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**OTS, Caltrans Announce Partnership with NASCAR Driver Ross Chastain**

**to Encourage People to “Protect Your Melon” and Practice Safe Driving**

**Elk Grove, Calif. –** The California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) have teamed up with NASCAR Cup Series Driver Ross Chastain to encourage safe driving on California roadways.

The new partnership will raise awareness about the importance of slowing down, not driving under the influence, being work zone alert and staying safe on rural roads. Chastain, an eighth-generation watermelon farmer and long-time advocate for seat belt use, will use his large social media following to share messages promoting safe driving habits and be on hand at safety initiative events asking people to “Protect Your Melon” and go safely.

Chastain is a rising star in the NASCAR Cup Series, earning two wins and finishing second in points last year in only his second full-time season. Despite his tendency to push the limits on the track, he has been an outspoken advocate for highway safety working with campaigns in New York, Delaware, Kentucky and Georgia. Chastain’s blue-collar background and aggressive driving style has been lauded by fans and competitors alike, including his viral “Hail Melon” wall-ride to make the Championship race last year.

“We’re excited to work with Ross Chastain and bring the message to everyone that safe driving habits save lives,” said OTS Director Barbara Rooney. “‘Protect Your Melon’ reiterates the importance of practicing safe road behaviors to help make sure all road users get to and from their destinations safely.”

“Improving safety on our roadways will take everyone doing their part, starting with each individual driver,” said Caltrans Director Tony Tavares. “Don’t drive distracted or under the influence and leave the high-speed driving to NASCAR.”

“I am excited to work with the California Office of Traffic Safety and Caltrans to encourage safe driving habits across the state,” said Chastain.

“I am fortunate to get to race in California at three unique venues: short track racing at the LA Coliseum, high speeds at Auto Club Speedway and even left and right turns at Sonoma Raceway. But when I am not competing on the track, I know the importance of slowing down, along with simple and safe decisions such as wearing your seat belt and being focused on the road. Our ‘Protect Your Melon’ program encourages drivers to leave the racing to the professionals and practice safe driving habits any time they climb behind the wheel.”

Traffic fatalities continue to be a significant problem in the state accounting for nearly 10% of all deaths in the U.S. Nearly half of all fatal crashes occur on rural roads. In 2020, the risk of dying in a crash was 62% higher on a rural road compared to an urban road for the same trip length.

Stay tuned to learn more about the “Protect Your Melon” program and highway safety events featuring Ross Chastain throughout the year.

To learn more about efforts to save lives on California roads, visit [gosafelyca.org](https://gosafelyca.org/), and follow Go Safely on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @OTS\_CA and @GoSafelyCA.

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