

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

State v. Moore

2012 MT 270N (Supreme Court of the State of Montana 2012) · No. DA 11-0550 · Decided November 21, 2012

SUMMARY

The Montana Supreme Court affirmed Michael Earl Moore’s conviction for a second DUI offense. The Court held that the evidence was sufficient for a rational trier of fact to find that Moore was under the influence while in actual physical control of his vehicle, despite the absence of evidence that the ignition key was in his possession. The opinion was issued as a noncitable memorandum decision.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of Montana
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Justice Patricia O. Cotter; Patricia O. Cotter; Michael E. Wheat; Jim Rice; Beth Baker; Brian Morris
JURISDICTION	Montana
DECIDED	November 21, 2012
DOCKET	DA 11-0550
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Moore appealed his DUI conviction and sentence from the Twenty-First Judicial District Court to the Montana Supreme Court, challenging the sufficiency of the evidence supporting a finding that he was in actual physical control of his vehicle while under the influence of alcohol.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews sufficiency of the evidence by viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution and asking whether any rational trier of fact could have found the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Michael Earl Moore v. State of Montana

TOPICS

- criminal procedure
- evidence
- standard of review
- appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law

criminal procedure

driving under the influence

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether sufficient evidence supported the finding beyond a reasonable doubt that Moore was in actual physical control of his vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, despite the absence of evidence that the ignition key was in his possession or in the ignition.

HOLDINGS

1. The evidence was sufficient for a rational trier of fact to find beyond a reasonable doubt that Moore was under the influence of alcohol and was in actual physical control of the vehicle.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The direct and circumstantial evidence of intoxication at the time of the arrest is reasonable and sufficient evidence to support a conviction of DUI.” (¶ 8)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

A Ravalli County deputy found Moore asleep or passed out in his truck on the side of a road in a remote location. Moore admitted that he had driven there, said he had consumed several beers, and displayed signs of intoxication, including the odor of alcohol, bloodshot and watery eyes, slurred speech, confusion, and poor performance on field sobriety tests. The officer did not search the vehicle or Moore to determine where the ignition keys were located.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Moore was convicted in Ravalli County Justice Court of a second DUI offense after officers found him asleep or unconscious in his truck. He appealed to the Twenty-First Judicial District Court, which conducted a bench trial, convicted him, and imposed a partially suspended sentence, fine, fees, and conditions. The Montana Supreme Court affirmed after reviewing the sufficiency of the evidence.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Booth, 2012 MT 40, ¶ 7, 364 Mont. 190, 272 P.3d 89

OPINION

State v. Moore

2012 MT 270N

PER CURIAM.

November 21 2012 DA 11-0550

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

2012 MT 270N

STATE OF MONTANA,

Plaintiff and Appellee, v.

