

BY JONATHAN WALKER
Whitehall Editor

SIR KEIR Starmer has been urged to "stop blaming older people" by The Bill star Graham Cole, after the government threatened to ban drivers aged over 70 from the road unless they pass an eyesight test.

The actor, who received specialist police driver training for his role as PC Tony Stamp in the long-running ITV drama, called the idea "ludicrous".

Graham, 73, said of his training: "I wanted the show and my part to be as authentic as possible, and it opened my eyes to the dangers on the roads and what our boys in blue have to deal with in the aftermath of an accident."

"These ludicrous proposals smack of an unfair approach to older drivers."

"Everybody wants safer roads but this looks suspiciously like an unfair attempt to heap the blame for accidents on older people when we all know it's younger drivers that are most at risk of being in or causing an accident."

Graham appeared in 1,202 episodes of The Bill, which ended in 2010.

Ministers have announced mandatory eyesight checks for motorists over 70 and are considering "cognitive testing" too, to improve road safety.

The aim is to cut deaths and serious injuries on the roads by 65%. Every day an average of four people are killed in traffic accidents, and

Stop blaming older drivers, says Bill star

thousands are seriously injured each year. But critics have accused the 63-year-old Prime Minister of picking on the wrong target.

Graham said: "It's absurd that the government sees fit to overlook my training and make me worry about whether I'll be able to keep my licence and my independence, while letting young drivers hoon around with impunity."

The government's road safety strategy also includes a consultation on lowering the drink-drive limit in England and Wales from the current 35mcg of alcohol per 100ml of breath. It has remained unchanged since 1967 and is the highest in Europe.

This will consider the introduction of alcohol interlock devices, which can be installed in cars and prevents the engine starting until the driver passes a breathalyser test.

Other proposals include suspending driving licences for people suspected of drink or drug-driving offences.

He went on: "But these plans give the distinct impression of a government fuelling unhelpful and untrue stereotypes by seeking to characterise all older people as potentially infirm and irresponsible. Older drivers are



Graham Cole, 73, had specialist driver training for his role in The Bill

Wanted cage fighter allowed into UK

EXCLUSIVE

BY LEE SORRELL

A CAGEFIGHTER from Romania who tried to kill a man with an axe was allowed back into Britain despite being wanted for an outstanding prison sentence in his home country.

Ionut Nastiu, 35, arrived at Luton airport last June and was stripped of his EU settlement scheme status.

But he was still granted entry by immigration officials and allowed to appeal the ruling.

This was despite being wanted in Romania to serve a five-year jail term for attempted murder and other violent offences.

The father of one previously arrived here in 2015 but was extradited eight years later to face a sentence for arson and threats of violence.

Nastiu has no legal right to live in Britain after the Home Office stripped him of his EU settlement rights. It is understood he failed to declare his criminal convictions to the authorities on his arrival on June 6 last year.

His lawyers are contesting his extradition to serve his outstanding five-year jail term in Romania. He was granted bail by a judge at Westminster magistrates court while this continues.

Last night the Home Office was facing questions on why a dangerous criminal was allowed back



'Vicious axe assault left his victim with brain damage'

into the country in the first place. It said: "It is long-standing government policy that we do not routinely comment on individual cases."

In March 2019, Nastiu was convicted in Romania of four offences, including attacking a rival crime gang member with an axe and striking him twice on the head. The vicious assault, which took place in the village of Ostra eight years earlier, left his victim with brain damage.

He was also found guilty of a violent burglary in 2013, when he threw rocks at a window and attacked one of the men inside.

Nastiu is understood to have been absent from his trial in Romania, as he was living in Britain and had started a career here as a mixed martial arts fighter. One YouTube video shows a victory against Andrej Kolas in a semi-professional middleweight bout at Warrington's Parr Hall in April 2018.

In another fight, at a hotel in Stoke two months later, labelled "Night of the Gladiators", Nastiu was defeated by opponent Adam Ryan.

The wanted man, who has previously denied the charges in Romania, was first arrested here by police in June 2019 to face extradition proceedings.

He then fought a four-year legal battle to avoid being removed from Britain.

In February 2023. However, District Judge Mark Jabbitt had ruled at his earlier extradition hearing that Romanian prosecutors had failed to prove that Nastiu had been deliberately absent from his original trial for the attempted murder charge and three other offences.

Instead, he was removed to serve a prison sentence for two further crimes – including repeated threats of violence and an arson attack in 2013, when Nastiu threw a Molotov cocktail through the window of a rival.

The offences carried a combined jail term of three years and four months. However, the Suceava

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