

Now it's Tony three-Mercs

Another Mercedes-Benz earmarked for Yengeni ended up with a former Zairean politician's wife. ANDRE JURGENS, JESSICA BEZUIDENHOUT AND MZILIKAZI WA AFRIKA

TODAY the Sunday Times can reveal that a third Mercedes-Benz was ordered for ANC Chief Whip Tony Yengeni by a company which won a lucrative slice of the controversial R43-billion arms deal.

But Yengeni did not get the vehicle - it ended up with Wivine Ndlangu Kavidi, the wife of former Zairean Prime Minister N'Guza Karl-I-Bond, at her home in Cape Town.

It is not clear why Yengeni never received the R400 000 red Mercedes SLK320 convertible earmarked for him when it arrived at a Cape Town dealership.

But the Sunday Times has evidence of a written "agreement" about the vehicle. Kavidi explained in a letter to the dealership that released the car that although the vehicle was intended for Yengeni, she would in fact become the new owner.

At the time that the car, ordered as a "private" staff vehicle by the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company, arrived for delivery in Cape Town in January this year, there was mounting political debate around the exclusion of Judge Willem Heath from the multi-agency team probing claims of corruption in the controversial arms deal.

Yengeni is a regular visitor at the luxury apartment where Kavidi lives in Fresnaye, an exclusive suburb on the slopes of Table Mountain.

When the Sunday Times visited the flat last week, there was no sign of Kavidi. Neighbours said she had left town. But the vehicle was parked in

the basement. When we visited the block again this week, the car was no longer there.

Along with Yengeni's Mercedes and that of his wife, the vehicle was ordered as a "private" staff vehicle by arms firm EADS which won contracts worth R420-million to supply missiles and tracking radars aboard four new navy corvettes.

EADS, which bought the cars from sister company, DaimlerChrysler SA, has admitted to helping about "30 VIPs" obtain vehicles in South Africa.

The company's admission came after the Sunday Times investigated Yengeni's green ML320 four-wheel-drive (worth R359 000) and a Mercedes C180 (R180 000) driven by his wife, Lumka, which was ordered on the instruction of EADS managing director, Michael Woerfel.

Documents on the couple's two cars have since been seized by investigators probing the arms deal. The Directorate of Public Prosecutions, the Public Protector and the Auditor-General are probing various aspects of the deal, including allegations of bribery and corruption against several prominent former and current government officials, including Yengeni.

DaimlerChrysler SA spokesman , Lulama Chakela, confirmed that her company had sold the SLK320 to EADS. Records show it was released from DaimlerChrysler SA on January 11. The Sunday Times traced the car to Kavidi via its registration number, CA 110938.

Traffic Department records list the SLK320 automatic's engine number (11294730903597) and chassis number (WDB1704652F213011).

It was registered in Kavidi's name exactly three months ago today, on January 29. The owner is described as W Ndlandu Kavidi of Fresnaye, Cape Town.

Hire Purchase Information in Pretoria, a company which tracks finance agreements, has no record of an agreement on this car. The car registration papers list Kavidi as the title holder of the car, a fact which indicates that it is fully paid for.

According to the registration papers, Kavidi is a foreign national. Her Congolese passport was used to register the car.

Reporter Mzilikazi wa Afrika flew to Cape Town on April 20 and headed for Kavidi's address. He wanted to ask her how she came to be driving a car which was originally intended for Yengeni.

Wa Afrika spotted the red SLK320 in a basement parking bay within minutes of arriving at the upmarket apartment block.

The car's roof is capable of being folded away "at the touch of a button", transforming the machine into a sleek cabriolet within 25 seconds.

Standard equipment includes airbags, anti-lock brakes, Bose sound system, climate control, fire extinguisher, first-aid kit, heated electric leather seats, and a car phone.

Tight security measures at the apartment block force visitors to buzz residents via an intercom system before the security guard allows them entry.

Wa Afrika waited downstairs for three hours. There was no answer when he buzzed unit 603, Kavidi's flat.

Her next-door neighbour finally appeared and said Kavidi had left the building carrying "big travelling bags" 24 hours before Wa Afrika and photographer Terry Shean arrived.

During the wait at security, Wa Afrika and Shean chatted to residents who claimed that Tony Yengeni was a regular visitor to number 603.

Paging through the building's A4-sized visitors' book, one resident pointed out several "Yengeni" entries. These included:

A visit to flat 603 at 4.30pm on Friday, March 2 , one week after the Sunday Times confronted Yengeni in his office at Parliament;

Another visit at 3.05pm on Sunday, February 18;

The latest recorded visit was last Sunday while Kavidi was apparently out of the country. Witnesses said Yengeni visited the flat at 8.30pm and left after about an hour. He arrived accompanied by a man and was later joined by an unidentified woman.

However, Kavidi's car disappeared from its parking bay early this week.

It has since been established that Kavidi, who held two ministerial posts in the government of ousted Zairean (now Democratic Republic of Congo), leader, Mobutu Sese Seko, is also the wife of former Zairean Prime Minister N'guza Karl-I-Bond who came to South Africa after suffering a stroke four years ago.

Mobutu named Karl-I-Bond prime minister in November 1991. Before that he was ambassador to Washington and, from 1986, minister of foreign affairs.

Karl-I-Bond is locked in an immigration battle with the South African Department of Home Affairs. He entered the country on a visitor's permit in 1997.

Kavidi is a well-known poet and author who writes in French. She published the book, *Deceptions and Glimmers of Hope* , in 1984.

Meanwhile, it emerged this week that Yengeni has had problems with yet another Mercedes-Benz, an E220, which was written off in an accident three years ago.

Wesbank, which was financing this car, impounded the wreck last month after unsuccessfully trying to claim arrears payments from Yengeni .

Yengeni's spokesman Dennis Cruywagen was contacted for comment on Friday and faxed a full list of questions.

He was not willing to go to his office to deal with the fax as he said it was a public holiday but offered to deal with the matter on Saturday morning.

Yesterday afternoon Cruywagen faxed the following statement on Yengeni's behalf: "I do not wish to subject myself to a witchhunt by the Sunday Times and therefore decline to comment."

- Siphon Ngwema, spokesman for the Directorate of Public Prosecutions, said investigators were unable to confirm or deny details of specific allegations.

<http://www.suntimes.co.za/2001/04/29/politics/pol01.htm>