

## PARENTS ARE STILL THE MAIN SUSPECTS



**Madeleine McCann's parents**

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By Martin Evans

### **The parents of Madeleine McCann remain the chief suspects in her disappearance.**

Portugal's most senior police officer made this clear yesterday as he introduced the new detective brought in to head the hunt.

Police chief Alipio Ribeiro said all lines of inquiry remained open, but he emphasised: "The investigation will continue to proceed along the lines it has proceeded until now."

He spoke out as it was revealed that the results of make-or-break forensic tests carried out in Britain will be presented on Monday.

Experts at the Forensic Science Service laboratory in Birmingham have spent more than two months analysing a huge amount of evidence collected by detectives.

The final batch, which is considered key to the entire investigation, has been overdue for several weeks but the Daily Express has learned that the crucial results are now ready. The results will be passed on to the McCanns later the same day.

Police on the Algarve believe that the findings will provide them with enough evidence to bring charges against Kate and Gerry McCann.

It has been alleged that they believe Kate accidentally killed Madeleine with an overdose of sedatives administered to help her sleep.

The McCanns are then accused of disposing of her body, possibly with the help of one or more other people.

The couple vehemently deny these allegations and still believe their daughter was abducted.

Among the evidence analysed by the Birmingham laboratory were samples of blonde hair recovered from the boot of the couple's Renault Scenic car, which was hired 25 days after Madeleine went missing.

The final tests are understood to have been focused on ascertaining whether these hairs belonged to Madeleine and whether they contained any traces of sedatives or other drugs.

But forensic experts warned last night that Portuguese police may have a hard time proving anything from the hair samples.

Julie Evans, of Eurofins, one of Britain's leading hair analysis providers, said: "It is very difficult to detect the presence of sedatives in recovered hair strands.

"This type of testing requires substantial amounts of hair, not just a few strands.

"If this testing is to investigate the presence of drugs then the hairs would need to have the follicle present.

"Even then, this testing would not show that the drug was present at the time of death, only that it had been taken or administered in the weeks preceding it."

She added: "To present this evidence to a court you would also need to prove that each of the hairs tested had come from the individual in question.

"Sedatives can be detected in hair, but even if they were and the source could be established it would be impossible to ascertain the dose of the drug administered, when that occurred or whether it had led to that person's death."

She concluded: "It would be very difficult to get a satisfactory result from a few hairs found in the boot of a car."

David Hill, a former regional commander of the National Crime Squad, agreed. Mr Hill, who now works for global security firm Red24, said: "I worked on several cases where drugs were suspected.

"After they are first taken, drugs are absorbed by the body and can take quite a while to work their way through it.

"You could not tell from a strand of hair from Madeleine, found after her disappearance, whether she had been given drugs the night she disappeared – only if she had been given drugs in the past."

Such is the political sensitivity of the case that the Portuguese ministries of foreign affairs and justice will see the results before they are passed on to detectives.

The new detective in charge of the case, Paulo Rebelo, was brought in to replace Goncalo Amaral, who was sacked after a series of blunders.

But at a press conference to introduce Mr Rebelo, police chief Ribeiro was full of praise for Mr Amaral, who was largely responsible for the McCanns being made official suspects or arguidos, describing him as an "excellent officer".

Mr Ribeiro said: "We await further advances with calm and patience."