

CAR-JACKING - BEATING THE CAR-JACKERS

Car-Jacking Is On The Increase. So What Can You Do About It?

The rise of 'Car-Jacking', the kind of smash and grab attack motorists are vulnerable to when actually in their cars, is an unwelcome facet of modern motoring.



Recent times has seen some high-profile victims, including Steve Norris, Edwina Currie and Anthea Turner. In each case, the thieves were targeting valuable items such as mobile phones, expensive watches or laptop computers. Nearly all cases have taken place when the vehicle has been stationary at traffic lights.

Police in the United Kingdom do not currently collect statistics on car-jacking attacks or smash and grab attacks. Such attacks are normally classed as either robbery or theft from a motor vehicle. However, a number of hot spot smash and grab areas have been identified in different parts of the country: Salford, Newcastle, Liverpool and parts of West London have all witnessed such attacks over the last year.

The RAC is advising motorists who are fearful of becoming victims of car-jacking to think about having protective film applied to their car windows. Such protective film prevents people outside of the vehicle from seeing inside, reducing the likelihood for opportunistic thieves attacking cars for their contents.

Protective film has in the past largely been used for cosmetic purposes in vehicles, either as a widow tint or to cool the car and its occupants from the sunlight. Recent improvements in the film, which is largely used in South Africa and North America, mean that it now offers real benefits from external attacks.

As well as preventing thieves from seeing a vehicle's contents, it can, in many cases, strengthen widows to such an extent that they become 'bullet-resistant', preventing criminals from being able to reach goods or to threaten the driver so that they can steal the car. The film also prevents the vehicles glass from shattering and causing injury.

As Edmund King, Executive Director of the RAC Foundation, observes, "The recent rise in horrific car-jacking attacks has highlighted an urgent need for motorists to be aware of ways to protect themselves from thieves who will, in some cases, use extreme violence to obtain a vehicle or its contents. Motorists can help prevent such attacks by keeping their vehicle locked and valuables away from the passenger seat or dashboard. Using a good quality protective film, professionally applied to a window, will also help motorists to avoid smash and grab attacks. Whilst such attacks are still very rare, they have risen dramatically in some parts of the country. Motorists who use the film will be better able to protect their vehicle windows and ultimately themselves and their cars. Immobilisers and other security measures have made new vehicles so secure that thieves are now often targeting the car through the driver rather than just valuables. Motorists need to be aware of this danger and ensure that they keep their car keys with them at all times"

The RAC Foundation has in fact issued some general advice to motorists to avoid car-jacking attacks:

- Ensure that valuables are not left on the passenger seat or dashboard when travelling. Thieves will be more tempted to target the vehicle if goods are visible.
- Make sure that you know the route you are using to travel to your destination. Car-jacking gangs may be more likely to target motorists who look unsure of where they are going or who are looking at maps at traffic lights.
- Always ensure that you take your car keys out of the vehicle if you are going into shops or a petrol station even if there is someone left in the car.
- Similarly, keep windows closed if possible.
- Always try to leave a gap between your vehicle and the car in front when parked at traffic lights. If you are attacked by a car jacking gang, being too close to the vehicle in front will prevent you from escaping.

- If your car is nudged by another vehicle, which then does not stop, try to take the car details down rather than following the vehicle at length. Some car-jacking gangs use the tactic of nudging a vehicle and then attacking the owner when they have followed them for a period.
- If your vehicle is under attack, dial 999 if you have a mobile phone and sound your horn to draw attention to your car.