

COLUMN FROM MAYOR TIM SHADBOLT

SOUTHLAND EXPRESS, 9 JULY 2009

This has been a sad week for Invercargill. Regardless of who was to blame for the tragic accident, the loss of three young people must be devastating for their family and friends. It casts a cloud over the whole city and my heart goes out to all those involved.

The rest of the world may be focused on the Michael Jackson memorial, but Southlanders will feel the loss of three of its own sons away from the global glare in a way that makes the entire community experience a sense of loss.

I first heard about the accident when my phone started constantly ringing. Reporters were demanding to know whether or not Invercargill had a serious boy racer problem. To me this seemed a brutal approach. Of course the western world has a love affair with the motor car. It's an integral part of our industrial revolution and young people are an expression of this "car culture". In most accidents the driver is automatically blamed, but the reality is that if we all hurtle around in tin cans at 50 or 100 kilometres an hour then inevitably some of us will be killed or injured. It's like air travel. Being able to fly across the world because of the jet airliner is an amazing luxury, but inevitably some of us will get killed. It's simplistic to blame the pilot. There are usually a whole range of factors. Obviously if we all walked everywhere these accidents wouldn't happen, but we don't walk. Bullet trains, jet planes and fast cars are our preferred means of travel, but the industrial machine makes us pay a high price for these luxuries.