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High-speed chase ends up deadly

Author: GLENN MAFFEI

Gazette staff writer

Article Text:

A man who sped away from police during a traffic stop early Monday was killed instantly when he smashed his car into the Chechessee River bridge, authorities said.

The man had been driving on S.C. 170 at a high speed when he struck a guardrail on the bridge at 12:15 a.m., said Trooper Sally Farmer of the S.C. Highway Patrol. He was ejected through the driver's side window and dragged for 200 feet between the guardrail and his own car, according to police and Coroner Curt Copeland.

Police have not been able to identify the man because his body was so severely disfigured. He did not have identification and authorities believe the 1995 Dodge Neon he had been driving was registered in someone else's name, Copeland said.

Sgt. David Zeoli, of the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office, pulled the man over on the Lemon Island side of the Broad River because he suspected the driver was drunk, and because the vehicle had only one headlight and did not use a turn signal, according to a police report. Zeoli approached the vehicle and reported the driver was holding a half-empty bottle of beer in his right hand.

The car took off and the deputy pursued, watching it pass vehicles in the no-passing zone, the report states. Zeoli said he lost sight of the car just before it crashed into the bridge.

"In our opinion, high rate of speed and intoxication were factors in this collision," Farmer said.

Drug and alcohol tests were pending Monday night, Copeland said.

The car was registered to Pedro Lopez Martinez, but he could not be found immediately, Farmer said. Authorities were working Monday night to track down the driver's family.

"Somebody's got to realize that this guy's missing and do the right thing and report it to the police," Farmer said. "I don't know any other way we're going to get any identification on him."

Anyone with information on the driver is asked to call the coroner's office at 525-7656.

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