

Strict 180km/h speed limit for Cannonball Run

By **PAUL GOVER** at Yulara
and **AAP**

A strict 180kmh will be "rigidly enforced" on the final two days of the Northern Territory Cannonball Run after the four deaths on Tuesday near Alice Springs.

The limit was imposed on Tuesday in the wake of the high-speed crash that claimed the lives of two Cannonball competitors and two marshalls.

The Northern Territory Police have also announced that their aerial surveillance aircraft will monitor

the conduct of the event, although Superintendent Terry Ey said yesterday "it was always in the contingency plan".

One of the Cannonball Run race officials killed had earlier warned that the Japanese man involved was a "crazy" driver capable of killing someone, the man's father said yesterday.

Gerry Pritchard, father of Keith Pritchard, 31, of Palmerston, near Darwin, said his son had made the comments after pre-race time trials in Darwin.

"He said after the time trials, 'The driver of the Japanese car, the Ferrari . . . he's crazy — he's going to kill someone'," Mr Pritchard said. "He said, 'I'll just get out and watch.' Unfortunately he didn't get to watch," Mr Pritchard told ABC-TV's 7.30 Report.

Keith Pritchard became last year the first NT resident to compete in the Bathurst 1000.

Mr Pritchard senior said his son would have wanted the race to continue despite the deaths.

The Cannonball run has become

a major political issue in the Northern Territory, which is in the run-up to an election, and there is a possibility of demonstrations against the run during the return leg from Alice Springs today.

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The concept of the Cannonball was to allow competitors to run at unlimited speeds, and many entrants had cars capable of making more than 250km/h. Fastest of all was the 300km/h Ferrari F40, of millionaire Japanese dentist Akihiro Kabe, that was involved in Tuesday's fatal crash.

The organising team under racing champion Allan Moffat decided to continue the event but have clamped down on safety.

"[The] tragedy has had a chilling effect on us all . . . the Cannonball organising body has redefined the parameters for the last two days of the event," Mr Moffat said.

"The organisers have decided to set a maximum speed limit of 180km/h on the grand touring and competitive sections.

This, if necessary, will be rigidly enforced."