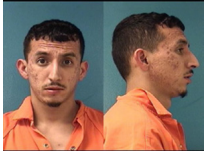


Police find drugs, a pistol during a traffic stop

Written by By: Molly Adamson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 16 April 2021 04:00



Two men claiming to be getting back from a trip to Phoenix were hiding drugs and a pistol in the car.

On March 4, around 4:30 pm, McKinley County Sheriff's Office Deputy Brandon Salazar saw a blue Mustang traveling east on Interstate 40 near the 25 mile-marker. When Salazar checked the car's speed, he saw it was going 75 mph in a 65-mph zone. He caught up to the car and pulled it over near the 28.5-mile marker on Interstate 40.

Salazar noticed that the driver and the two other people in the car seemed extremely nervous. The three people began rambling, barely letting Salazar explain why he had pulled them over. The driver, Jason Cervantes-Ponce, gave the deputy his ID.

The passenger, identified as Juan Morales, explained that the car belonged to him and that he had to look up the insurance and registration. Salazar decided to talk to Cervantes-Ponce back at his patrol car before checking back in with the passenger about his car insurance and registration.

In his report, Salazar said Cervantes-Ponce still seemed nervous while they talked in the police car. He told Salazar the three of them had been in Arizona visiting Morales' family. He said that they'd been there three days.

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Cervantes-Ponce said that he was good friends with Morales, and that the other person in the car was Cervantes-Ponce's girlfriend.

Salazar let Cervantes-Ponce off with a warning, and after he filed the paperwork, he spoke to Morales to get the car's insurance and registration.

Morales said he couldn't get any of the documents, explaining that he had just bought the car in Phoenix, Ariz. and that's why he didn't have it registered yet.

He said that they had taken a bus to Phoenix, picked up the car, and then driven to Albuquerque. While Morales was explaining this, Salazar saw the woman tugging on Morales' sleeve. Salazar verified the VIN and went back to his patrol car to talk to Cervantes-Ponce.

When he was asked how the trio got to Arizona, Cervantes-Ponce had a different story than his friend. He stated that they drove there and were driving back. He said that he had been driving because Morales had been drinking.

Salazar told Cervantes-Ponce he could go, but when he returned to the car, the deputy called him back.

Cervantes-Ponce sat in the front seat of Salazar's unit, and the deputy asked him if he understood that he was free to go. Cervantes-Ponce said he understood.

Then Salazar asked for clarification about the group's travel plans. In his report, Salazar said that he was beginning to wonder if other criminal activity was going on based on how nervous the three seemed to be and the inconsistencies between Morales' and Cervantes-Ponce's stories.

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Salazar asked Cervantes-Ponce if he could search the car, and Cervantes-Ponce said he would have to ask Morales, since it was his car. Salazar explained that since Morales was drunk, he would not ask him. He allowed Cervantes-Ponce and Morales to decide if they would let him search the car.

After they talked about it, Cervantes-Ponce told Salazar he could search the car.

Salazar and Deputy Johnson Lee searched the car and found about 300 synthetic Fentanyl pills and a firearm in a backpack on the floorboard in the backseat of the car.

The pistol was a Smith & Wesson M&P shield 9mm. The deputies also found a variety of bullets throughout the vehicle.

The deputies detained all three passengers. They discovered that the female was a minor, and Salazar called her mother. The minor was transported to the Farmington Juvenile Detention Center.

The two men were charged with trafficking controlled substances (possession with intent to distribute) and the unlawful possession of a firearm.

Morales was released on his own recognizance.

Ponce was released on \$5,000 Cash Surety.

By: Molly Adamson
Sun Correspondent