



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11

I, Andrew McKee, Coroner, having investigated the death of Wade Palmer,

Find, pursuant to Section 28(1) of the Coroners Act 1995, that:

- a) The identity of the deceased is Wade Palmer;
- b) Mr Palmer died from injuries sustained in a single vehicle motorcycle crash;
- c) Mr Palmer's cause of death was multiple trauma; and
- d) Mr Palmer died on 9 February 2020 at Upper Castra, Tasmania.

Introduction

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the comprehensive investigation into Mr Palmer's death. The evidence includes:

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- An opinion of the pathologist who conducted the autopsy;
- The results of toxicological analysis of samples taken at autopsy;
- Affidavits confirming identification and life extinct;
- Affidavit of Susan Hughes, the partner of Mr Palmer;
- Affidavit of Ian Sims, motorist;
- Affidavit of Karen Webb, treasurer of the Tasmanian Motorcycle Club of which Mr Palmer was a member;
- Affidavit of Senior Constable Adam Lloyd, Crash Investigator;
- Affidavits of Philip Evans, a Transport Safety and Investigations Officer;
- Affidavits of attending and investigating police officers;
- Medical reports and records from Northern Midlands Medical Centre;
- Report from Tasmania Ambulance Service; and
- Report from the Department of State Growth.

Background

Wade Palmer was born in Launceston on 8 May 1970. At the time of his death, he was aged 49 years and resided with his partner, Ms S Hughes at Penguin, Tasmania.

Mr Palmer was adopted by Ray and Gaynor Palmer when he was nine months old and he had one younger brother.

Mr Palmer grew up in Perth, Tasmania. He attended Perth Primary School and Kings Meadows High School. Upon leaving school, he was employed as a bicycle salesman / repairer in Launceston. During his working life he was employed as:

- A vehicle / van deliverer for Autorent Hertz (during the late 1990s);
- A vehicle detailer at Bruce Gowan Toyota, Launceston (early 2000s);
- A labourer at Tas Alkaloids (2006-07);
- A labourer at Swift Meats, Longford (2007-08);
- A machinist at Amcor (2008-2014);
- A machinist at Tankworld (2014-16); and
- A postal deliverer for Australia Post, Burnie (2016- 2020).

As a young man, Mr Palmer was a talented cyclist, training at the AIS in Adelaide and competing in races all around the world. He won the Launceston to Hobart wheel race in 1989.

Mr Palmer married Ms L Perri in 1995 and they separated in 1996. Their marriage produced one child, Bianca Palmer, born 13 November 1995.

Mr Palmer commenced a de-facto relationship with Susan Hughes in August 2015 and they resided together in Penguin until his death.

Mr Palmer had owned a variety of motorcycles over his adult life. He was a member of the Tasmanian Motorcycle Club. He attended eight track days at Simmons Plains Raceway. The club maintains records of track incidents occurring during race days. Mr Palmer is not mentioned in those records.

In May of 2019 Mr Palmer purchased a brand new Yamaha YZF-R1M 998cc motorcycle, registration number B636C, from a dealership in Burnie. Senior Constable Lloyd described the motorcycle in his report as follows:

“This model of motorcycle is Yamaha’s flagship road-legal superbike model. It is a \$40,000 motorcycle fitted with race-designed technology and computer management systems or electronic control units (ECU) for most of the major components.”

Ms Hughes described the motorcycle as Mr Palmer’s “dream bike.”

Shortly prior to his death Mr Palmer had purchased a Go-Pro. He intended recording his motorcycle rides.

Circumstances Surrounding Mr Palmer's Death

On Sunday, 9 February 2020, Mr Palmer was at home with his partner, in Penguin. They enjoyed a regular Sunday morning. Ms Hughes described Mr Palmer as happy.

Mr Palmer intended going for a ride which would enable him to test out his new Go-Pro.

He left home at approximately 3.00pm. Ms Hughes expected him to be gone for an hour to an hour and a half.

When he had not returned by 5.30pm, Ms Hughes started to worry and made a number of attempts to contact him on his mobile phone.

At 6.10pm, Mr Sims, accompanied by his wife, Mrs K Sims, were driving their vehicle along Castra Road. They had just travelled past the junction of Duniams Road, when Mrs Sims informed Mr Sims that she could see a motorcycle tank in the paddock. Mr Sims turned his vehicle around and returned to the area where Mrs Sims had seen the tank. As Mr Sims was climbing over a gate to enter the paddock he observed the crashed motorcycle, helmet and the body of Mr Palmer in the paddock. Mr Sims contacted emergency services.

