

*A Guide to
Vehicle Security*

Guide to Vehicle Security

Introduction

When we talk about vehicle crime we refer to a number of different offences. Theft from car, theft of car and car-jacking are the main and most common vehicle related offences.

For most of us, our car is the second largest purchase we make. It should be secure.

In the following lines a number of suggestions are being made to help reduce your chances of becoming a victim of vehicle crime in any shape or form it might take.

If you are unfortunate enough to become the victim of this type of offence, do not offer any resistance but try to remember as much detail as possible about the offender(s) and their vehicle.

This booklet generally outlines measures that could be taken to reasonably reduce the opportunity of crime. The recommendations are based on current best practice.

Any crime risk assessment should be based on crime trends and patterns, indicating reasonable, practical and cost-effective measures, which can be incorporated to reduce the risk of crime.

There can never be any guarantee that crime will be effectively reduced.

It is strongly recommended that other statutory bodies are consulted, eg Health & Safety, Fire Prevention, etc., and especially Development Control covered by Town Planning Legislation (consult your local authority Planning Officer).

The guidance on legislation is not meant to be an accurate statement of the law, but offer guidance only. You would not be able to rely on it to provide a defence to a criminal charge or civil claim.

Car Crime

Doors and Windows

Lock the doors, windows, boot and sunroof every time you leave the car – however briefly.

Ignition Key and Immobiliser

Take the ignition key out even when the car is parked in your drive or garage. And always set the immobiliser. Follow this routine even when filling up with petrol or just popping into the newsagents. If you do not have an immobiliser consider having one fitted.

Steering lock and other security devices

Always use them.

Valuables and other possessions

Don't leave them on display. That old coat on the back seat may be worthless, but the thief won't know that. He may break in to see if you've left any money or cards in the pocket.

Remember the cost of replacing a broken window is often far more than the value of goods stolen. If you can, take your belongings with you. If you can't, lock everything out of sight in the boot. In particular never leave the following anywhere in your car:

- ♦ *cheque, credit and debit cards.*
- ♦ *driving documents and personal correspondence. They could help a thief to sell your car or provide a cover story if stopped by the police.*
- ♦ *mobile phones. 40% of car break-ins involve the theft of a mobile phone.*

Radio / cassette players

Always remove these if you can. Whether removable or not, all equipment should be marked both visibly and permanently with the vehicle registration number. Make a note of the serial number and keep it in a safe place.

Etching

Arrange to have the vehicle registration number etched on to all glass surfaces – including the side windows and headlamps. You may also arrange to have the vehicle identification number (VIN) etched in this way, but check with the manufacturer first.

Aerial

When parking, retract your aerial down to stop it being vandalised.

Driving

Keep valuables out of sight and consider keeping all the doors locked and the windows closed. Thieves have stolen handbags and other valuables by opening car doors or even breaking windows while cars are stationary at traffic lights or held up in slow moving traffic.

Parking

If you have a garage use it. Remember to lock it. More than half of all car thefts occur in the vicinity of the home.

When away from home, or if you do not have a garage, always try to park in a well-lit, open location. A quarter of all recorded crime happens in car parks, so look for one that is well supervised, with restricted entry and exit points, good lighting and security cameras. Avoid dark corners.

The police scheme **Secured Car Parks** aims to make car parks safe, more attractive places by setting high crime prevention standards of internal design, layout and management. Those measuring up are entitled to display the official gold or silver “Secured Car Parks” plaque. For a list of “Secured Car Parks” in your area, contact the Crime Reduction Advisor at your local police station.

Watch out for strangers showing interest in your car or your neighbour’s car. They may be thinking of stealing it, rather than admiring it! If they look suspicious, call the police straight away.

Buying a new car

If you are buying a brand new car, insist in a model with built-in security features.

