

Nissan manager found guilty in theft of Pathfinders

By Reporter McCormack
Reporter Staff

WILFORD—A city man who authorizes said used his position as a financial manager at a West Haven car dealership to steal four Nissan Pathfinders with a total value of more than \$160,000 faces up to four years in prison. He was found guilty by Superior Court Judge of first-degree larceny.

Steven Bernstein, 36, of Danison Drive, pleaded guilty to the felony charge in a plea-bargain agreement Wednesday that allows

a judge to impose a maximum sentence of eight years, suspended after four years served. Bernstein is scheduled to be sentenced March 16.

Bernstein's attorney, Tara Knight of New Haven, will have the right to argue for a lesser term.

Bernstein was employed as a financial manager at George Harle Nissan on Derby Avenue in June 1997 when police were notified about the theft of four Nissan Pathfinders. Bernstein allegedly sold the stolen vehicles.

Bernstein fell under suspi-

cion after management discovered that in addition to each vehicle, four sets of keys and the original certificates of title were taken.

Through an extensive investigation by the state police Auto Theft Taskforce, it was learned that Bernstein attempted to register one of the cars in Westport with the original certificate of title. Assistant State's Attorney Kevin Doyle said.

Three of the four Pathfinders were recovered by authorities. The fourth was never located, due to Bernstein's reported unwillingness to cooperate fully

with investigators.

According to an arrest warrant affidavit, a manager at George Harle Nissan Inc. at 426 Derby Ave. told police that Bernstein was in a unique position to steal the cars because the keys and titles were locked in a desk to which he was one of only a handful of people with access.

From the beginning of the investigation, Bernstein was suspected of being the person responsible for the thefts, the warrant states. He was let go from George Harle Nissan June 30 after only four months

In July 1997, investigators

were contacted by police in New York City after one of the stolen Pathfinders was located. A check with the state Department of Motor Vehicles in Connecticut determined that the vehicle was registered to a man with a residence in West Suffield.

The investigation widened in August when police learned that the car had been insured by an Allstate agency in Westport and one of its employees revealed Bernstein accompanied another man to purchase a policy for the stolen vehicle.

X-manager sentenced in car thefts

By Tucker McCormack
Register Staff

MILFORD — A city man who authorities said used his position as a financial manager at a West Haven car dealership to steal four Nissan Pathfinders with a total value of more than \$130,000 was sentenced Wednesday to three years in prison.

Superior Court Judge Jack L. Grogins ordered Steven Bernstein, 36, of Swanton Drive to eight years, suspended after three served, with five years probation for his role in what authorities believe may have been an organized car theft ring.

Bernstein previously plead-

ed no-contest to first-degree larceny under a plea bargain agreement that allowed a judge to impose a maximum sentence of eight years, suspended after four.

Bernstein's attorney, Tara Knight of New Haven, argued for a lesser sentence.

Bernstein worked at George Harte Nissan on Derby Avenue in June 1997 when police were notified about the theft of the Pathfinders, each with an approximate value of \$32,500, according to authorities.

Bernstein was suspected to be involved after management discovered that four sets of keys and the original certificates of title also were taken.

Police said.

Through an investigation by the state police Auto Theft Taskforce, it was learned that Bernstein attempted to register one of the cars in Westport with the original certificate of title, authorities said.

Authorities recovered three of the four Pathfinders. The fourth was never found, court officials said.

According to an arrest warrant affidavit, a manager at George Hart Nissan Inc. at 426 Derby Ave told police the keys and titles were locked in a desk to which Bernstein was one of only a handful of people with access. Bernstein was fired after only four months on the job.