

REX V. NERIJUS KUNECKIS

SENTENCING REMARKS

1. On 23rd March 2026, at the Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing [PTPH] you pleaded guilty to two counts of causing death by dangerous driving. Just over a year earlier, on Friday 14th February 2025, you had been driving an Audi Q5 on the A13 when you lost control of the car, collided with a another vehicle, hit a couple of crash barriers before ultimately crashing into a Honda Jazz vehicle travelling on the opposite carriageway. The impact caused the death of the driver of the Honda, Kalin Hadzhiev, as well as the passenger in the car you were driving, Laimonas Narvydas.

The facts.

2. A compilation of available CCTV and dashcam footage has been played as part of this sentencing hearing. It shows what can only be said to be a shocking and frightening sequence of events arising out of your sustained dangerous driving: driving at speed, weaving in and out of traffic that leads in due course to your car ending up on the opposite carriageway and the catastrophic consequence of two deaths.
3. On Friday 14th February 2025, you were driving an Audi Q5, KN70 UAE at approximately 16:22. Laimonas Narvydas was your front seat passenger. You were heading westwards along the A13. The A13 is a dual carriageway with three lanes in each direction and subject to a national speed limit of 70 mph.
4. Your Audi was changing lanes and weaving in and out of traffic when you had a minor collision with a BMW 320i. Despite that, you continued to drive changing lanes to avoid traffic when you then lost directional control of the Audi as you tried to go from lane 2 to lane 1 after you overtook a green Kia vehicle and tried to pass a van. The nearside of the Audi mounted the grass verge and made contact with a crash barrier to the left of the inside lane before yawing across all three lanes of the westbound carriageway. The Audi then hit the crash barrier in the central reservation before going over the barrier completely and onto the

eastbound carriageway. Your Audi then crashed into the Honda Jazz driven by Kalin Hadzhiev that was in the middle lane of the eastbound carriageway before flipping and colliding with a Renault Truck cement mixer. The Audi came to a rest with the offside of the car on the ground. The collision with the Honda and cement mixer caused many of the contents of the Audi to be ejected from the car. The items included the engine which landed in lane three of the eastbound carriageway in front of a Fiat Doblo, causing the Fiat to collide with the engine.

5. Those who saw the incident speak of the fast and erratic nature of your driving. As the speed limit was 70mph other vehicles were travelling at speeds in the 60s and up to 70mph. Other drivers comment on your speed being in excess of the speed they were driving at.
6. A forensic collision investigator attended the scene. The weather at the time of the collision was cold with little wind and good visibility. The road surface was dry. There were no environmental or weather factors that would have contributed to the collision. There was nothing about the road surface, nor anything about the Audi that would have contributed to it either. The reconstruction carried out by the investigator shows various stages to the final part. Whilst moving between lanes you cause a collision with the front nearside of a BMW, then have a second collision with a nearside crash barrier, then collide with the central crash barrier, then hit the Honda before hitting the Renault cement mixer.
7. Emergency services were called to the scene. Before their arrival first aid was given to those injured. Despite the efforts of all those at the scene and medical professionals who attended, very sadly both Kalin Hadzhiev and Laimonas Narvydas were pronounced dead at the scene. You sustained serious injuries and were taken to the Royal London Hospital. You underwent surgery and were discharged two weeks later on 28th February.
8. Having been conveyed to the Royal London Hospital by ambulance, a police officer was tasked to attend the hospital. PC Hakim overheard a conversation between you and the doctor. In answers to questions you admitted driving the car, that you remembered '*driving, driving, driving and then bang*'. In answer to the question whether you had used any drugs or alcohol, you said words to the effect that you had had two shots four hours before the incident. You did not specify what the shots were.
9. A specimen of blood was taken at 18:24 on 14th February 2025, following your admission to hospital.

10. You were interviewed on the 25th April 2025. Your legal representative was present. For the most part ‘no comment’ responses were made to the questions posed. You were asked to provide the PIN for the phone you had. No PIN was provided in interview. You were also asked this question: *“I understand that a sample of your blood’s been taken from you when you were in hospital. That sample of blood we intend to send up to the Lab to assess that to see if there’s anything in your blood that might have contributed to your level of driving, would you be willing to consent for that blood to be sent up to the Lab?”* Your response was to say no, you didn’t want it sent. However, it was submitted for testing. When the laboratory who received the sample said they required consent or a production order from a court, a Judge at the Crown Court at Woolwich granted the order.
11. The forensic scientist analysed the blood sample. The result was 197 milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood. The sample was taken just over 2 hours after the collision and so you had clearly consumed alcohol prior to the sample collection. Given the short interval the results may be broadly reflective of the situation at the incident time although depending on the drinking pattern the blood alcohol concentration could have been modestly higher or lower. The level she detected is over twice the legal limit for driving in the UK (80mg% in blood) and would be expected to produce significant intoxication in the average social drinker.
12. Objection has been taken to the admissibility of the blood alcohol analysis on the basis that the police failed to follow the correct procedure for obtaining blood samples when a suspect is in an incapacitated condition in hospital as set out in the provisions of the Road Traffic Act 1988 and the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988. It is contended on your behalf that this has resulted in prejudice to you as a second sample of blood was not taken and provided to you to enable you to independently check the accuracy of the analysis now relied upon.
13. The prosecution submit that the sample result is admissible. They say that although incapacitated when admitted to hospital, your consent was sought at interview and whilst you were not in that interview explicitly warned that failing to give permission could render you liable to prosecution, you were legally represented and have not been prosecuted for failing to provide a specimen.
14. On Wednesday this week application was made for this sentencing hearing to be further adjourned so that an expert could be sought now to analyse blood taken from you. I refused the request the case be further delayed. There have been submissions today that the blood alcohol reading should not be taken into account against you on sentence. In my judgment the fact that the blood sample shows you to be over the limit is something that can be taken

into account and is here a further aggravating feature of the case. I will provide a separate ruling on this issue in due course.

