

## Recovered...continued from Page 1A

"Waiting to retrieve them after TVA started drawing down the lake made it a much safer operation."

Insurance claims on the vehicles, a 1999 Lincoln Town Car and a 2002 PT Cruiser, have both been collected, Lt. Wood said.

"Both vehicles were purposely launched into Lake Nottely," Lt. Wood said. "An investigation of the Lincoln shows that it was rigged to drive into the lake. The PT Cruiser had its seats removed before it was launched into the water."

Union County sheriff's



**Tanner's Wrecker Service hauls in this 1999 Lincoln from Hannah's Boat Dock on Lake Nottely. It was one of two stolen cars retrieved on Aug. 24th by the Union County Sheriff's Office.**

investigators have turned information about the underwater recoveries to insurance companies that paid out claims on the vehicles.

The task of recovering the vehicles wasn't easy.

Lt. Wood said the operation began at 9:30 a.m. on

Aug. 24th, and ended around 4:30 p.m.

Tanner's Wrecker Service retrieved the vehicles from the lake, Lt. Wood said.

The Union County Fire Department assisted the dive team on the recovery of the stolen vehicles.

Divers involved in the recovery included Lt. Wood, sheriff's Lt. Mark Cecci, sheriff's Lt. Patrick Martin, Deputy Mike Davis of the Fannin County Sheriff's Office, and dive instructor Tommy Crutcher, of Hartwell.

## Chase...continued from Page 1A

he was apprehended.

Authorities believe that Maldonado had been staying at the residence in Sonorville for less than 24 hours, sheriff's reports from Union and Gordon counties show.

Gordon County Sheriff Mitch Ralston said that the home had been rented by a third party, and authorities do not believe that the property owner had any knowledge of the illegal activity.

The methamphetamine had a street value of approximately \$100,000, Gordon County Sheriff Ralston and Union County Sheriff Stephens said.

It was a chase earlier in the day in Union County that led to the significant methamphetamine bust, both sheriffs said.

It was a chase Union County sheriff's Lt. Chad Deyton will never forget. It was a moment that Sheriff Stephens hates happened in his county.

"But, that's what happens when you're trying to keep dope off your streets," Sheriff Stephens said. "We had information that these folks were coming to town. We set up a road block at Weaver and Ledford roads.

"Mr. Johnson decided he could skip through the road block and he did his best," Sheriff Stephens said. "Later, an effective PIT maneuver by Lt. Deyton on the Expedition that Mr. Johnson was driving



**Union County Sheriff Scott Stephens waits for Young's Wrecker Service to remove the crashed vehicle from 515.**

put this major bust in motion."

Johnson, with Fair as his passenger, avoided blocks at various points throughout the chase, Lt. Deyton said.

All the while, they're tossing suspected drugs out the window of the Expedition, Investigator Worden said.

Lt. Deyton backed off of the chase in the city of Blairsville and resumed the chase on 515.

"I backed off in Downton, it just wasn't worth the risk of injury to innocent bystanders," Lt. Deyton said. "As we got out in the open on 515, Mr. Johnson actually tried to PIT me. I backed off and kept him in sight.

"When the opportunity arose to PIT his vehicle, I made that move," Lt. Deyton said. "At one point, I thought he was pulling a gun on me, but he was reaching for drugs to toss out of the vehicle."

Once Lt. Deyton had Johnson's Expedition pinned against the 515 guard rail, Johnson exited the vehicle through his driver side window, Investigator Worden said.

"He went down the embankment and through a patch of saw briars," Worden said. "Three deputies, Lt. Deyton, Lt. Rick Landress and Sgt. Josh Berry retrieved Mr. John-

son from the heavily wooded area. Ms. Fair surrendered without incident."

Union County deputies retrieved several ounces of suspected illegal drugs from the 515 median and along the corridor, after the chase, Sheriff Stephens said.

"This bust is the result of a lengthy investigation that was completed by my deputies, and it proves that we are making progress in the reduction of drugs in our area," Sheriff Stephens said. "Through our efforts, we were able to partner with GBI and Gordon County Sheriff's Office to remove a large amount of these dangerous drugs from circulation in Union and Gordon counties.

"I want to commend everyone involved for their efforts and cooperation that resulted in several arrests without any injuries," he said. "If, at any time, you become aware of any illegal drug activity and would like to report it to the Union County Sheriff's Office, please call us at (706) 439-6066. You may remain completely anonymous."

Johnson and Fair remain in the Union County Jail; Maldonado remains in the Gordon County facility, jail records show.

## Hunters encouraged to review tree stand safety tips

Though commonly used by deer hunters everywhere, tree stands often are improperly installed. As a result, they are considered the leading cause of hunting-related incidents, according to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division.

Not every tree stand is the same. Hunters should be familiar with their particular model's features. Following are recommended safety tips:

When using a non-climbing portable or ladder stand, hunters should securely fasten the stand to the tree and install ladders or steps according to the manufacturer's directions.

Hunters should always wear a Fall-Arrest System (FAS)/Full Body Harness during ascent and descent. Be aware that single strap belts and chest harnesses are no longer recommended and should not be used. Failure to use a FAS could result in serious injury or death.

Hunters should always attach their FAS in the manner described by the manufacturer. Failure to do so may result in suspension without the ability to recover into the tree stand. Be aware of the hazards associated with full body harnesses and the fact that prolonged suspension in a harness may also be fatal.

Have in place a plan for rescue, including the use of cell phones or signal devices that

may be easily reached and used while suspended. If rescue personnel cannot be notified, you must have an alternate plan for recovery or escape. If you have to hang suspended for a period of time before help arrives, exercise your legs by pushing against the tree or doing any other form of continuous motion or use your suspension relief device.

Consider your personal physical condition before going out. If you do not have the ability to recover or escape from a FAS, it is recommended that you hunt only from the ground.

Hunters should always use a haul line to pull their gear and unloaded firearm or bow into their tree stand. Never climb with anything in your hands or on your back. Prior to descending, lower equipment to the ground on the opposite side of the tree.

Staying awake and alert is important. Hunters should avoid taking medications that cause drowsiness prior to hunting. Also, never use alcohol or drugs before or while hunting.

Hunters should always inform someone of where they are hunting and what time they expect to return.

For more information on tree stands or hunting-related safety, call 770-761-3010 or visit [www.georgiawildlife.com/hunting/education](http://www.georgiawildlife.com/hunting/education).