Look for:

- ◆ *An immobiliser – most manufacturers now fit these as standard.*
- ◆ *Doors fitted with deadlocks (sometimes called double locking) or the new electronic locks.*
- ◆ *A central locking system*
- ◆ *Visible VIN (Vehicle Identification Number). The VIN is the unique 17-digit number that identifies your car from every other one on the road. Some manufacturers now bond the VIN plate to the dashboard of the car so that it is visible through the windscreen. A thief will have to remove the whole windscreen and damage the dashboard before he can sell it on. This cuts into his profit and can act as a deterrent. Visible VINs also help the police check a vehicle’s identity.*
- ◆ *Etching – The vehicle registration number and/or VIN etched on all glass surfaces is a further useful deterrent to theft.*
- ◆ *Removable panel and/or security-coded car stereo equipment – Some manufacturers are now fitting stereo equipment, the components of which are dispersed throughout the vehicle and/or which will not fit into other makes of vehicle.*
- ◆ *Lockable fuel cap.*
- ◆ *Lockable wheel nuts – especially if you have expensive alloy wheels.*
- ◆ *Car alarm*
- ◆ *Security glazing – Specially strengthened glass fitted to the side windows of your car makes it much more difficult for a thief to break in, particularly if deadlocks have also been fitted. However, a British Standard for car security glazing has only recently been agreed so it may be some time before this feature is standard in most cars.*
- ◆ *Tracking devices – You may wish to check whether a vehicle tracking device can be supplied. These enable a car to be tracked by the police or system operator if stole.*

Research

- Decide what make and model you are interested in.
- Find out where the vehicle's identification numbers should be.
- Consider taking an independent qualified examiner with you.

Private Advertisements

- Can you identify the vendor? Be ware of mobile telephone numbers (which may not be traceable).
- Beware of "between 5pm and 6pm" type adverts. Is this a phone box? Try calling outside the specific hours.
- Does the vendor hold the vehicle registration document and MOT certificate? If not why?
- Always arrange to view the car in day light at the vendor's home – satisfy yourself it is their home.
- Never allow them to bring the vehicle to your home or meet you at some other location.

Locks and Security

- Does the car have a working security alarm system?
- Do the locks differ? (Thieves often change locks they have damaged).
- Do any of the door locks or surrounding areas appear to have been damaged? (Signs of forced entry?)
- Check the locking petrol cap – has it been forced and replaced?

Final Advice

- If you buy a vehicle that is subsequently found to be stolen, apart from problems you may have explaining your actions to the police, you will have no right in law to the ownership of that vehicle.
- You will lose both the car and the money you paid for it.
- Be sure before you buy.
- Never feel pressured into buying.
- Never pay cash.
- Always remember "Let the buyer Beware".
- If in doubt – walk away.

Car-jacking

There is no such crime as "car-jacking" - the crime is either robbery or aggravated vehicle taking.

The best advice is that drivers should remain vigilant and aware of what is happening around them when approaching or leaving their vehicle, and while driving.

GMP advises drivers to lock all vehicle doors while driving. This has the support of the Fire Service.

Know how your central locking works; does the central locking include the boot/hatchback? If not, ensure that the boot/hatchback is locked.

Consider the use of tracking devices.

In the unlikely event that you feel that someone is trying to stage an accident, or you are concerned that you are being followed, or if you are being flashed to stop (other than by an obvious police vehicle), you should drive to the nearest police station or to a safe public place where there are potential witnesses (e.g. a 24-hour supermarket car park or filling station).

You should draw attention to yourself by flashing your lights or sounding your horn to make people aware you are in difficulty.

If stopping at a cash machine or similar, try to do so in well-lit, highly visible areas.

Don't stop to help stranded motorists. Call the Police from a safe place.

Make sure you can see the rear wheels of the vehicle in front when pulling up to junctions or traffic lights so you can avoid being hemmed in if there is a problem.

When returning to your parked car, remain aware of your surroundings, do not use a mobile phone (which reduces your awareness of what is going on around you), and, if you have remote control locking, only open the doors when you are at the vehicle.

Cars Stolen With Keys

Many cars, particularly modern cars, are now very difficult to steal without the keys. This means that criminals are now targeting the car keys as an initial crime, in order to go on and steal the vehicle.

Don't leave car keys lying on the kitchen or hall table when you get home, or even worse, on the window sill just inside the door, or indeed anywhere near the door where someone could go "fishing".

Consider the use of a disguise for keys - e.g. something which looks like a food can. However, remember that you need to have easy access to house keys in the event of a fire.

At night, if you have nowhere secure to keep keys, take them to the bedroom with you - but remember that your personal safety is more important than protecting your belongings.

Some cars have been stolen after householders have opened their doors to strangers, who have forced entry to the house, stolen the car keys and then the car. Basic home security advice applies - if you have a door chain, use it; if not, fit a chain. Don't open the door to strangers, especially if you are on your own in the house.