Victim impact.

15. There are before the court moving statements from the families of those who were killed. Nezire Hadzieva speaks of her loving husband who was 44 when he died. She speaks of the impact on her, and the family of his loss. In part of her statement she says this:

“He was not just my husband, he was my soulmate, my best friend, the father of my children, my everything. He was the only person who could truly understand me, even without words. He was my strength when I was weak, always standing beside me no matter what life brought. He saw the best in me and supported me in everything I did. His loss has shattered me in a way that words can barely describe. It feels as though a part of me was taken with him, leaving behind a pain that never truly rests. Losing a loved one is not a single moment in time—it is something you carry with you for the rest of your life. It lives in the quiet spaces, in the empty chair at the table, in the silence where their laughter and voice once filled the air.”

16. There is a moving statement from Kalin’s sister, Emiliya. She speaks of the impact on her of losing her much loved brother, as well as the profound impact on their father, mother and the wider family.
17. From the family of Laimonas Narvydas, who was aged 38 when he died, I have seen and read a statement from Marijus Leliunga, who speaks of the acute nature of the impact of the death of his brother-in-law Laimonas. As he says the collision on the 14th February 2025 has affected the whole family: not only has it destroyed the lives of those that died on that day, it has also destroyed the families surrounding them.
18. No sentence can ever be equated to the loss of any life and nothing the court can do can ever bring back those who have died or make anything right. As those who have seen the footage in this case have seen in seconds the lives of two much loved individuals were lost.

Sentencing Guidelines.

19. I have before me the relevant sentencing guidelines. The maximum sentence for causing death by dangerous driving is one of life imprisonment. In terms of Culpability this case is one that comes within Category A. It was a prolonged, persistent and deliberate course of

dangerous driving. There were a number of highly dangerous manoeuvres at close quarters and at speed. In my judgment the evidence of consumption of alcohol is admissible. Even if it was not, it is clear that a refusal to provide or give consent for a sample to be analysed would be an aggravating factor. Even if one does not work on the basis that the reading was as high as the laboratory result shows, you were clearly over the limit. I note what is set out in the guidelines as to those cases where more than one death is caused.

“The starting points and category ranges below relate to a single offence resulting in a single death. Where more than one death is caused and they are charged in separate counts, or where another offence or offences arising out of the same incident or facts is charged, concurrent sentences reflecting the overall criminality will be appropriate.

Where more than one death is caused but they are all charged in a single count, it will be appropriate to make an upwards adjustment from the starting point within the relevant category range before consideration of other aggravating features and mitigation. The court may conclude that it would be contrary to the interests of justice for the final sentence to be limited to the offence range for a single offence.”

20. Here, I intend to pass a sentence that reflects the result of your overall conduct. I intend to pass concurrent sentences on both counts that reflect both deaths. I have very much in mind the Totality guideline.
21. For an offence within Category A, the start point is one of 12 years’ custody and the range 8 to 18 years’ custody. There are no statutory aggravating factors. In relation to statutory mitigating factors, you have no previous convictions and were aged 49 as at the date of the offence.
22. In terms of factors reducing seriousness or reflecting personal mitigation, you are now aged 51 (date of birth 16th March 1975) and as I have said 49 at the time of the offence. You are of previous good character. Your driving record is clear.
23. In terms of personal mitigation, I note the references that have been provided from your family and close friends. All speak highly of you. This incident will clearly impact on your family, as well as those who have lost loved ones. I note the contents of the report of Dr Italiano, the Clinical Psychologist.

24. In your letter to the Court today I note your expressions of remorse. You say the day will remain engraved on your memory and yet is also said on your behalf that you have no memory of the events. Your desire to drive in the way you did - to get where you were going as quickly as you could - shows a complete disregard for the safety of others which does not chime with how you are described by those who speak about you and whilst you express sorrow, whether this is actual remorse is less clear to me.
25. You pleaded guilty. It is submitted that the plea was at the first hearing when a plea could have been given. The BCM (Better Case Management) form is silent on this issue. Whilst the level of credit at a PTPH is normally in the region of 25%, in the light of what is said here by Mr Aleeson, he having checked with your representative at the time, that no question of plea was asked, credit at one third will be given for your pleas of guilty. As well as ordering a disqualification until an extended test is passed there has to be a disqualification from driving and for a minimum period of 5 years.

Sentence.

26. On both counts, applying the guidelines as set out and making allowance for the aggravating and mitigating features identified, in my judgment the sentence before plea would have been one of 18 years' imprisonment for these two deaths. Making allowance for your plea, a sentence of 12 years imprisonment on each count concurrent.
27. Your licence will be endorsed with the particulars of the convictions for both offences of causing death by dangerous driving. There will be an order for disqualification until you pass an extended driving test.
28. In terms of disqualification from driving, the minimum period is one of 5 years and here in light of the facts and your driving record, a disqualification for 10 years. In light of the custodial period I have imposed, there must be an extension period to that period of disqualification and that has to be two-thirds of the custodial term I impose as the custodial period is to be one over 7 years. The extension period is one of 8 years. So there will be a disqualification from driving for a period of 10 years and an extension period of 8 years making a total period of 18 years.
29. On the sentence of 12 years, you will serve two-thirds of that term and then be released on licence for the remainder of it – whilst on licence you must comply with the terms of that licence. At any stage the licence may be revoked and your return to custody ordered.

30. If the statutory surcharge applies the appropriate order may be drawn up.

Recorder of London
His Honour Judge Mark Lucraft KC,
Central Criminal Court
Old Bailey,
London EC4M 7EH
June 12th 2026.