



Auto-Theft.info Releases Special Report On How To Protect Your Car From Thieves

Noted Auto Theft Prevention Expert Dave Badger provides Auto-Theft.info viewers with an extremely thoughtful and helpful summary on how to protect your vehicle from car thieves. The advice provided is timely given the recent increase in auto theft.

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Theft Prevention Tips For Cars, Vans, SUV's, Trucks, and Motorcycles

By Dave Badger, Executive Director of The StolenCarReports Program

August, 2003 -- Typically, your car is your second greatest investment after your home. And if you're like a lot of car enthusiasts, it's a source of pride and joy. You baby it, feed it, wash it, and take it in for regular checkups. You also guard it from danger. One danger that more than a million people per year deal with is theft. Don't think for a minute that your vehicle cannot be stolen. The truth is that no car, truck, or motorcycle is theft-proof. A professional thief can steal virtually any car, anytime, and anywhere. So, how do you guard against the danger of theft? It's easier when you understand some of the characteristics of the crime.

The first step in understanding auto theft is learning that there are basically three reasons why vehicles are stolen: 1) for "Joy Riding," 2) for "Chop Shops," and 3) for export abroad. Each of these categories is about the same size. Together, they represent more than 1.3 million vehicles each year.

While you're eating, sleeping, working, or otherwise preoccupied, a thief can take your car to use it, strip it, or ship it. You will be left with a car that has been driven, damaged (a little or a lot) and abandoned by someone you don't know, a skeleton of what used to be a car you treasured, or the memory of a lovely car that is now being driven by a new owner somewhere overseas. And, even if you are insured for theft, there is a good chance that the insurance reimbursement won't come close to helping you replace your treasured vehicle.

The second step in understanding auto theft is learning about the nature of the crime itself. Vehicle theft is a "crime of opportunity." With hundreds of millions of vehicles to choose from, thieves usually opt for the "easiest car to steal" in the area. For a thief, the easiest car to steal is one that suits the thief's purposes, one can be entered and started quickly, and one that can be moved from place to place undetected. Whether a thief is stealing any car in sight for a quick get away, or is determined to steal a higher-priced luxury car, the specific car stolen will be the one that is easiest to take.

To illustrate this point, let us consider the following scenario. There are two similar Mercedes sitting in front of a convenience store. One is locked, and the other is idling with the doors unlocked. Which one would a thief steal? Simple.

Let us change the scenario slightly. The same two cars are sitting in front of a convenience store. This time, both cars are locked. However, one of the cars has "The Club" (or other locking device) attached to the steering wheel. Which one would a thief most likely steal? Now you begin to see the pattern of how this works. A thief will almost always take the easiest target.

When you begin installing "barriers," you make your car harder to steal. Remember, spending a fortune in an



effort to make your car theft-proof is not the goal. The real goal is to make your car less inviting to a thief.

The most straightforward approach to vehicle theft prevention is the National Insurance Crime Bureau's "Layered Approach." This strategy consists of "Layers" of theft prevention, including Common Sense, Warning Devices, Immobilization Devices, and Tracking Devices. The Layered Approach also considers how much theft prevention is required based on the specific type of vehicle and the geographic area of the owner. The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) (<http://www.nicb.org>) identifies the most frequently stolen vehicles and the highest theft areas of the country to calculate recommended levels of theft prevention measures to be taken by car owners.

For every car owner, "Common Sense" is always the first step in theft prevention. Using common sense is also very affordable. A common sense approach to theft prevention includes such practices as always locking your car - no matter how briefly it will be unattended. For example, on cold winter mornings, many of us warm up our cars in our own driveways before leaving for work. Look at the basic elements of this scenario - the keys are in the ignition, the engine has been started and is running, and the car unlocked and unattended. You can't make it much easier for a thief to steal your car.

In addition to always locking your car's doors and windows, common sense theft prevention also includes such practices as parking in well-lit areas and never leaving your keys (or a spare key) in the car.

The second layer of theft prevention as described by the NICB consists of Warning Devices. The types of devices in this category include car alarms, steering wheel locking devices, brake pedal locks, wheel locks, theft-deterrent decals, identification markers, and window etching. Many of the items listed in this category are very affordable and offer a significant level of theft prevention. Before moving on, let's look at some of the items listed in this category.

Locking Devices: One of our earlier theft examples highlighted the effectiveness of a steering wheel locking device. Steering wheel locks are available for less than \$40.00, are easy to use, and are tremendously effective. Of the various locking devices listed in this category, steering wheel locks are the most familiar to most motorists. However, brake pedal locking devices and wheel locks are also effective and affordable. Locking devices are effective because they force a thief to spend more time stealing a vehicle, which means more time to get caught in the act.