Emergency services attended the scene. Mr Palmer was declared deceased at the scene.

Condition of the Yamaha YZF Prior to the Crash

The registered Yamaha was inspected after the collision by Mr P Evans, a Transport Inspector employed by the Department of State Growth. I am satisfied he is qualified to express the opinions contained in the affidavit he swore in the coronial investigation. He listed extensive damage to most of the motorcycle, consistent with a rolling and tumbling collision. He expressed the opinion that prior to the crash, the motorcycle was mechanically sound and roadworthy and his inspection did not reveal any fault that could have caused or contributed to the crash.

Crash Investigation

A thorough investigation of the crash was conducted by Senior Constable Adam Lloyd, an experienced crash investigator. I am satisfied that Senior Constable Lloyd is qualified to express the opinions contained in the crash investigation report and the affidavit he swore in the coronial investigation.

The crash investigation report discloses that Mr Palmer had been riding his motorcycle on Castra Road heading towards the Duniams Road junction.

Prior to the crash, Mr Palmer was negotiating a slight right hand curve. As he did so the motorcycle has left the sealed portion of the roadway and entered the gravel verge. The motorcycle has travelled along the gravel verge in an almost straight line for approximately 35 metres.

Prior to re-entering the sealed portion of the roadway the motorcycle has travelled over a slight dip in the gravel and the bitumen lip of the sealed portion of the roadway.

The impact of hitting the bitumen lip has caused the motorcycle's front wheel to turn slightly to the left and for the motorcycle to become slightly airborne for a distance of 10.1 metres touching down near the centreline of the roadway.

As the front wheel was facing slightly to the left when it touched down on the roadway it was unable to rotate freely which has caused the front tyre to skid.

The forward momentum of the motorcycle has then caused the front wheel to turn rapidly in the direction the front wheel was facing. The motorcycle handle bars facing to the left have caused the motorcycle's front end to quickly fall down to the right causing Mr Palmer to be thrown from the motorcycle. Mr Palmer and the motorcycle were located down a steep embankment on the south western side of Castra Road.

The entire sequence of the crash was captured on the Go-Pro fitted to Mr Palmer's motorcycle.

Senior Constable Lloyd expressed the opinion that the motorcycle was travelling at an excessive speed for the right hand curve it was approaching and was not correctly positioned within the lane to undertake a high speed right hand cornering manoeuvre.

Senior Constable Lloyd calculated that the motorcycle was travelling at 140km/h when it left the roadway. The posted speed limit on that section of the roadway was 100km/h.

He expressed the view that inattention was a significant contributing factor to the crash.

Senior Constable Lloyd noted that the condition of the roadway or the prevailing weather conditions were not causative factors of the accident.

He further noted the motorcycle being ridden by Mr Palmer was in excellent condition with numerous safety features that made it an extremely safe motorcycle. The condition of the motorcycle did not contribute to the crash.

Finally he noted that the protective equipment worn by Mr Palmer far exceeded what is considered adequate for normal road conditions.

I accept the opinions expressed by Senior Constable Lloyd.

Post-Mortem Examination

A post-mortem examination was undertaken by pathologist, Dr Terrence Brain on 10 February 2020. Dr Brain opined that Mr Palmer's cause of death was multiple trauma secondary to the crash. I accept Dr Brain's opinion as to Mr Palmer's cause of death.

Toxicological testing revealed Mr Palmer had no alcohol or drugs in his system at the time of his death.

Comments and Recommendations

I extend my appreciation to investigating officer, Senior Constable Lloyd, for his investigation and report.

The circumstances of Mr Palmer's death are not such as to require me to make any recommendations pursuant to Section 28 of the *Coroners Act 1995*.

I wish to comment that this crash would not have occurred had Mr Palmer been riding his motorcycle at an appropriate speed. The inescapable conclusion from Senior Constable Lloyd's report is that inattention and the speed of Mr Palmer's motorcycle being well in excess of the posted speed limit and the safe cornering speed for the curve were major causative factors of the crash.

I note that members of the public were exposed to the aftermath of the crash along with first responders.

This case is a further example of the consequences that flow from an individual's decision to drive a vehicle at high speed.

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr Palmer.

Dated: 27 November 2020 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

Andrew McKee
Coroner