

## Young couple implicated in car thefts caught after city/county chase Saturday

Written by Marty Randall

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A teenage couple implicated in as many as four car thefts in Southern Indiana are being held in separate facilities after their capture on Saturday, February 21, in Scott County.

Officers with the Scottsburg and Austin police departments and the Scott County Sheriff's Department ended a sometimes high speed chase through Scottsburg and the countryside through use of "stop sticks" near the intersection of Cutshall and Slab Roads to disable the stolen vehicle in which the couple was fleeing. Both the male and female fled on foot into a nearby field where they were apprehended by Lt. Col. Paul Clute of the Austin department.

The incident on Saturday had its beginnings on February 18 when the Scottsburg Police Department received a report from a Michigan man that his 2005 Chevy Malibu had been stolen from the parking lot of a Scottsburg liquor store. Scottsburg Patrolman Troy Ford and Sgt. Rex Herald of the Sheriff's Department investigated the incident.

The man was able to give officers his license plate number.

When Scottsburg Sgt. Brian Hall was patrolling in the city on Saturday just before 4 p.m., he noticed a car matching the description traveling east on State Road 56 in Mayonnaise Alley, that section of S.R. 56 populated by fast food restaurants.

The vehicle turned into a gas station, giving the officer enough time to note the Michigan license plate matched that of the stolen car. He followed the car as it left the gas station and continued east on S.R. 56, advising dispatchers of the vehicle he was tracking. He said he saw the male driving with a young-looking female passenger.

Sgt. Joe Nicholson of the Scottsburg department arrived to assist Sgt. Hall. As the car turned south onto Beechwood Avenue, Sgt. Hall attempted to stop it, but the driver gunned the car, striking a sign and entering a private yard. He continued east on Allen Street, and Sgt. Nicholson joined the chase at the back entrance of Chase Bank.

The vehicle went east across U.S. Highway 31, entered a gas station there to access an alley that continued east and coming out onto Hazard Street. He then traveled through two yards coming out onto Highland Street.

As officers lost track of the speeding car, a woman walking on Meridian Street called 9-1-1 to report a car traveling at high speed north on Meridian.

As Sgt. Hall traveled north on North Main Street, he said he saw the car heading north on that road out of Scottsburg. He reported its location to dispatchers, and Lt. David Hardin joined the chase, Sgt. Nicholson staying in Scottsburg in case he was needed there.

At the road's intersection with Marshfield Road, the car sped through the four-way stop still heading north. At that point, Deputy Jeremy Arnold also became involved. All headed north toward Cutshall Road, where the car again failed to stop at the T intersection, turning east on that highway and traveling toward the New Providence neighborhood.

Lt. Col. Clute joined the chase where Cutshall Rd. meets Slab Road. That area was where Deputy Joe Guarneri of the Sheriff's Department had laid down the "stop sticks," which are designed to shred a vehicle's tires as it travels over them.

They did the job, puncturing the driver's side front and rear tires and making the car impossible to drive further.

It was at that point that the teenagers fled on foot, only to be captured by Lt. Col. Clute.

Suspects were identified as a 16-year-old female, who was listed as a runaway from Child Protective Services, and 18-year-old Damien Dale Smith of Montgomery Street, Scottsburg. Smith was transported to the Scott County Security Center, while the 16-year-old was eventually taken to the juvenile facility in Brownstown.

With an officer with Department of Child Services present, the girl was questioned. She

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allegedly admitted that she and Smith did not steal the car in which they were riding. Rather, she implicated another male, whom she said had allowed them to use the vehicle. She refused to say whether they were the couple that had been involved in a "drive away" incident at a local gas station on February 19 in which no payment was made for gas pumped.

The girl told a tale of stealing a foster parent's car in Crothersville on the day she was entered into the NCIS system as a runaway. She said she and Smith had used the car for several days before crashing it into a parked vehicle in Columbus. They ran from that accident, she allegedly said, and soon stole a silver Ford Focus at a Columbus gas station. The woman driver, the girl said, had left the car running.

She went on to say they then used that car for a couple of days before crashing it on West Lake Road. In that accident, Smith suffered a facial injury, while the girl, who is two months pregnant, said she was knocked unconscious and suffered injuries to her wrist, right knee and back.

After that wreck, the couple allegedly went home, where the gray Malibu was reportedly provided by their friend.

The teenager was treated and released at Scott Memorial Hospital before being taken to the Jackson County juvenile facility.

Her boyfriend has five charges filed against him in Scott Superior Court.

Smith appeared on Monday, February 23, for an initial hearing in which he was advised of those charges, which include a count each of fleeing law enforcement, receiving stolen property, reckless driving, operating a motor vehicle when never receiving a license and illegal consumption of alcohol. The first two charges are Class D felonies, while remaining charges are B or C misdemeanors.

A not guilty plea was entered for him, and a jury trial date of May 11 was scheduled by Judge Nicholas South. Smith will be provided with the services of a public defender.

He remains incarcerated at the Scott County Jail.