

Speed focus in fatal I-75 crash trial

Mom, twin daughters died

By Sheila McLaughlin

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LEBANON — Speed will be the key issue when Jerad Rushlow goes on trial today in a crash that killed a Georgia woman and her 3-year-old twin daughters on a deadly stretch of Interstate 75 in June.

Mr. Rushlow, a 19-year-old beauty school student, is charged with three misdemeanor counts of vehicular homicide in the deaths of 48-year-old Nancy Hinkle and her daughters Elizabeth and Emily.

Authorities contend that Mr. Rushlow, who was returning to his home in Newport, Mich., after attending a beauty show in Cincinnati with his parents, was traveling too fast at 68 mph in a gusty downpour June 4.

Mr. Rushlow's northbound 1996 Ford Explorer crossed the grassy median just north of Ohio 63 and traveled into the path of a southbound 1999 Buick Park Avenue driven by Gary Hinkle, 49, of Peachtree City, Ga.

Mr. Hinkle was seriously

injured in the head-on crash.

Defense attorney Jay Clark is expected to make his case with a retired National Transportation Safety Board accident reconstruction engineer, who calculated that Mr. Rushlow was traveling about 20 miles below the 65 mph speed limit when his SUV hit a pocket of rainwater on the road and went out of control.

Lebanon Prosecutor James Whitaker must show that Mr. Rushlow's actions were negligent. He faces up to six months in jail on each charge.

The Hinkles are among 13 people to be killed in 10 crashes since November 2000 on a 12-mile stretch of Interstate 75.

Their deaths prompted temporary increased police patrols and a state study on possible safety improvements. Rumble strips were added in some areas to alert drivers that they were going off the road.

State officials renewed their enforcement efforts last month after a fiery crash near the Ohio 129 ramp claimed the life of a 38-year-old Michigan man.