

Was Princess Diana's Mercedes sabotaged?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

According to the Feb. 4 edition of the French publication *Le Parisien*, Hervé Stephan, the magistrate in charge of the investigation of the Aug. 31, 1997 car crash that killed Princess Diana, Dodi Fayed, and driver Henri Paul, has ordered new forensic tests on the Mercedes 280-S in which they were riding. According to forensic examinations conducted on the wrecked car, and further medical examinations of both Henri Paul and bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones, the driver and front passenger airbags inflated *prior* to the crash. *Le Parisien* asked whether the premature release of the airbag might have "blinded the driver and contributed to the loss of control of the vehicle."

Prior to these new revelations, the overwhelming majority of French and British media had portrayed the fatal crash as a "garden variety" traffic accident, caused principally by high-speed drunk driving by Henri Paul. This disinformation has been fueled by French police investigators since the day after the crash, and has been a critical element in the effort to cover up mounting evidence that Princess Diana and the others were victims of a professional, vehicular homicide.

Unanswered questions

The airbag issue was raised, in part, as the result of medical tests on Paul and Rees-Jones—the latter the sole survivor of the crash, who was sitting in the front passenger seat. Both men had head injuries consistent with the impact of the airbags.

It was belatedly acknowledged by French authorities that the Mercedes was rammed by a second car, causing the fatal head-on crash into a tunnel pillar in the Place de l'Alma underpass shortly after midnight on Aug. 31. Police found parts of a rear tail-light of a car, later identified as a Fiat Uno turbo model, manufactured between 1984 and 1987, at the crash site. They knew from day one that a second car had been somehow involved in the fatal crash. Later, white paint scrapings on the right side of the Mercedes were found, also confirming that there had been a collision with a Fiat Uno. However, such a crash, under normal circumstances, would not have activated the air bags.

The question thus emerges: Was the safety system on the Mercedes tampered with?

The London *Times*, in a Feb. 5 story by Paris-based re-

porter Ben MacIntyre, elaborating on the *Le Parisien* account, noted that "Henri Paul, driver of the Mercedes, will have reacted with shock when the driver's airbag exploded in his face. The safety balloons housed in the steering wheel and passenger-side dashboard go off with the speed and sound of a gunshot at an impact of about 20 mph. . . . Car airbags are designed with an explosive charge of about 8 grams of nitro-cellulose that detonate inert gases into a 301 bag. There are many recorded cases of drivers being scared by the crack of the explosion. The charge inflates the bag within 40 milliseconds, but the gas is discharged through vents and the bag deflated within a second of impact. However the distraction for a driver could be critical. . . ."

New video evidence

In a second important new development in the case, the London *Daily Mirror* reported on Jan. 31 that two Australian tourists who were in the Place Vendôme, in front of the Ritz Hotel, shortly after midnight on Aug. 31, had videotaped a white car speeding after the Princess's car. The footage was later turned over to French magistrate Stephan, who told the *Mirror*, "This is important new evidence into my investigations."

The footage, according to a Reuters report, "is said to show the white car screeching away from the side of the road to pursue a decoy car used to dupe photographers. It then spins full circle to join the paparazzi chase and hurtles at speed the wrong way down a one-way street."

The white car was later identified as a Citroen AX. The media accounts of the white car attempted to suggest that French police may have been wrong in identifying the car that rammed the Mercedes in the Place de l'Alma tunnel as a Fiat Uno. However, *EIR* has learned that the Citroen may have been yet another vehicle seen near the crash site, and possibly involved in the vehicular attack.

As *EIR* first reported on Nov. 21, 1997, British attorney Gary Hunter, a key eyewitness, told Scotland Yard that he and his wife were staying at a hotel near the Place de l'Alma on the night of Aug. 30-31. Hunter heard a loud crash from inside the tunnel, and went to his hotel window, facing out onto the Rue Jean Goujon. Moments after the crash, he saw two cars, a small darker-colored car, and a larger white car, speed past his hotel at nearly 70 mph, evidently attempting to escape from the scene of some kind of crime. Sources close to the French magistrate's probe believe that the Citroen, first seen in the Place Vendôme, may have been the white car that Hunter saw, on the tail of the smaller vehicle.

Although bodyguard Rees-Jones has still not recovered his memory of the final seconds before the crash, he did tell magistrate Stephan that he recalls that the Mercedes was being followed from the Ritz Hotel by a white car.

If nothing else, the new evidence argues for magistrate Stephan to announce that the probe into the fatal crash is now officially a murder investigation.