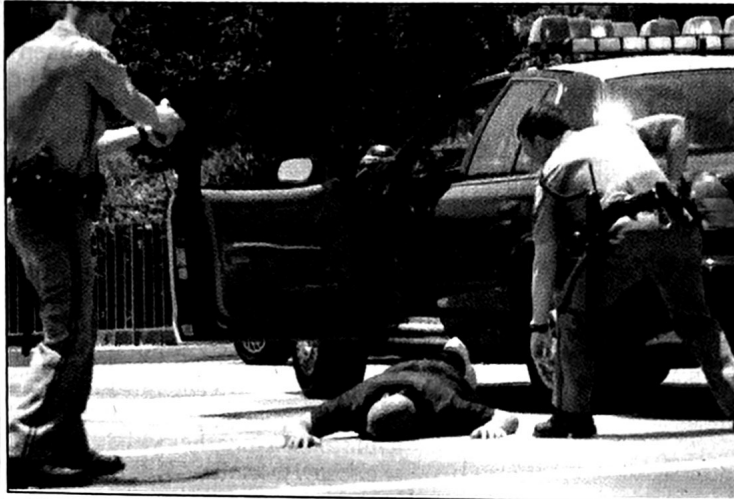


Car recovered in chance encounter



MORGAN HAGAR / NEWS-PRESS

One of four juveniles suspected of car theft is ordered to the ground at gunpoint by California Highway Patrol officers.

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Jonathan Bower and his wife were on their way home from a Mother's Day brunch when they saw their Honda Accord, stolen the day before, coming toward them on Hollister Avenue.

Sheryl Bower turned her car around and Jonathan called 9-1-1 on a cell phone.

"By the time we caught up to them, they were at a red light, and we pulled up right behind them," said Mr. Bower, who counted four people in his 1993 green Accord.

"I was very nervous and antsy because I wanted to try to give the police all the information they

'I just want to get the Simple Green out and wipe that car out. You just feel invaded (after) somebody has taken your car.'

Jonathan Bower, who got his stolen car returned

Owners followed their car — with 4 suspects inside

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needed before we lost sight."

The Santa Barbara native wasn't sure if the teens in his car would try to speed or make erratic turns.

But the apparent thieves had no idea who was behind them — or who the Bowers were talking to on their cell phone.

A California Highway Patrol car responded, and the officer turned on his lights and pulled over the Accord in front of La Cumbre Plaza.

The Bowers, who had their young daughter with them, were told to leave the area.

But a red light caught them next to their car full of suspects and they watched officers, with their guns drawn, remove the suspects from the vehicle, one by one.

Two were taken to Juvenile Hall and two were released, said CHP Officer Craig Carrier. Their names were not released because they are under 18.

"Anytime something comes out as easily as it did today, we're happy," Officer Carrier said.

The Accord was in nearly the same condition as when Mr. Bower parked it in his Mesa driveway Friday night, with the doors unlocked and a spare key in the glove compartment, something he says he won't do again.

The child car seat was missing, and there were cameras, possibly stolen, in the back. Mr. Bower hopes authorities can use any images from the film as evidence against the thieves, or at least to help return the cameras to their rightful owners.

This is his second vehicle that's been stolen.

About seven years ago, his motorcycle was taken from in front of a house. Thirty days later, it was returned to the very same spot, with only a few scrapes.

"God's on my side, I'll tell you, to get these back," he said.

After his slow-speed pursuit, Mr. Bower was spending the rest of Sunday relaxing — and hoping to put the incident behind him.

"I just want to get the Simple Green out and wipe that car out. You just feel invaded (after) somebody has taken your car," he said.

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