

Los Angeles Times - April 21, 2010

Man Convicted of Groping 27 Female Drivers in Mid-City

A man who sexually assaulted women motorists by tricking them into stopping after convincing them sparks were coming from their cars was convicted Wednesday of groping 27 female drivers.

Carlos Mares, 37, called the "sparking brakes suspect" by LAPD detectives, faces four years behind bars after pleading no contest in a downtown Los Angeles courtroom to 31 criminal counts for the sexual assaults in 2008 and 2009.

Deputy City Atty. Richard Kraft said that as part of a plea agreement, Mares will be required to register as a sex offender and serve four years in jail.

Mares was arrested in November after LAPD sex crimes detectives conducted an extensive manhunt for the serial groper and made a public appeal when a half-dozen victims went to authorities.

Driving a 1990s white compact car between the hours of 8 and 11 a.m, primarily in Mid-City, the suspect would pull up next to lone female drivers and tell them sparks were shooting from under their cars and offered to check their brakes.

He would be wearing an orange vest, much like that of a municipal worker, detectives said. Once a woman stopped and opened her car door so Mares could check the brake pedal, he would reach in and grope her, investigators said.

As part of the plea deal, Mares will not receive credit for the six months he has been in custody since his arrest, authorities said. He was being held in lieu of \$360,000 bail.

He is slated to be sentenced May 6 by Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Greg Dohi.

Prosecutors say Mares may face additional time behind bars because he also is charged with