

Jury acquits man in car-crash death

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The 1999 automobile crash that killed Camas resident Joseph Steven Allyn was an accident, not a crime.

That was the argument made by defense attorney Steve Thayer during a seven-day trial in Clark County Superior Court, and the jury ultimately agreed.

The panel of six men and six women deliberated about five hours Tuesday before finding Steven E. Asher not guilty of vehicular homicide and vehicular assault.

Prosecutors had charged that Asher, 46, of Vancouver, was recklessly driving his sports car when it spun out of control on Washougal's E Street and struck another vehicle.

Allyn, 29, was a passenger in Asher's car.

The driver of the other car, Tanya Taylor of Washougal, suffered injuries that included a broken ankle.

The accident happened about 8 a.m. on Jan. 22, 1999. Unlike most vehicular homicide cases, no drugs or alcohol were involved.

The jury also had the unusual opportunity to see a videotape of the crash, as the collision was captured by a surveillance camera at East County Communications.

Witnesses estimated that Asher was driving 45 to 80 mph in a 30 mph zone, and said his car fishtailed and spun out shortly before the crash.

But Thayer presented two engineers — or, as deputy prosecutor Grant Hansen called them in his closing arguments, “hired guns” — to discuss in detail how the Pantera sports car

would have handled the curve on E Street.

Thayer argued that Allyn pulled the hand break, which is on the passenger's side of the car in a Pantera, and that is what caused Asher's car to lose control.

Hansen said the hand break was pulled after the accident “was already under way.”

He told the jury the accident was caused by a “reckless, indifferent” driver who wanted to “hot dog and show off his car to impress everyone and see how fast he could go. And he had a passenger who got no vote.”

Allyn's widow, Jill Allyn, has filed a civil lawsuit against Asher. The case is pending.

Her late husband grew up in the Camas-Washougal area, graduated from Camas High School and worked as a diagnostic technician at Hi-Way Fuel.