

News story: Romanian people smuggler jailed

Romanian national Claudiu Pricope was stopped by Border Force officers at the UK inward tourist controls at the Channel Tunnel in Coquelles on 4 November. When asked what he was carrying in his Seat Alhambra, Pricope was vague, saying that it was clothing, but that he did not know where it was from, where it was going or who it was for.

Unsatisfied with his responses, Border Force officers subjected the vehicle to further examination.

Paul Morgan, Director of Border Force South East and Europe, said:

The car appeared to be full of bags of clothes, however when officers opened a rear side door and began removing the bags they found a 2 person tent, fully erected in the void where the rear passenger seats should have been. Inside the tent were crammed 5 people.

The temperature inside the tent was intense. All 5 of the teenagers were drenched in sweat, but people smugglers care little about the conditions in which they transport their human cargo, often putting the lives of others at risk.

The Vietnamese nationals, 2 males and 3 females, were passed to the French Police Aux Frontières and Pricope, 29, of no fixed UK address, was arrested. The investigation was passed to Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation officers and Pricope was subsequently charged with assisting unlawful immigration into the UK.

Pricope pleaded guilty yesterday (4 December) at a pre-trial hearing at Canterbury Crown Court and was sentenced there immediately.

Assistant Director David Fairclough, from the Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation team, said:

This was not an opportunistic offence, but a carefully planned attempt to circumvent the UK's immigration rules. Pricope misguidedly believed that zipping the people into a tent would defeat Border Force, but all it achieved was to subject them to uncomfortable conditions.

We work closely with Border Force colleagues to rigorously investigate allegations of immigration related criminality and this case should serve as a warning to anyone tempted to get involved with this kind of offending. We will catch you, and put you before

the courts.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit <http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org>.