

CAR CRIME –

HOW TO AVOID IT

A LITTLE CARE SAVES A LOT OF HASSLE

Car Criminals Are Opportunists. Don't Make It Easy For Them....

Now that security is one of the top priorities on the wish list for new car buyers and now that manufacturers produce vehicles bristling with anti-theft devices, auto criminals often turn their attention to older cars - with the most frequent target being small saloon cars and cars over 12 years old.

But even the most state of the art vehicle can't provide a deterrent when some

of the strains of heavy shopping start to tell on their drivers.

These instances, compiled by the RAC Foundation, tell their own story:

- The shopper who loaded up their car with presents before returning to the
- shops for more, activated the alarm and walked off leaving the car door open.
- The driver who drove off leaving a pile of shopping behind.
- The motorist so engrossed in their shopping list that they completely forgot to lock the car.
- The harassed car owner who filled the back seat of their vehicle with
- shopping because the boot was already full of rubbish for the tip. The rubbish was, of course untouched when they returned, unlike the shopping.
- The driver who went shopping, leaving the keys in the ignition.
- The distracted individual who left house keys on the dash along with opened addressed mail.
- The careless car-owner with good intentions, placed lap-top, phone and briefcase in the boot of his estate car, but forgot to close over the cover.

On heavy shopping trips, ordinarily sensible and well organised people frequently get distracted because they have such a lot on their mind: not taking care of mundane things like locking the car can be a consequence. But now that much car theft is more opportunist driven, motorists need to be extra vigilant to protect the vehicles and contents.

The most prudent advice is to park in a well lit, security patrolled area and ensure that all goods are firmly locked in the boot or covered by an estate load cover.

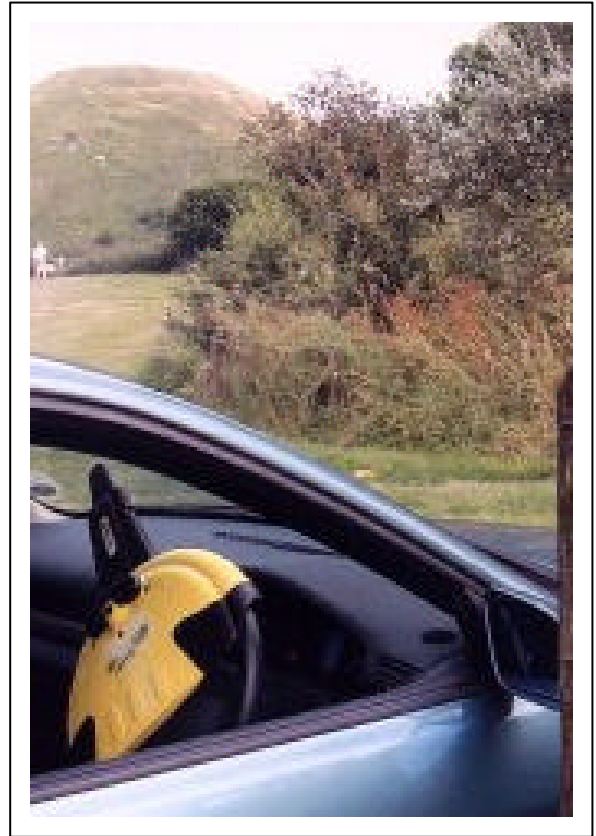
Some people actually advocate moving their car to a different area of the same car park between trips.

Other car crimes devised by devious thieves include:

Frosting

For years, opportunist thieves have been seizing the opportunity to steal cars whenever they are left unattended for a few minutes - whether from petrol station forecourts, outside school or shops. Now they have caught onto the idea of nipping in while motorists leave their engines running while the car defrosts on icy mornings.

As the driver pops into the house for a quick cup of tea, the thief makes



off with an early Christmas present. The moral of this one is obvious. Never leave keys in the ignition and doors unlocked in an unattended car - even for a couple of minutes and even if it is sitting on your own driveway.

Sneaking

Ignition keys left hanging on a hook or sitting on a table beside a door are an easy target for opportunist criminals. This is an increasingly popular technique employed by burglars who now believe that it is easier to break into the house or help themselves to the car keys when the house door is open than to run the gauntlet of sophisticated security devices fitted to many up-market vehicles. And while they are in the home, they may as well help themselves to as much booty as they can fit into their waiting boot.

Hooking

A deviation on the above involving the use of a long piece of wire with a hook attached. This can be fed through the letterbox to retrieve car keys from nearby hooks and tables, before driving off effortlessly without causing undue notice by neighbours. Always ensure that your keys are not easily visible or accessible from doors and windows-not even through the letterbox.

Jacking

The disturbing custom where thieves lie in wait for a car owner and remove his ignition keys by force before driving away the vehicle. Another variation appears to be to pounce on unsuspecting motorists stopped at traffic lights or junctions, forcibly evicting them from their cars before driving off at high speed. Other thieves smash and grab at traffic lights and run off with handbags and laptops.

While still a rare crime, tips on how to avoid this nasty situation include always parking in a well-lit, populated area or a car park with CCTV coverage and keeping vehicle doors locked while driving in urban areas. Leave a space from the car in front when parked at lights and be vigilant. Hide bags and valuables in the boot or under the seat.

The RAC Foundation report that:

In 2000/2001, 341,674 cars were stolen from England, Wales and Scotland, a total of 1.3% of the 27 million registered with the DVLA

One car was stolen for every 79 on the road

The car with the highest risk of theft was the Vauxhall Astra Mark 2 SX registered between 1990 and 1992.

Car Crime – The Facts:

The following figures have been provided by The Home Office and have been taken from the British Crime Survey 2002 / 2003:

- Last year, over 10% of vehicle owning households had their car broken into, stolen or vandalised
- Vehicle related crime now accounts for 20% of all crime in Britain
- The most common items stolen in thefts from vehicles were exterior fittings (32% of thefts), car radios (23%) and valuables (16%)
- The average loss incurred during thefts from vehicles where the vehicle itself was not stolen was £80
- The highest risk area for theft from a vehicle is Yorkshire and the Humber region. 6.8% of the population have had property stolen from their cars
- The lowest risk area is Wales where 5.4% of the population have been victims of theft from their vehicle

- Most vehicle related thefts occur in the area around the home (over a third) – although length of time that the vehicle is parked is a consideration
- 19% of all vehicle thefts occur in a car park
- 83% of those who had experienced vehicle related crime reported feeling emotionally affected
- Since 1997, vehicle related crime (thefts and attempted theft from a vehicle and of a vehicle) have reduced by 26%