



OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Stanislaus County

832 12th Street, Suite 300
Modesto, CA 95354

Mailing: P. O. Box 442, Modesto, CA 95353
Phone: (209) 525-5550 Fax: (209) 525-5545

Birgit Fladager
District Attorney

Carol Shipley
Assistant District Attorney

Chief Deputy District Attorneys

Jerry Begen

Alan Cassidy

Dave Harris

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Carol Shipley

Date: April 13, 2009

Assistant District Attorney

Re: Phillip Martin Costa

Phone: (209) 525-5550

Auto Thief Sentenced to Six Years Prison

Modesto, California – Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Phillip Martin Costa, age 36, of Modesto, was convicted of auto theft, evading a peace officer, and reckless driving while under the influence. Costa is currently on parole as a result of auto theft convictions from January 2004 and August 2001 for which he served terms of imprisonment. Deputy District Attorney Jeff Mangar prosecuted the case for the People.

The case arose out of events that occurred on March 26, 2009 at about 2:50 p.m. in the area of Paradise and Carpenter Roads in Modesto. A California Highway Patrol officer observed a 1986 white Nissan pick-up truck with no rear license plate. When the officer tried to initiate a routine traffic stop, Costa accelerated to over 70 mph in residential neighborhoods with a 25 mph speed limit. Costa ignored the stop signs and traffic signals at Waverly Drive, Beverly Drive, and Victoria Drive. The left rear tire on the pick-up truck then deflated and Costa abandoned the truck and fled on foot. He was located in a backyard a short distance away by a trained police canine, Gizmo. Officers then discovered that the pick-up truck had been reported stolen out of Modesto on March 25, 2009 from the victim's driveway. Costa admitted that he used methamphetamine earlier that morning, but claimed an unknown male gave him the truck for free and that he did not know the truck was stolen.

Upon entry of the plea, the Honorable Marie Silveira sentenced Costa to six years in the California Rehabilitation Center.

Stanislaus County residents can report suspected vehicle theft activity to their local law enforcement agency or contact the Stanislaus County Auto-Theft Task Force (STANCATT) at: (209) 545-7316.

IF YOU OBSERVE A THEFT IN PROGRESS, DIAL 911

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