

Think Your Car is Safe from Thieves? Think Again

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By ARA Content

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by: **ARA Content**

(ARA) – Every time you park your car, you're taking a risk.

Just ask David J. of Stanford, Conn., whose 1998 high-performance Acura Integra Type R was stolen right under his nose just one month after he installed a top-of-the-line security system for \$1,500.

Mother's Day is a long-held tradition of revering the woman who gives the gift of life.

"Mothering Sunday" is another early Mother's Day tradition that has shaped the way we celebrate our mothers today. This English holiday dates back to the 1600s, and involved young servants who pampered their mothers with fine delicacies. While we continue to celebrate the mother figure in modern America, it is most often with traditional gifts of flowers and cards. But if Mother's Day is indeed about the most personal sentiment and respect for a mother, a gift of gratitude should warm their hearts forever.

car was tire tracks in the newly fallen snow.

"They found it three weeks later, stripped clean," he added.

David's experience is not unusual, says James Cooper, CEO of Ultimate Security Systems Corporation of Irvine, Calif. Despite manufacturers' claims to the contrary, most security systems are easy to overpower and hardly even slow down a professional thief, said Cooper, whose firm created and markets the PowerLock anti-theft system.

Every 25 seconds

The National Insurance Crime Bureau (www.nicb.org) reports that 1.1 million vehicles are stolen nationwide each year. That's one vehicle every 25 seconds in what has become a \$7.5

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billion-a-year-industry, according to the Insurance Information Institute (www.iii.org), a trade organization. It's an industry, moreover, dominated by organized auto-theft rings that steal cars to fill contract orders. And no wonder: A \$20,000 stolen vehicle can be stripped and sold into \$30,000 worth of parts, insurers say.

Your car doesn't have to be a high-performance vehicle like David J's to be an attractive target for a thief with a list of parts, or with orders for a particular make and model of a car. Different models of the popular Toyota Camry and Honda Accord swept eight of the top 10 list of cars reported stolen in 2000, according to an annual study conducted by CCC Information Services Inc., a Chicago-based supplier of software and communications systems to auto insurers. Chevrolet and Ford pickups captured the other two slots.

Brett Ploumen didn't have a security system on his 1992 Chevrolet Astrovan. But he thought he was taking appropriate precautions by parking in well-lit, high-traffic areas and locking his vehicle's

doors and windows.

Ploumen found out differently when he went to dinner with friends at a busy neighborhood strip mall in Santa Ana, Calif. "When we returned, the Astrovan wasn't there. There was broken glass on the ground and another vehicle in the parking place," Ploumen recalled.

"Three days later they found it, wrapped in a tarp on a side street," he said. The entire front end of the car was gone – it had essentially been turned into a trailer, and a beat-up trailer at that. When he saw it, "I was sick to my stomach instantly," Ploumen said.

Some popular devices

Cooper describes some of the most popular auto security devices, and the drawbacks that allow thieves to get around them:

1. Bar or wheel locks: Steering wheel bars lock up the steering wheel; wheel locks prevent the theft of wheels and tires.

How to get around them: All it takes is a pair of bolt cutters or a hacksaw. "They saw through the steering wheel, slide off the bar lock and hot-wire the car. It takes anywhere from 15–30 seconds," Cooper said.

2. Audible alarms: Known in the industry as "nuisance alarms," these alerts are intended to scare thieves away.

How to get around them: Audible alarms are almost universally ignored. Additionally, a professional thief can cut a wire and silence the alarm in seconds.

3. Pedal locks: This device locks the brakes.

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How to get around them: They can be bridged or cut in 15–60 seconds.

4. Electronic immobilizing devices: These devices are designed to disconnect all power from the starter, preventing thieves from bypassing the ignition and hot-wiring the vehicle. They can be installed at the factory or purchased as an aftermarket item.

How to get around them: Seasoned thieves dismantle these systems or wire around them in seconds, usually by cutting two wires. Additionally, thieves easily find override or valet switches used by owners to disarm the systems.

5. Tracking systems: These devices transmit a radio signal to locate the car.

How to get around them: Tracking devices can be removed at a chop shop before a theft is reported. Or the car can be stripped and dumped before the owner finds out it's been stolen.

