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2 charged in ID fraud scheme affecting 6 N.Y. dealerships

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Two men are accused of taking part in an elaborate identity fraud scheme that permitted them to purchase five high-priced vehicles from different dealerships about 40-50 miles north of New York City.

The suspects, Jankely Hidalgo, 29, and Jonathan Sevilla, 34, were taken into custody after failing to fraudulently purchase a vehicle with a forged Connecticut driver's license at Lexus of Mount Kisco, N.Y., a spokeswoman in the Westchester County District's Attorney Office said.

Other arrests are pending in connection with a federal investigation in "multiple states" that involves the Department of Homeland Security, the spokeswoman said. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement had a "limited role" in the case, a department spokesman said in an email to *Automotive News*.

Hidalgo and Sevilla were arraigned last week on charges of identity theft in the first degree and grand larceny in the second degree for stealing a Lexus from Ray Catena Lexus of Larchmont, N.Y., according to a statement by Westchester County District Attorney Anthony Scarpino. They entered not guilty pleas.

The size of the suspected fraud ring and the scope of the investigation are still unclear.

Hidalgo, the driver, provided fictitious driver's licenses and stolen personal information, including Social Security numbers, to Sevilla and other mules in the ring to pose as buyers

looking to finance a vehicle, according to the statement from the office.

On Oct. 20, 2017, Hidalgo drove Sevilla to the Ray Catena store, where Sevilla used a stolen identity and formulated a deal to finance a Lexus vehicle valued at \$86,741, the release said, and drove the vehicle off the lot without paying for it.



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Hidalgo was also involved in the fraudulent purchases of a Land Rover vehicle from Land Rover of New Rochelle, a Toyota 4Runner from Rivera Toyota of Mount Kisco, a Range Rover vehicle from Croton AutoPark of Croton-On-Hudson, and a Mercedes-Benz S500 from Mercedes-Benz of Goldens Bridge, the release said.

Sevilla was an accomplice in only two of the fraudulent escapades at Mercedes-Benz of Goldens Bridge and the unsuccessful attempt at Lexus of Mount Kisco, according to the release.

Hidalgo and Sevilla also were arraigned on June 28 in Mount Kisco Court on felony charges for the unsuccessful attempt. The charges included identity theft in the first degree, and attempted grand larceny in the second degree.

The affected dealerships and the Department of Homeland Security did not immediately return requests for comment. AutoNation, owner of Land Rover of New Rochelle, said it has been asked not to comment on the investigation.

"A search warrant of Hidalgo's home in the Bronx recovered smart phones and a number of electronic devices, some storing victims' identifying information, and a credit card reader/writer, used to create forged credit cards," the release said. "In Sevilla's Bronx home, detectives found more than a dozen cell phones, SIM phone cards and memory cards."

The value of the scheme falls between \$500,000 and \$1 million, the release said.

The stolen vehicles were expected to be shipped to Africa for resale, the release said. Some of the vehicles were recovered prior to being placed in shipping containers.

The case involving Ray Catena Lexus has been pushed to Monday in the Town of Mamaroneck Court, according to the Westchester County District Attorney's Office.

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