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# Feschuk: Racing rivals talk safety ahead of Grand Prix

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By **Dave Feschuk**  
Sports Columnist

BLAINVILLE, QUE.

Once cutthroat rivals on a racetrack, Jacques Villeneuve and Michael Schumacher were brought together Thursday in the name of a mutual interest — keeping the wheels of commerce turning away from pit lane.

They were playing the level-headed spokesmen, specifically, for the merits of the various electronic safety devices that you, the consumer, might think



Former Formula One rivals Michael Schumacher, right, and Jacques Villeneuve have a laugh at a demonstration of electronic safety features for cars Thursday, June 10, 2010, in Blainville, Que., north of Montreal. The Canadian Grand Prix will be held Sunday June 13, 2010.

Ryan Remiorz/THE CANADIAN PRESS

about including in your option package the next time you buy an automobile. It was a worthy pitch, for sure. Still, slapping the surnames Villeneuve and Schumacher on the same marquee will forever conjure images of four-wheeled recklessness; motor racing fans will never forget the scene in Spain in 1997, when the Canadian was nearly denied his only world drivers' championship by the German's malicious sideswipe. So if it was a bit like hiring Lindsay Lohan and Hedo Turkoglu to do a public service announcement on the merits of responsible clubbing, at least Schumacher had a sense of humour about it — however briefly.

Subjected to a question-and-answer period, Schumacher was asked if the blind-spot recognition system available in state-of-the-art road cars would have helped him avoid his infamous collision with Villeneuve. A white tent, erected near a suburban test track to shield Schumacher and Villeneuve from a light morning rain and populated by a couple of

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hundred car-savvy Quebeckers, erupted in laughter.

“It would have been a shame,” said Schumacher, “because then we wouldn’t have anything to laugh about right now.”

The German, asked to elaborate, shut down the line of questioning.

“You know, I think there is more important things to talk about,” said Schumacher.

Fair enough. Automobile safety is no laughing matter. And there are those who will tell you Schumacher has done more than enough to outrun his early-career barbarism. Certainly his record seven world championships speak loudly. And even if Schumacher’s ongoing F1 comeback hasn’t produced a victory heading into Sunday’s Canadian Grand Prix, at least he can say he’s a Formula One racer again, this after a three-season absence from the cockpit.

“It’s great for Formula One because it was starting to run short a bit of heroes,” Villeneuve said of Schumacher’s return.

The Montreal race is making a comeback of its own this year, returning to the global schedule after a one-year absence. And Villeneuve, for his part, is still an occasional pro. He’ll be clad in fenders at Road America for next week’s NASCAR Nationwide Series race, and he’ll do the rounds when the same series comes to Montreal in this summer. There was a chance he could have reunited with Schumacher on the F1 starting grid this season, but Villeneuve’s attempts to land a ride proved futile.

More than a decade has passed since Villeneuve won the world championship by weathering Schumacher’s attempted takeout. There hasn’t been a finer moment for Canadian race fans since; there hasn’t been a Canadian in F1 since Villeneuve flamed out in 2006. And considering Villeneuve is still only 39 — and that Schumacher isn’t embarrassing himself for Mercedes GP at age 41 — there are those who hold out hope.

“I’m quite happy right now being busy raising kids,” said Villeneuve. “That’s more work than actually racing, which I didn’t expect. But I would obviously be happier behind a wheel. Once you’ve been a racer, I think you’re a racer all your life.

“I worked hard on (trying to find a seat in Formula One for) 2010. I’m giving myself until 2011. There’s still a few months.”

Schumacher, for his part, was asked for his thoughts on Villeneuve attempting to return to the F1 field. The white tent, again, was filled with laughter and mischievous grins.

“I don’t know what is funny about that,” said Schumacher, who claimed never to know what was under-handed about his handiwork in Spain in 1997. “The point is, as Jacques was saying, we are racers, and we have that in our blood. So, what you have there, you always keep.”

Done talking, Villeneuve and Schumacher took to the test track in road cars — the former in a Volvo, Schumacher in a black Benz sedan — to demonstrate the miracle of electronic stability control. And if they resisted the urge to bump fenders, Schumacher still exacted his toll on a Canadian target, comically flattening four Montreal-area pylons when the driver (or was it the in-car computer?) misjudged a zig-zag.

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