

MAYO MAN RECEIVES 15-YEAR PRISON SENTENCE FOR CARJACKING

A Mayo man received a 15-year prison sentence today for forcibly stealing a car from a woman who volunteered to give him a ride home from a Spartanburg business.

Billy Lawter, 38, was guilty of carjacking at the conclusion of a two-day jury trial. Lawter will serve 85 percent of Circuit Judge Roger Couch's prison sentence before he is eligible for release.

The crime occurred July 31, 2002. Lawter approached a 23-year-old Taralee Minihan as she was preparing to leave Club Cocktails on Asheville Highway and asked for a ride home. A few minutes into the drive, the Minihan realized that Lawter led her into unfamiliar territory on Hanging Rock Road. Lawter told her to pull over to the shoulder of the road. He grabbed her around the neck with his left arm and used his right arm to open the driver door of Minihan's Chevrolet Camero. He pushed her out and stole the car.

Minihan flagged down a passing motorist and got a ride to a Boiling Springs convenience store where she called 911 about 5:25 a.m. Lawter wrecked the car on Double Bridge Road near Belcher Road. A sheriff's deputy pulled him from the wreck moments before the car was engulfed in flames, according to Assistant Solicitor Bob Coler.

Lawter's criminal record includes convictions for driving under the influence, burglary, criminal domestic violence and paint sniffing.