6. Solenoid immobilizer systems: Although categorized as an immobilizer, this kind of system is based on a different principle than most electronic security systems. PowerLock is one example. It attaches permanently to the vehicle's starter motor, where it effectively prevents hot-wiring. Once installed, such a system is impossible to remove, bypass or disable.

How to get around them: It can't be hot-wired, says Cooper. "A system like this is virtually impossible to circumvent," he says. The only way to steal a car protected by such a system is to tow it away.

Personal Security

Cooper also warns consumers to be aware of the capacity of their security system. "A lot of so-called security systems consist of remote entry and flashing lights. A lot of people think of that as automobile security, and it really isn't: It's a convenience feature. Some manufacturers are beginning to recognize that, and label it as 'personal security.'"

After his nightmare experience, Ploumen is an evangelist for adding a security system to your car. "Look into some kind of aftermarket security system," he advises consumers. "Find something you feel comfortable with – and that's proven."

Ploumen has researched the security field thoroughly since his van was stolen. He briefly considered a brake lock, but decided it wasn't practical. He chose Ultimate Security Systems' Powerlock after a friend told him about it.

David J. also purchased a Powerlock system after replacing his Acura Integra Type R. "I came across it on the Internet. It was not expensive, so I thought, 'Why not give it a try?'" He added three additional layers of security with brake and pedal locks, plus a tracking system.

David became a would-be victim again a few months later. This time, though, his story has a happy ending. The thieves pried the door open with a "Slim Jim," bent the clutch pedal sideways to circumvent the AutoLock, then broke the ignition switch in an attempt to hot wire the car. When

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PowerLock circumvented that effort, they tried rolling the car down a nearby hill to pop the clutch. That didn't work, either, so they abandoned the car. The tracking system helped authorities recover the car a short time later.

For more information, contact USSC, 17173 Gillette Avenue, Suite 5, Irvine, Calif. 92614; (800) 231-7131, or visit

Courtesy ARA Content,

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Security Release: Important Tips For Your Vehicle

By Pete Lance

Your car is probably one of the most expensive items you have ever purchased. Therefore you must protect it well to help you keep your car and belongings from being stolen or vandalized.

Here are some important tips for the security of your vehicle:

Tip 1: Park in a Well Lit Area

Places which are well lit and have a lot of traffic are the best place to park your car. No sensible thief will steal a vehicle where there are a lot of people around.

Tip 2: Don't Attract Attention

Attracting attention tells people that you have something valuable in your car. Don't attract attention by placing high valued items in full view. Hide them away or risk losing the whole vehicle!

Tip 3: Take your Belongings with You

Take everything out of your car. Anything that can call attention probably will, and thieves love to hotwire cars that have expensive things inside. Don't leave in plain view any money, electronic items or expensive items.

Tip 4: Thieves Love Audio Equipment as Much as You do

A good snatch-and-grab man can get a stereo out of a car in seconds, often before passers-by even

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notice. So to make sure that your equipment is safe, you should make it difficult for the thief. Some companies make accessory frames that bolt your head unit securely to the car's body.

Tip 5: Get an Alarm System

Although an alarm system will not get the police rushing to your vehicle or get passer-bys restraining the thief, it will however lessen the time a thief can work your vehicle. Furthermore, many thieves will not even attempt your vehicle if they see that you have a security system installed.

Tip 6: If You can Help it, Don't Customize

Tinted windows, custom wheels, fog lights, all these accessories attract thieves. Your car will of course look like a powerful vehicle, but that means more thieves would want your car as well. If you really want to add performance accessories to your vehicle, don't tell the whole world about it. Install them where no one can see them. Have your car look like something fresh out of the factory.

Tip 7: Lock at All Times

Last but not least, no matter how long (or how short) you are going to be away from your vehicle, lock your vehicle. Make sure there is no way for anybody to get in, be it passenger doors, the boot or even

the sun-roof. That short 2 minutes you don't lock your vehicle can be costly.

Pete Lance is the founder of

, a premier company which helps the

consumer save money on gasoline. Thousands of gas stations across the nation are tracked daily to guarantee the lowest prices on gasoline anywhere in the United States

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