

80mph car chase through South Tahoe ends in meadow

By Kathryn Reed

A Ford Mustang GT went airborne as it careened over a fence at the Upper Truckee Meadow after the driver led officers through the streets of South Lake Tahoe at speeds that reached 80mph. The vehicle stopped about a quarter mile in and then the man and woman unknowingly ran right to waiting officers.

The 4pm June 29 incident started with a report of a kidnapping about 3am June 27. The 32-year-old South Lake Tahoe female victim was not physically hurt and was released. It is believed she and the suspect were acquaintances.



Christopher Wadstein was arrested on two felonies and a parole warrant June 29.

Photo/Taylor Flynn/Mountain News

The investigation of that crime came up with leads that Christopher Wadstein, 21, of South Lake Tahoe might be the perpetrator. For the past 24 hours local officers have been

tracking the parolee.

"He was mobile when we found him," South Tahoe police Lt. David Stevenson said. "We attempted to stop him at Black Bart and Pioneer Trail. That's where the chase started."

Officers chased the suspect through the Sierra Tract, across Highway 50 where at the end of Creekwood Drive the vehicle plowed through the short wood fence leading to the California Tahoe Conservancy meadow.

"This guy was going 60mph. There was no hesitation," said Curt Murtha, 25, who from his porch saw the chase go into the meadow.

Other witnesses said officers were no more than 30 seconds behind him as they all wound up in the meadow. No skid marks are visible where the vehicles flew around the corner from Springwood to Creekside.

A roofer on Creekside said it was quite a scene to watch.

Other said it was like something out of "Dukes of Hazard."

Officers were scouring the meadow for anything the suspects may have tossed from the convertible. With Wadstein being called armed and dangerous, they were looking for a 9mm handgun he may have had on him. None was found.

With sweat beads forming on his bald head, the guy complained of chest pain as he sat in the back of the patrol vehicle. He vacillated about wanting to go to Barton Memorial Hospital. Paramedics eventually took the heavily tattooed Wadstein to the emergency room.

The adrenaline, short sprint and high altitude may have contributed to his chest pain. He was booked into El Dorado County Jail on Tuesday night on a parole warrant, felony kidnapping and felony evasion of officers.

Stevenson didn't know why California parole officials wanted Wadstein back in custody, nor did he have his list of prior convictions.

Also arrested and booked into the South Lake Tahoe facility was Lacey Almdale, 21, of South Lake Tahoe, for obstructing officers.

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies, FBI agents, South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team, and El Dorado County probation officers assisted South Tahoe officers.

Dressed all in black, with automatic weapons slung over their shoulder, the SWAT guys were also in facemasks.

"One officer had a gang hit put out on him so we are really concerned for his safety," acting Chief Martin Hewlett said of the hoods.

Eventually, Emerald Bay Towing showed up to cart the vehicle off. The Mustang does not belong to either of the people arrested. It was not stolen, but officers were still trying to figure out how Wadstein and the vehicle owner are connected.

Officers had gone through some of the contents of the vehicle at the scene. A stack of jeans sat on the back. Next to it was what looked like a small overnight bag, plus a small wooden box with unknown contents.

Stevenson said the vehicle is in custody and will be thoroughly gone over today.

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