

Police fatally shoot California teenager after car chase

Trévon Austin
1 June 2021

California police released body camera footage showing a Stanislaus County deputy fatally shooting teenager Xander Mann on May 18, after Mann allegedly drove at an officer following a seven-mile pursuit. The Stanislaus County Sheriff's Office identified Deputy Gerardo Zazueta as the officer who shot Mann. He has been with the department for four years, according to police.

The video begins with a deputy approaching Mann's vehicle during a traffic stop and asking him to roll down his window. Police said the 16-year-old white youth had been pulled over for an expired registration sticker and a broken headlight in Modesto, California. Four other teenagers can be seen in the vehicle, presumably tagging along for a joy ride late at night.

After partially rolling down his window, Mann then drove off from the scene, and the deputy rushed back to his patrol car to pursue him. Police chased Mann through Modesto for approximately 20 minutes, reaching speeds up to 60 miles per hour, according to their own account.

Continued footage shows authorities in the chase discussing a pit maneuver—a pursuit tactic by which a pursuing car can force a fleeing car to turn sideways abruptly and cause the driver to lose control. Another deputy vehicle was about to make an attempt on Mann's car. Police reported they tried this tactic at least twice.

Eventually, Mann's vehicle reached an industrial area near the Modesto City-County Airport, where it hit the side of the road and came to a stop, the sheriff's office said. Police said officers tried to stop the car twice before Mann's car spun out of control, and began driving in reverse before crashing into a curb.

Police claimed that after the initial crash, Mann sped forward and narrowly missed Zazueta, who was outside

of his vehicle. He then discharged his firearm. The footage does not show the moment when Zazueta opened fire, but three shots can be heard in the background and another officer can be heard calling out, "shots fired." County Sheriff Jeff Dirkse said that Zazueta "had no time or place to retreat."

The video then shows several law enforcement officials swarming Mann's car, which had smoke coming from the front end after it crashed into a train crossing pole after the shooting. Officers are then seen dragging Mann out of the driver's side door. Upon seeing Mann's injuries, officers begin administering CPR and one of the passengers can be heard screaming Mann's name. The footage shows officers performing CPR for more than 15 minutes until paramedics arrived.

Mann was transported to a local hospital with critical injuries while the other passengers were treated and released from the hospital. Initially, investigators believed another passenger in the vehicle was grazed by a bullet. Further investigation revealed that the only person shot by deputies was the driver. Mann died three days later in the hospital.

Sheriff Dirske, who presided over the release of the footage, claimed Zazueta was not able to activate his body camera "due to the rapid nature of how this critical incident unfolded." The Sheriff's Officer reported an ongoing internal investigation to ensure policies were followed. The department did not report sending any deputies on leave after the incident.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact