

# 'Kiddie car' goes for 300-mile

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One was so short he could barely see over the steering wheel. The other was two years shy of the legal driving age.

But together the pair of escapees from a Jacksonville juvenile detention center managed to drive more than 300 miles before being captured Saturday afternoon in Broward County.

Their adventurous journey down Florida's east coast began with a car theft in Jacksonville, continued with a 90-mile-an-hour chase near Vero Beach and ended at a turnpike rest stop near Pompano Beach.

Along the way the teenaged duo allegedly concocted stories, paid for gas with a stolen state credit card, tried to sell a stolen CB radio and — in the words of one observer — handled themselves like a pair of "professional con men."

Sunday, the two unidentified juveniles — ages 13 and 14 — spent a restful day at the Broward Juvenile Detention Center in Fort Lauderdale while authorities tried to reconstruct the events that brought them there. Both suspects have been charged with escape and auto theft.

Tipped by an alert restaurant employe, the Florida Highway Patrol picked up the duo's trail Saturday morning in Indian River County.

Paul Cowles, a management trainee at the Wayfara Restaurant near Fellsmere, became suspicious when one of the boys walked up to the roadside service complex with two empty gas cans and bought \$7.99 worth of gas with a state credit card.

Five minutes earlier, the same boy purchased \$3.02 worth of gas with the card.

He said he was riding with his uncle and their car ran out of gas on the high-

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Paul Cowles,  
restaurant employe

way," Cowles said. "He said the card belonged to his uncle. He seemed pretty convincing for a little kid."

After filling the cans with gas, Cowles saw the boy jump into the backseat of a new Ford LTD station wagon driven by another young boy. The driver was wearing the same color shirt as one worn by a boy who had tried to sell him a CB radio a few minutes earlier.

Suspecting something was wrong, Cowles got in his car and followed the white 1982 Ford south on Interstate 95. The chase proved futile.

"I must have been doing 75 [miles per hour], but I was losing them," he said. "They must have been going 90. They were flat moving."

After spotting the car heading west toward Florida's Turnpike on State Road 60

near Vero Beach, Cowles pulled off the road and called the Florida Highway Patrol in Fort Pierce. Dispatcher George Biggles, in turn, notified the turnpike station in West Palm Beach.

Shortly after 1 p.m., Trooper Jim West was traveling south on the turnpike near Pompano Beach when he saw the empty car parked at the Pompano Service Plaza. He pulled into a restaurant parking lot and waited for the suspects to show up.

About 15 minutes later, a young boy "no more than four feet tall and 50 pounds" left the restaurant, West said, climbed into the driver's seat and drove to a nearby gas pump.

When West walked over to question him, the 13-year-old was paying for the gas with a state credit card.

"He told me he was buying gas for his

## Young escapees take stolen car for 300 miles before capture

*CAR/From 1BR*

mother, who was still in the restaurant," West said. With the boy in tow, West searched the restaurant, but failed to find the boy's mother.

But West did find the 14-year-old in the restaurant.

"He denied knowing anything about the car," the trooper said. "He also denied knowing the other boy."

A computer check of the boys' names showed they had escaped last Friday from the Ricker Road Youth Development Center in Jacksonville. The car and the orange and blue credit card had been stolen from

the center, where the boys were serving sentences for burglary and grand theft.

As West attempted to handcuff the two, the older boy escaped and fled across the highway. West twisted his ankle chasing him, but a group of gas station employees finally caught him in a wooded area.

West said both juveniles are from Broward County. The 14-year-old, about five feet tall and 100 pounds, apparently did all of the driving during the escapade, but little else is known about their lengthy trip.

"They're not saying much," West said. "They're being cool about the whole