

Borden woman involved in I-65 double fatality now facing 13 criminal charges

Written by Marty Randall

Wednesday, 27 January 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 27 January 2010 09:25

A Borden woman who allegedly admitted to Indiana State troopers that she was the driver who purportedly started a chain reaction accident that led to the death of two Scott County residents on December 13 now faces 13 criminal charges in the case.

All of the charges against Jennifer P. Just, 34, were filed in Scott Superior Court. They range from Class B felonies of operation of a motor vehicle causing death with a controlled substance in blood to Class D felonies of operation of a motor vehicle with a controlled substance in blood causing serious bodily injury.

James and Thelma Jewell of Austin died as the result of Just's alleged actions that sunny Sunday afternoon. Around 1 p.m., the Jewells were driving north on I-65 and were a few miles south of the Austin exit when their silver 2003 Toyota Tacoma pickup truck was struck in the rear by a 1996 Ford Ranger pickup purportedly driven by Just.

According to witnesses' statements to Trooper Nathan Teusch, the Ranger passed them at a high rate of speed. It was seen by others to leave the northbound lanes and go into the berm /rumble strip areas, but it "jerked" back into the lane and then appeared to gain speed. It again reportedly "jerked" to the left as it approached the Jewells' truck and then struck the couple's vehicle, causing it to go out of control and into the median. The smaller truck crossed the median and hit a southbound semi-tractor-trailer. The collision killed the Jewells.

Witnesses said that the red pickup followed the Jewells' truck into the median and possibly stopped momentarily before it continued on north.

State police caught up with the red truck at the Circle K, a gas station just east of the Austin interchange off State Road 256. Trooper Mark LaMaster talked to Just at the gas station and said she admitted being the driver. Her brakes went out, she told the officer, but she was able to bring the truck to a stop at the Circle K.

Trp. LaMaster stated in the probable cause affidavit that Just "...seemed to be intoxicated or under the influence." He said he administered two procedures to test her abilities, and Trp. LaMaster said she flunked both. She also allegedly told him she did have a cell phone with her, but the officers found one in the truck and were able to contact a relative to whom Just allegedly sent a text message shortly after 1 p.m. that she had been involved in a wreck.

A subsequent check with the cell phone company purportedly indicated that Just had sent "...many text messages....from 12:40 p.m. until contact was made (with her) at the Circle K gas station, and it also has revealed outgoing calls being made from that cell phone in the same time period," the court document stated.

After Just consented to a blood test, she was transported to Scott Memorial Hospital in Scottsburg. Both blood and urine were taken. Results from those samples apparently indicated that the woman had THC, an ingredient in marijuana, as well as opiates and benzodiazepine, in her body.

State police also had the red pickup checked for brake failure. A certified master mechanic told Trp. Teusche that the vehicle's brakes were in good working order. The officer also obtained a statement from the relative who had loaned Just use of the truck, which indicated that the brakes were working the previous day.

Charges filed include two Class B felony counts of operation of a motor vehicle causing death with a controlled substance in blood; two Class B felonies of failure to stop after accident resulting in death; two Class C felony counts of operation of a motor vehicle while intoxicated causing death; two Class C felonies of reckless homicide; two Class D felonies of operation of a motor vehicle with controlled substance in blood causing serious bodily injury; two Class D felonies of operation of a motor vehicle while intoxicated causing serious bodily injury; and a

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Class B misdemeanor count of false informing.

The final count is based upon the woman's original statement that she did not have a cell phone with her.

Judge Nicholas South heard the woman's plea of not guilty during her initial court appearance on Monday, January 11. Bond was set at \$80,000 corporate surety or full cash. Her jury trial was scheduled for April 13.

Judge South also set a bond reduction hearing for Tuesday, January 19, at the request of the woman's attorney.

Just remains incarcerated at the Scott County Security Center.