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# Man Guilty of Vehicular Manslaughter

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SAN FERNANDO-- A San Fernando man with a history of speeding was convicted Wednesday of vehicular manslaughter in an accident involving excessive speed, but was acquitted on a more serious count.

Todd Lawrence Olson, 25, was speeding along Balboa Boulevard on Jan. 2, 1998, when he swerved to miss a car that had begun to turn in front of him. He lost control of his Acura Integra and smashed into a pole, killing a passenger, friend Julia Dawn Sokolow, 23.

In an unusual move, Deputy Dist. Atty. David Mintz filed felony manslaughter charges against Olson based in part on his history of speeding. Authorities said that Olson was ticketed eight times in less than two years for excessive speed and that his license was suspended at the time of the fatal accident.

Mintz said Olson's record showed that he had been warned of the dangers of speeding, which would have helped prove gross negligence, a necessary element in the felony charge. However, the judge did not admit that evidence.

The jury found Olson guilty of the lesser charge of misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter. He had pleaded guilty before the trial began to driving with a suspended license.

Together, the convictions warrant a maximum sentence of 18 months in County Jail, Mintz said, a fraction of the six years in prison that Olson could have been sentenced to on the felony charge.

Olson and his family were "extremely relieved" by the verdict, said his defense lawyer, James Blatt.

Olson "is well aware that speed does kill and he feels a tremendous amount of remorse over the incident because Ms. Sokolow was a very close friend," Blatt said.