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18-Year-Old High School Student Arrested After Allegedly Stealing Vehicle, Leading Police on High-Speed Chase

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Amanie Mathurin **May 11, 2022**

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Mugshot of Ryan Branch. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. CROIX — Criminal charges have been filed against an 18-year-old man accused of stealing a vehicle.

Ryan Branch is charged with unauthorized use of a vehicle, possession of stolen property and grand larceny, all categorized as aiding and abetting.

The charges stem from an incident on Saturday afternoon where an individual reported that he had parked his truck at Cane Bay Beach to pick up his son and returned to find the vehicle missing.

According to the driver, his personal belongings including his cellphone were all in the vehicle at the time. He was able to track his cellphone to a location in the vicinity of Frederiksted Beach and provided that information to police.

Officers then sent out a radio transmission with the vehicle description and license plate number which was received by an officer on mobile patrol near Frederiksted Town. According to the probable cause fact sheet, that officer spotted the vehicle parked across from the St. Croix Country Club Beach while he was traveling north on Hams Bluff Road Route 63. He also observed five men standing next to the vehicle.

The officer requested additional assistance and traveled back to the location to investigate. He reportedly noticed the vehicle heading north towards him, driven by an unknown male accompanied by four unknown male passengers. The officer activated the lights on his police vehicle but the stolen vehicle tried to do a U-turn in the roadway and instead drove into a fenced-off parking lot causing damage to the fence. The driver then took off at high speed, driving recklessly, fishtailing and almost losing control of the vehicle, according to police.

The vehicle eventually stopped and the driver and occupants ran towards some trees and bushes which led to a gut. According to the officer, the driver exited so quickly that the vehicle rolled forward into the trees and bushes. The officer pursued the men on foot and ordered them to stop running. He observed one of the men getting tangled in some tree vines while attempting to escape. The officer noted that the man, later identified as Ryan Branch wore a black ski mask. Branch eventually complied with the officer's orders to get down on the ground and put his hands behind his back. He was handcuffed and patted down and police say several credit cards belonging to the owner of the vehicle were discovered in Branch's pocket.

Following his arrest, bail was set at \$25,000. At his advisement hearing on Monday, it was revealed that Branch is currently an unemployed student. The judge eventually agreed to release him on an unsecured bond for the full bail amount. She noted that while she understands the people's concerns regarding his alleged actions, she finds that a third-party custodian and a curfew should suffice to address those concerns. The court may revisit these conditions if they are found to be insufficient during the pendency of the matter.