

By John Chapman

£20k payout for driver, 73 after police smash up car

A RETIRED businessman yesterday won more than £20,000 damages from police who smashed his car windows after stopping him for driving without a seatbelt.

Grandfather Robert Whatley, 73, was pulled over in his Range Rover and expected the officers to tap gently on his window.

But one policeman hit the glass 15 times with his baton while another climbed on to the bonnet to kick in the windscreen of the £60,000 car.

It was all captured on a video camera mounted inside the police patrol car as Mr Whatley was stopped in a quiet country lane.

The video was obtained by his legal team and later posted on YouTube where it was seen by more than 30 million people worldwide.

The incident sparked fury, with critics claiming the police's heavy-handed actions had terrified an elderly man and resulted in a waste of taxpayers' money.

Extreme

Jonathan Isaby, political director of the TaxPayers' Alliance, said: "As anyone who has seen the video will testify, the treatment of Mr Whatley in this case was excessive in the extreme. The result is that tens of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money has had to be paid in compensation - money which would be far better used on providing frontline policing to protect us all."

Former property developer Mr Whatley was arrested and charged with driving without a seatbelt and failing to stop for police. He was found guilty and fined a total of £235.

But Mr Whatley had the last laugh yesterday when Gwent Police agreed to pay an out-of-court settlement and his legal fees in compensation for the post traumatic stress disorder



Grandfather Robert Whatley, left, won a £20k payout from police after officers were filmed by their own patrol car's camera smashing the windows of his Range Rover, right. They had pulled him over for not wearing a seatbelt



he suffered at the hands of the two PCs. The force also paid for repairs to his black Range Rover costing £9,800.

Mr Whatley, of Usk, Monmouthshire, said: "The police went completely over the top. You would have thought I had robbed a bank."

"I was terrified when they started smashing in the window and trying to kick in the windscreen. I feel the officers were too quick to turn to aggression. I brought this claim as a matter of principle and not for compensation." Mr Whatley, who was

recovering after a stroke, admitted not wearing a seatbelt because he had been reversing earlier.

A spokesman for his family said: "It is incredible that police in Britain can behave in this way. They put an elderly man in fear of his life."

"We sued the police because unfortunately there has been some lasting psychological damage."

"Most people are not in the financial position, or are too scared, to take on the police. But we were not prepared to back down and it is highly significant that the police have

paid up without a fight. With their own legal costs we estimate this has cost them more than £100,000."

The two PCs, who have not been named, were removed from frontline duty pending an internal disciplinary hearing. But they were allowed back on duty after being cleared of any wrongdoing.

Mr Whatley's solicitor Nogah Ofer said: "This payment shows up the police disciplinary system as a cosy club in which police officers' explanations are accepted unquestioningly. Police support for officers who

act in this way does little for public confidence in the police complaints system."

A spokesman for Gwent Police said: "We have not accepted any liability in this matter. However, contesting the matter further would have incurred substantial legal costs if the case had gone to court."

"Therefore, whilst we maintain our position that we do not admit liability, a decision was made to settle the matter out of court on

OPINION: PAGE 12