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Injured driver gets jury award of \$3.3M

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A jury in Middlesex County has awarded \$3.3 million to an Edison woman who suffered a severe back injury when her car was struck from behind while she was waiting in line to pay a toll on the Garden State Parkway.

The jury awarded the sum, including \$300,000 interest, to Teria Armstead, a 48-year-old receptionist who filed a lawsuit claiming she was injured when her car was hit July 12, 2002, in the northbound lanes of the Union Toll Plaza.

The panel awarded the amount after finding one of the defendants, Mattie Crosson of Hillside, was responsible for causing a three-car crash that led to Armstead's injuries.

Another driver, John Sonzogni, was cleared of liability when the verdict was returned Thursday following a three-day trial in New Brunswick before Superior Court Judge Lorraine Pullen.

During the trial, Armstead's attorney, **David Nitti of the Law Office of Michael A. Percario in Linden**, argued that his client suffered an injury to her lower back when her car, a Toyota Camry, was struck from behind by Sonzogni's car, a Ford Taurus.

Sonzogni, 78, an Oradell resident who later moved to Florida, said in videotaped testimony that his car was knocked into Armstead's vehicle when it was sideswiped by a Mercury Cougar driven by Crosson, according to Nitti.

The lawyer said the jury rejected the testimony of Crosson, who blamed Sonzogni for the crash, contending she was stopped in traffic when he struck her vehicle and then crashed into Armstead's Camry.

Nitti said it was uncertain when Armstead may collect any portion of the award, noting an appeal was possible by Crosson's insurer, Allstate Insurance Co. Armstead is in pain and continues to undergo physical therapy, but has not suffered any loss of movement and continues to work, Nitti said.

Crosson's attorney, identified in court papers as Uwaila Esemuede, could not be reached for comment.