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Local

Missouri suspects stopped by alert officer

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For the second time in two weeks, dangerous fugitives from other states have been captured in Billings.

Two teenage runaways from Missouri and their 22-year-old cousin - who are suspected of killing a man in Arizona - are in custody after arousing the suspicions of a Montana Highway Patrol officer who stopped them on Interstate 90.

The boys and their cousin were about to be released later when one of the boys told local police about their involvement in a murder, authorities said Friday.

The boys - Joshua Aston, 16, and his 15-year-old brother, Nicholas Aston - appeared Friday in Youth Court, where Judge Susan Watters ordered them detained on \$500,000 bond each. The boys, both in shackles, appeared calm during the hearing and said they understood why they were being held at the Youth Detention Facility in Billings.

Court appearance awaited

The cousin, Justin Alexander Harrison, was being held at the county jail without bond on suspicion of murder. He is expected to make an initial court appearance next week.



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The three are linked to the disappearance and murder of a 35-year-old food company executive whose body was found Sunday in the desert 70 miles west of Phoenix. The body of Pedro Corzo was found in a shallow grave about a half-mile from his Ford Explorer. Authorities in Arizona said Corzo's death was being investigated as a homicide, but no details of how the man was killed have been released.

According to Arizona news reports, Corzo was a general manager at Del Monte Fresh Produce Southwest Inc. His wife reported him missing Jan. 9 when he did not return from a business trip.

In Billings, MHP Officer Toman Baukema said he was parked in the median on Interstate 90 on Thursday afternoon when he saw a car with Missouri license plates drive by at 45 mph.

An attention-getter

The car caught his attention, Baukema said, not only because of its slow speed but because the occupants looked young and the car had out-of-state plates.

Baukema did a records check on the car and was told it was connected to a report of two teenage runaways from Missouri. The report also included a caution to officers because the boys were said to be armed.

Baukema followed the westbound car and waited for other officers to catch up. When backup arrived, Baukema said, officers stopped the 1985 Chrysler on the King Avenue exit at about 3:45 p.m. The car pulled over without incident, and all three occupants obeyed the officers, Baukema said. Harrison was driving, he said.

Baukema said Harrison admitted having weapons in the car and allowed a search of the vehicle. Three guns were found in the trunk of the car.

Baukema said a further check did not show the boys or their cousin were wanted on any criminal charges. The officers took them back to the MHP office on South 27th Street to decide what to do. One of the boys then told officers about the murder in Arizona, Baukema said. The matter was turned over to the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office, which contacted authorities in Phoenix.

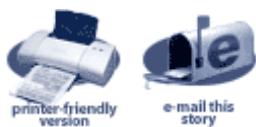
Detectives from the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office were to arrive in Billings on Friday to interview the brothers and Harrison. It was unclear Friday if the guns found in the car were used in the slaying. The car was impounded until a search warrant was issued, Sheriff Chuck Maxwell said.

The boys were reported as runaways on Jan. 8 by the St. Charles County Sheriff's Office, near St. Louis.

Officers of the Montana Highway Patrol arrested another fugitive on Jan. 6. Ervin James Brown, 41, had escaped from a prison in Detroit, Mich., where he was serving a life sentence for murder and robbery. Brown stole a car in South Dakota and guns from a sporting goods store in Buffalo, Wyo., and robbed a gas station in Dayton, Wyo., authorities said, before he was spotted heading toward Billings on Interstate 90 at 100 mph.

Brown initially fled from officers, who used road spikes to disable the stolen car. Brown's car stopped on Shiloh Road and he was arrested after a brief standoff in which he aimed a jammed shotgun at officers. Brown remained in the Yellowstone County Detention Facility on Friday while awaiting extradition back to Michigan.

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