

## Traffic stops Tuesday result in arrests, marijuana seizures

Written by Faith Huffman

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Interstate traffic stops by state troopers Tuesday resulted in two marijuana busts, four arrests and seizure of more than 160 pounds of marijuana Tuesday.

Troopers searched another vehicle late Wednesday morning after discovering what appeared to be an irregularity in the gas tank, but had found nothing as of noon Wednesday.

The first stop was made at 2:24 a.m. Tuesday at the 120 mile marker on Interstate 30 east at the 120 mile marker, after Texas Department of Public Safety Trooper Chuck Cannon observed a brown Ford Explorer with Indiana license plates traveling 70 miles per hour in a 65 mph speed zone.

The driver was identified as Edward Colon Jr., 36, of Indiana and the passenger as Michael Anthony Bass, 31, also of Indiana. While completing a warning citation to be issued to Colon, the trooper began to talk with the pair about their travels.

Cannon became suspicious of illegal activity after both men gave conflicting stories as the purpose, destination and duration of their travel. Those suspicions were further aroused by the pair's "nervousness and deceptiveness, which led to him asking for permission to search the Explorer. When the pair refused, troopers called for Sulphur Springs Police Sgt. Jason Ricketson to bring his canine to the location to conduct a free air search.

The police dog alerted on the vehicle, giving the trooper probable cause to conduct a search. The trooper discovered a cardboard box containing eight cellophane-wrapped bundles of marijuana in the vehicle. The bundles weighed about 24 pounds, including wrappings.

Both Colon and Bass were arrested for possession of 5-50 pounds of marijuana, a third-degree felony offense, according to arrest reports. Both remained in the county jail at 11 a.m. Wednesday in lieu of \$25,000 bond on the felony charge, according to jail officials.

A second traffic stop, at 4:10 a.m. Tuesday, on Interstate 30 also resulted in two men being arrested on felony marijuana charges.

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Texas Highway Patrol Trooper Jacob Muehlstein stopped a black Chevrolet Suburban on I-30 for a traffic violation. The two occupants of the vehicle were identified as Alfredo Sada, 31, and Alex Ayala, 32, both of Laredo. While talking with the men, Muehlstein became suspicious of criminal activity, noting the pair gave conflicting stories about their trip, according to troopers reports.

After establishing what he believed to be reasonable suspicion, the trooper asked for and was given permission to search the vehicle. About 140 pounds of marijuana was found in the gas tank, according to arrest reports.

Texas Department of Public Safety narcotics officers interviewed the pair before booking them into jail for possession of more than 50 pounds, but less than 2,000 pounds of marijuana. Both Ayala and Sada remained in the county jail just before noon Wednesday in lieu of \$150,000 bond on the second-degree felony charge.

In a third episode, during a routine traffic stop on I-30 west Wednesday morning, troopers became suspicious of criminal activity from a man and woman in vehicle similar to the one Ayala and Sada used Tuesday. When asked about their travels, the pair gave stories which didn't seem plausible for a trip from Illinois to Mexico. They agreed to let troopers search the vehicle. The vehicle was taken to the Hopkins County Sheriff's office where it was further inspected after troopers discovered what appeared to be an irregularity in the gas tank and a section of flooring in the back of the vehicle. Closer inspection revealed the irregularity to simply be from the baffling in the tank.

The highway patrol continued to search the vehicle late Wednesday morning, but had found nothing after more than an hour of intensive scrutiny.

Local troopers were assisted by area highway patrol troopers who had been working an "enhanced traffic enforcement project" in the Hopkins County area Tuesday and Wednesday to cut down on accident rates through high visibility and stops of vehicles committing traffic violations and driving unsafely, according to Texas Highway Patrol Trooper Bruce Dahme.