MICHAEL EARL MOORE,

Defendant and Appellant. APPEAL FROM: District Court of the Twenty-First Judicial District, In and For the County of Ravalli, Cause No. DC-11-1 Honorable Jeffrey H. Langton, Presiding Judge COUNSEL OF RECORD: For Appellant: Wade Zolynski, Chief Appellate Defender, Sarah Chase Rosario, Assistant Appellate Defender, Helena, Montana For Appellee: Steve Bullock, Montana Attorney General, Tammy A. Hinderman, Assistant Attorney General, Keif Storrar, Legal Intern, Helena, Montana William Fulbright, Ravalli County Attorney, Angela Wetzsteon, Deputy County Attorney, Hamilton, Montana Submitted on Briefs: September 26, 2012 Decided: November 21, 2012 Filed: _____ Clerk Justice Patricia O. Cotter delivered the Opinion of the Court. ¶1 Pursuant to Section I, Paragraph 3(d), Montana Supreme Court Internal Operating Rules, this case is decided by memorandum opinion and shall not be cited and does not serve as precedent. Its case title, cause number, and disposition shall be included in this Court's quarterly list of noncitable cases published in the Pacific Reporter and Montana Reports. ¶2 Michael Moore was charged with a second driving under the influence (DUI) offense after Ravalli County officers discovered him sleeping or unconscious in his truck at a remote location in Ravalli County. Subsequently, he was found guilty by the Ravalli County Justice Court. He appealed to the Twenty-First Judicial District Court. Following a bench trial, he was convicted and sentenced to 180 days in the Ravalli County Detention Center with 175 days suspended, and assessed a fine of \$1,000 with \$400 suspended, and various other fees and conditions. Moore filed a timely appeal and his sentence was stayed pending appeal. ¶3 On appeal, Moore's singular argument is that the District Court did not have sufficient evidence to determine beyond a reasonable doubt that Moore was "in actual physical control [of his vehicle] at the same time that he was under the influence of alcohol." (Emphasis in original.) He asserts that because the key was not in the ignition of his truck nor was the key on his person at the time he was approached by the officer, he was not in "actual physical control" and therefore could not be found guilty of DUI. We review a question on the sufficiency of the evidence to determine whether, after reviewing the evidence in a light most favorable to the prosecution, any rational 2 trier of fact could have found the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt. State v. Booth, 2012 MT 40, ¶ 7, 364 Mont. 190, 272 P.3d 89. ¶4 At trial, Ravalli County Deputy Guisinger testified that he responded to a dispatch call that an unresponsive male was sitting in a truck at an intersection in a remote location in Ravalli County. Upon arriving at the reported location, Guisinger discovered Moore asleep or passed out in his vehicle on the side of the road. After awakening Moore, the officer detected alcohol on Moore's breath, and noticed that Moore's eyes

were bloodshot and watery and Moore's speech was slurred and incomprehensible. Guisinger questioned Moore about whether he had been drinking and how he arrived at the location where he was parked. Moore told Guisinger he had driven to see his mother but upon discovering she was not at home, he left, and later pulled his vehicle over to sleep awhile. When furthered questioned, however, Moore appeared confused and had difficulty remembering where his mother lived. ¶5 In response to Guisinger's questions about drinking, Moore told Guisinger he had consumed a few beers a few hours earlier. Guisinger noted there were no empty beer cans or other alcohol containers in or around Moore's vehicle, nor was Moore parked in the vicinity of a bar or package/convenience store. Moore agreed to perform standard field sobriety tests but performed poorly. Guisinger arrested Moore for DUI. The officer did not search Moore's vehicle either before or after the arrest to determine the location of the ignition key. 3 ¶6 On appeal, the State again presents these facts and asserts that this evidence, viewed in the light most favorable to the State, is sufficient for a rational trier of fact to conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that Moore was guilty of the charge of DUI. ¶7 Section 61-8-401(1)(a), MCA, provides that it is unlawful for "a person who is under the influence of alcohol to drive or be in actual physical control of a vehicle upon the ways of this state open to the public." ¶8 Moore's argument that he was not in possession of the ignition keys and therefore had no ability to control the vehicle is unpersuasive. Moore admitted to driving to the location where he was discovered; he admitted that he did not have time to dispose of the keys at the time Guisinger awakened him; and he did not allege that someone else had driven him or that someone took his keys after he arrived. He claims he "took actions to ensure the keys were outside his possession." While it is undisputed that Guisinger did not search the vehicle, it defies logic that the ignition keys were somewhere other than in the vehicle which Moore had driven to the location where he was arrested. The District Court did not err in paying no heed to this argument. The direct and circumstantial evidence of intoxication at the time of the arrest is reasonable and sufficient evidence to support a conviction of DUI. ¶9 We have determined to decide this case pursuant to Section I, Paragraph 3(d) of our Internal Operating Rules, which provides for noncitable memorandum opinions. The issue in this case is legal and is controlled by settled Montana law which the District Court correctly interpreted. We therefore affirm the District Court. 4

/S/ PATRICIA COTTER

We concur:

/S/ MICHAEL E WHEAT

/S/ JIM RICE

/S/ BETH BAKER

/S/ BRIAN MORRIS