

Boy of 4 in hijack nightmare

Mom was 300km from home when she heard news

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MORE than 300km from Joburg on a bus headed home, Barbara Mbangwa heard that her new car had been hijacked with her four-year-old son inside.

Mbangwa was on her way home from Durban last night when her phone rang as they passed through Montrose, 20km south of Harri-smith. Her 17-year-old daughter Blessing told her that her Toyota Fortuner, which she had bought two weeks ago, had been hijacked – with her youngest child, Vuyo, inside – at their home in Kempton Park. It was not clear who had been driving the car.

"Then ADT called me because my daughter had pressed the panic button, and they told me what was going on," Mbangwa told The Star this morning.

She was patched through to a conference call with ADT, the police and Tracker.

"The problem was that the car had not yet been transferred into my name, so I did not have a password or anything like that. So, obviously Tracker had to verify everything and make sure I was genuine," she said.

She had bought her 4x4 through a private deal on the internet, acquiring it from a diplomat at the US embassy. While the car had a tracking device, it was not yet linked to her details on the company system.

"Even the diplomat got involved and tried to help," Mbangwa said, explaining how urgent work was done to activate the tracking device in her car so that police could trace it.

The hijackers were picked up travelling along Beyers Naudé Drive near Cresta Shopping Centre in Blackheath just after 9pm. Police tried to stop it, but the hijackers ignored the command and opened fire on the police, who shot back.

During the shoot-out, one of the hijackers was killed and another arrested.

People living in flats near the scene told The Star that they had heard at least seven shots. "At first I thought it was the sound of fire-crackers, but it just went on and on. I dived to the floor because it was so scary," said a woman who gave her name only as Prudence.

Another, who identified herself

as Marilyn, said she was sitting in the garden when she heard two shots.

"I jumped up and ran inside," she said. "As I entered the house there were two more gunshots and then the firing continued. It was like a war zone – so scary. I was confused, in shock and didn't know what to do."

Police cordoned off Beyers Naudé and Castle Hill Street where the body of one of the hijackers, covered in a body bag, lay next to a police van.

Late last night they were using sniffer dogs to comb the area for evidence. A crowd of onlookers watched their progress.

Describing her agony as the search for her missing son went on for hours, Mbangwa said: "You know, you can't describe the feeling of not knowing what is going on. It's terrible. You just try hard to be calm."

"We don't know exactly what happened to Vuyo. Maybe he was

crying or something, but the guys bought him some chips and a Yogi-Sip, then they dropped him off somewhere near the Ivory Park police station where he was found," she said.

Vuyo was returned home safely at about 9.45pm and went straight to sleep in his own bed. His mother got home some time after midnight and when The Star contacted her at about

7.30am the boy was still asleep.

"I am so happy that he is home and safe, but I don't want to wake him up. He normally sleeps until quite late, so I just want to leave him to wake up on his own. I am just hoping that he is not too traumatised and that everything is fine and back to normal soon," Mbangwa said.

Mbangwa's car has been recovered but she has not yet had it returned to her.

"I don't care about the car – those kinds of things can be fixed or replaced. I am just happy that my child is fine. And I have learnt that my neighbours and friends and everybody care," she said happily, explaining how many people waited up last night to welcome her home.

Police spokesman Superintendent Eugene Opperman said investigations were continuing and no new information was available this morning.



ARREST: A policeman speaks to a suspect inside a police vehicle.