

## NEWS

# Fireball engulfed injured girls as they crawled from crash car

THREE teenage girls were killed when a car exploded into a fireball after a crash in which a schoolfriend died at the wheel.

Two had managed to crawl badly injured, one with both thighs broken, from the Peugeot 106 Rally which had smashed headlong into a tree.

Soon after pulling themselves clear of the vehicle, it suddenly ignited, slid down a ditch towards them and engulfed them in flames.

The other passenger who was still clambering from the wreckage, also died as she was caught in the blaze, an inquest in Harrogate, North Yorks, heard yesterday.

The hearing was told there was nothing mechanically wrong with the L-registered car and no other vehicle was involved in the crash, on a country road at Beckwithshaw, North Yorks.

Colin Moore, the Claro coroner, said "The reasons why this tragic event occurred will never be known with 100 per cent certainty, but most

probably it was excessive speed, combined with a poor position in the road and the relative driving inexperience.

The car veered across the country road, hit a 75lb stone on a grass verge and then careered out of control. At one stage it left the ground and cleared a drainage ditch before crashing into a tree.

The impact was so great that the engine compartment was forced into the car, killing the driver, instantly.

The front seat passenger managed to get out despite sustaining multiple injuries, including two fractured thighs. Dr Carl Gray, a pathologist, found that she had been overwhelmed by the fire as she lay in the ditch.

One of the rear passengers suffered a lacerated liver also managed to get out but was killed by the fumes from the blazing car.

The other rear seat passenger was half in and half out of the car when she was overcome by the fumes.

Pc Kenneth Sandercock, the police accident investigator, said the position

of the bodies suggested that, after hitting the tree, the car had slid down the ditch and trapped the two who had got out of the vehicle.

He said: "I am satisfied that three of the victims survived the impact and tried to exit the vehicle."

**Pc Sandercock believed that the fire was caused by brake fluid hitting hot engine components and then igniting, causing leaking fuel to catch fire. The flames spread through the car quickly, because of high winds, and when fire crews arrived they were confronted by a 22ft fireball.**

Motorists who had stopped when they saw the flames did not realise anyone was inside the vehicle because of the ferocity of the blaze.

Pc Sandercock said there was little or no sign of the driver having braked before the crash and there was nothing to suggest brake failure.

The coroner recorded accidental death verdicts on all four victims.