

Driver sped to crash, park says

The French tourist at the wheel Thursday in the fatal wreck might have fallen asleep



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WAILUKU » The driver of the vehicle that crashed on the road from the summit of Haleakala on Thursday was speeding and most likely fell asleep at the wheel when he veered off Crater Road, national park spokeswoman Sharon Ringsven said.

Three French tourists, including the wife of driver Bernard Ortolan, died at the scene. Ortolan, 60, of Sceaux, France, was the lone survivor of the one-car crash at the 7,600-foot elevation, about two miles up from Haleakala National Park headquarters. Ortolan was in critical but stable condition yesterday at Maui Memorial Medical Center.

Ortolan, a physician, was able to get out of the red four-door sedan but was hurt too badly to go for help and lay on a nearby rock until rescuers found him, Ringsven said. Killed were his

wife, Anne Verger, 58; Rolande Andina, 65, of Paris; and Philippe Chaigneau, 49, also of Paris. Chaigneau is survived by his wife and two teenage children, who were traveling in another vehicle, Ringsven said.

Park Ranger Michael Ing, who investigated the accident, said the car left the road near mile post 13, flew into the air about 40 feet and crashed into rocks, then rolled back 15 feet to the bottom of a gulch. The four people in the car were a part of an 11-member tour group from France. Park officials think the crash happened between 1 and 1:30 p.m. However, the car was not spotted by a passing bicyclist until 3:45 p.m. The bicyclist had to wave down other visitors to call for help, and rangers were notified at about 4:10 p.m.

Ringsven said the tour group had hiked down Sliding Sands trail, returned to the parking lot at 12:30 p.m. and left the trail head in separate vehicles at different times. She said that when the four people in the sedan did not show up at a meeting place, the other members of the groups searched overlooks and parking areas and notified rangers of the missing car at 2:30 p.m.

Ringsven said Ortolan and his wife were wearing seat belts, but rear passengers Andina and Chaigneau were not. The car's air bags had deployed. She said seat belts probably played a role in reducing the injuries to Ortolan. The weather was sunny and the road was dry at the time of the crash, Ringsven said. The Crater Road is winding and steep in sections, but the crash occurred in a relatively straight and level section where there are no guardrails.

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