

# Killer driver escaped from jail

By **IAN HEPBURN**  
February 20, 2007

**SUN JUSTICE** – our new, hard-hitting campaign on behalf of all readers – aims to right the wrongs in society.

Perhaps you have been conned by a rogue dealer or left outraged by a shameful court decision?

If you know of an injustice, we want to hear from you.

Here, we reveal the scandal of the Dutch drink-drive killer who fled prison in Britain and escaped to Holland – where the authorities **REFUSE** to send him back.

WHEN Piet Minnaard was jailed for five years for killing a hotelier while drunk at the wheel, the victim's family hoped the sentence would bring some small consolation.

But the Dutchman simply walked out of an open prison in England after just 20 months and fled to Holland, where he stuck two fingers up at British justice and vowed: "I'm never going back."

The police, Crown prosecutors, the Home Office, MPs and Euro MPs have all battled to get Minnaard — dubbed The Dutch Untouchable — brought back to Britain to finish his sentence.

*But despite the Netherlands being one of the UK's closest EU allies, the authorities there refuse to cooperate.*

In Holland, escaping from custody is not regarded as a punishable crime in itself and, as a result, officials refuse to return him to the UK.

Minnaard, 40, a mussel farmer, was jailed for five years in 2003 for killing popular hotelier Len O'Driscoll in a horrific car crash in Wales.

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He pleaded guilty to causing death by dangerous driving and the sentence was reduced to four years on appeal.

Mr O'Driscoll's widow Kim — who was badly injured in the same crash — said last night: "I would like to see Minnaard brought back here to



**Home free ... fugitive Minnaard fled to Holland and his plush home, inset**

Pictures: PAUL EDWARDS

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finish his sentence and have extra time slapped on for absconding.

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"From what I hear about this man he has shown no remorse. When he walked out of prison he went back to his family. But my kids were never able to see their dad again.

*"It is an absolute scandal that he has been allowed to get away with this and nobody can touch him."*

Minnaard shattered the family's lives on a night in October 2002.

He had been sent to the UK by his firm, Delta Mossel, to help set up a mussel farm in Wales.

That evening he had been drinking with friends in Llanrhidian, South Wales — and was so boozed up when he climbed into his car to go home that he forgot he should be driving on the left.

He had **DOUBLE** the legal limit of alcohol in his blood when he drove down the wrong side of the road in his Mercedes and smashed head-on into a car driven by 58-year-old Len.

The hotelier — taking his wife and teenage daughter home after a visit to the cinema — died in the wreckage as his VW Golf was spun on to its side and finished facing back in the direction from which it had come. Kim suffered severe stomach bruising and whiplash.

Daughter Laura, now 20, had to be cut from the wreckage and suffered a broken wrist and thigh bone.



Escape ... Minnaard left Leyhill jail

Len and Kim were in the middle of redeveloping their hotel, the King Arthur at Reynoldston, Gower, at the time of the crash.

Mother-of-three Kim, 49, is still heartbroken that her husband never got to see his dreams for the business come true.

*But her main feeling is rage.*

She is furious that Minnaard ended up in a prison he could escape from by just walking out — especially when the authorities knew he had access to fishing boats which could take him out of the country despite his passport being confiscated.

It is believed that on leaving prison, he fled to Holland in a boat supplied by a friend.

Kim told Sun Justice: "It was ludicrous for Minnaard to be put in an open prison when it was known he had contacts with boat owners and it was so easy for him to get out."

But she is also angry at Holland's failure to send him back. She said: "I am horrified that Holland, as a member of the EU, does not recognise international laws. I really believed, when I found out, that it would be a simple matter to bring him back to finish his sentence.

"I did not think for one minute that the law there would be on his side.

*"We have been dealt one massively cruel blow after another."*

Minnaard was sent to jails in Swansea and Cardiff then transferred to Leyhill Open Prison in Gloucestershire.

In December 2004 — just 20 months into his sentence — he followed in the footsteps of 113 other Leyhill inmates that year and walked out, despite having at least 16 months still to serve.

The fight for the return of Minnaard was taken up by Martin Caton, Labour MP for Gower, Euro MP Glenys Kinnock, and Director of Public Prosecutions Sir Ken Macdonald.

They all believed that the newly signed system of the European Arrest Warrant, which allows countries to arrest suspected criminals in other countries with the help of foreign police and bring them home without an extradition process, would see Minnaard brought swiftly to justice.

None of them realised that a quirk in the Dutch legal system would dash these hopes.

But finally, David Archer, Chief Crown Prosecutor for Avon and Somerset, admitted in a letter to MP Mr Caton that the system had beaten them.

The letter explained: "In the Netherlands, escaping out of legal custody does not constitute a crime and, as a result, the Netherlands refuses to surrender Mr Minnaard to the United Kingdom since there is no equivalent crime upon which to base such surrender."

He also informed the MP that the Dutch system prevented them sending a citizen back to another country to complete a jail term.

It was then left to Mr Caton to pass on the shock news about Minnaard's "untouchable" status to Kim in another letter.



**Devoted ... tragic Len with Kim in happier times**

He wrote: "This, I am sure, will deeply disappoint you, and in my view, you are entitled to be very angry — first with the Dutch authorities and also because the Home Office misled us about the legal situation with regard to the European Arrest Warrant."

*Today, Minnaard is not in hiding. After leaving prison, he simply went home to his lavish detached house in the shellfish port of Yerseke in south west Holland.*

And he told Sun Justice defiantly: "I have no intention of ever going back to Britain — and nobody can make me."

Minnaard was banned from driving in the UK for seven years — but in Holland he has no such problem and cruises the local country roads in a dark green saloon.

At the house he shares with his wife and two sons he insisted that he had served his sentence and only walked out because he was held longer than his release date.

He claimed: "They promised to release me in October 2004. But by the end of December, when I had heard nothing, I ran away.

"I only did it because there was no sign of a release date. I could have gone months earlier.

"People say two years is nothing compared with the loss of a life. But there can be no proper punishment.

"It is not true that I showed no remorse for what I did. I am a normal human being.

*"My wife wrote a letter to Mrs O'Driscoll telling her how we felt but we never got a reply.*

*"I have no plans to go back to Britain. I just want to stay with my wife and my children."*

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- **DEMAND killer Piet Minnaard is returned to Britain to finish his sentence by contacting the Dutch Embassy on 020 7590 3200 or at [london@netherlands-embassy.org.uk](mailto:london@netherlands-embassy.org.uk)**

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