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Justice for Catriona

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Lorry driver Denis Putz has been convicted and sentenced for causing the death of Catriona Patel. The jury returned a unanimous verdict of Causing Death by Dangerous Driving this morning and in the afternoon, the judge sentenced him to 7 years imprisonment and a lifetime driving ban.

Putz had pleaded guilty to Causing Death by Careless Driving but not guilty to the more serious charge of Causing Death by Dangerous Driving. With drink driving and suspected mobile phone use as aggravating factors, the CPS prosecuted him for the more serious offence.

Catriona was cycling in London in June 2008 and stationary at the Oval junction when Putz ran her over in a tipper lorry after failing to see her. CCTV evidence proved that she was visible in his mirror for 29 seconds and wearing a high visibility vest. One of his mobile phones was active at the time of the crash although he argued that it was functioning as a two way radio.

Putz tested positive for drink driving at the scene but breathalyser tests conducted over an hour later found him just under the threshold for being charged for drink driving. As with speeding, there is a tolerance above the legal limit allowed by the Association of Chief of Police Officers (ACPO). RoadPeace has called for a lower drink drive limit for commercial vehicle drivers and for tolerances to be reduced in keeping with the more sophisticated breathalyzer equipment that is now available.

Amy Aeron-Thomas, RoadPeace Executive Director states:

A professional lorry driver for many years, Putz knew the damage a tipper lorry could cause if used improperly. Which is exactly what he did when he got behind the wheel still under the influence of alcohol. Driving a lorry requires full concentration and no impairments at any time, let alone in Central London at rush hour.

As sentences go, this will be considered a tough one, thus indicating the judge's condemnation of Putz's criminal behaviour. Lifetime bans are very rarely imposed, but we believe they should be standard for any driver convicted of causing death by dangerous driving. It is still nothing compared to the lifetime sentence imposed on Catriona's family.

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