

71-Year-Old Man Charged In October Hit, Run Accident

By JOHN WILDMAN

Staff Writer

Greg Webb had been riding a motorcycle just a month when he wheeled into a south Charlotte intersection toward a friend's home.

Webb, 18, says he watched warily as a van started to pull into his right-of-way that Friday afternoon, Oct. 27, at Melbourne Court and Marion Place.

Webb braked, but the van drove into him and the 1988 Kawasaki 750 Ninja.

Airborne for 66 feet, Webb felt his right leg break as he landed in a yard. In his pain, Webb says, he gave little thought to the fact the van drove away.

"All I could think about was whether I'd be able to walk again," Webb said Wednesday.

Charlotte police Officer S.L. Mullis began hunting the van, using eyewitness information and a broken bit of the van's grill. The grill piece, found on the street, had "Dodge" on it.

Friday, police charged 71-year-old businessman William E. "Pete" Baker with felony hit and run, punishable by five years in prison.

In an interview Wednesday night, Baker said someone — he doesn't know who — took his van Oct. 27 from his south Charlotte business and left it there, wrecked, hours later. His 30-year-old firm

— Audio-Visual Service Co. at 3037 South Blvd. — rents and repairs projectors and tape recorders.

"The police don't seem to believe me," said Baker, who's to appear in court Dec. 11.

Sgt. Jerold Johnson, Mullis' supervisor, said it is unusual to charge a 71-year-old with hit and run. While he said Baker was cooperative when arrested, he called the charge serious.

So did a Melbourne Court woman, who ran to help Webb. The woman, who requested anonymity, said she was stunned the van drove away.

"It upset me so badly," she said. "I think it's awful when someone hits an animal and doesn't stop. I can't believe someone wouldn't stop for a person."

Webb spent six days in Charlotte Memorial Hospital, where a surgeon inserted a steel rod in his leg where his thigh bone was fractured. Webb limps around with crutches, but had to drop out of Central Piedmont Community College and quit his job washing cars. In 18 months, doctors will remove the steel rod.

Webb, a 1989 graduate of Olympic High School, says he's rethinking the merits of motorcycles. And he's glad someone has been arrested.

"Accidents happen, I understand that," he said. "But the person should have stopped."