Theft-Deterrent Decals - Perhaps the oldest example of a theft-deterrent decal would be the one provided by the AAA Motor Club that offers a reward for information about a vehicle if it has been reported stolen. Another program that offers warning decals would be of the several "Watch Your Car" programs around the country. These organizations provide a decal that gives police permission to stop the vehicle if it is being driven during very late night or early morning hours when it would normally be unused.

Identification Markers - This include a group of products that actually reinforce the true identity of a vehicle and make it harder for thieves to disguise a stolen vehicle, or its parts. The true identity of any vehicle is represented as its Vehicle Identification Number (VIN). In most cars, vans, trucks, and motorcycles this is a 17-character set of numbers and letters that are unique to each vehicle. A vehicle's VIN is imprinted or marked on the vehicle in several places. To disguise a stolen car or its parts, thieves try to remove, replace, or alter the VIN of a stolen vehicle. Several companies offer products that make this much harder for a thief to accomplish.

DataDot Technologies is one company that produces an identification-marking product. DataDot Technologies



produces a product that incorporates microdots imprinted with identification information into a spray-on product that is applied to various surfaces on a vehicle. Although invisible to the naked eye, these microdots reinforce the true identity of a vehicle very well.

Another company that produces an identification-marking product is IDsticker. IDsticker (<http://www.IDsticker.com>) produces a set of identification marking decals containing license plate data and VIN data that are applied to various visible and hidden locations on a vehicle. IDsticker decals are very affordable and provide a visible warning to thieves that a vehicle's identity has been reinforced, making the vehicle a riskier target for theft. In situations where a thief attempts to hide the crime by putting a phony license plate on stolen vehicle, IDsticker decals actually create a visible warning that a vehicle may be stolen because the phony license plate on the vehicle does not match the valid license plate information on the IDsticker decals.

Perhaps the most effective and most familiar item in this category is glass etching, more commonly known as VIN etching. This is a process whereby a vehicle's VIN is actually etched into the windows of the vehicle. VIN-etched windows make a vehicle a dangerous theft target for thieves.

VIN etching does not detract from the visual appearance or actual value of a vehicle to its owner. However, it has the opposite effect for a would-be thief. VIN etching reduces the appeal of a vehicle to a thief because it makes it harder to disguise the crime by making it easier for police to identify the stolen property. VIN etching also reduces the value of a vehicle to a thief because all of the car's windows would have to be replaced with non-etched glass before the thief could attempt to sell the car or its parts.

VIN etching is so effective that many insurers offer discounts from 3% to 15% on comprehensive premiums for cars with etched windows. Cars that have been VIN etched have a 64% lower theft rate than non-etched cars. And, a VIN etched car has a more than an 85% chance of recovery if it is stolen.

While many automobile dealers offer VIN etching as an add-on service during the purchase of a vehicle, it is also very easy, safe and much more affordable for you to do VIN etching yourself. You can purchase do-it-yourself VIN etching kits from companies like VINetcher and others. (<http://www.VINetcher.com>)

As we move onto the NICB's third and fourth layers of protection, we begin looking at higher-tech products with higher price tags. These products are recommended for vehicles that are more frequently targeted by thieves, and/or vehicles located in areas with higher than average levels of vehicle thefts.

The NICB's third layer of theft protection consists of immobilization devices. These devices prevent thieves from bypassing your ignition and hot-wiring your car. Examples of these sorts of devices include smart keys which have computer chips built into the ignition key, kill switches that inhibit the flow of electricity or fuel to the engine until a hidden switch or button is activated, and starter, ignition, and fuel disablers.

The fourth and final layer of protection consist of tracking devices that emit a signal to a police or monitoring station when the vehicle is reported stolen. Tracking devices can be very effective in helping authorities recover stolen vehicles. If you live in an area with high theft rates, own a high-ticket vehicle, or if you are considering the purchase of a higher priced vehicle you should consider installing this type of device.

As mentioned earlier, theft-prevention does not equal theft-proof. In spite of your best efforts to prevent theft, a professional, determined thief is still capable of stealing your vehicle.



If your vehicle is stolen, call the police and your insurance company immediately to report the theft. After taking these two steps, you can register your stolen vehicle with StolenCarReports - "The Nation's Neighborhood Watch For Stolen Vehicles." StolenCarReports (<http://www.StolenCarReports.com>) issues email and wireless text message alerts containing descriptive information about your vehicle to people in the area where your vehicle was last seen. These alerts let people in the surrounding area know that the vehicle has been stolen and asks them to contact police with any information that will help locate the vehicle. StolenCarReports also lists the information about your stolen vehicle in an online database that is available to the general public. StolenCarReports charges a small registration fee that is fully refundable if the vehicle is not recovered within a 6-month period following registration.

The fact that vehicle thefts are rising annually in the U.S. means that it is up to you to take responsible measures to protect your vehicle from thieves.

Enjoy your vehicle and protect your investment!



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