

Protecting Your Car from Thieves

In the time it takes you to read this, a thief could break into your car, hot-wire it and drive away. If you think it won't happen to you, consider these sobering facts:

- Every 19 seconds, a car is stolen in America.
- The number of cars stolen this year would be enough to fill the parking lots of 170 major shopping centers.
- The cost of car theft and looting is estimated to be more than \$7 billion.

Here are some things you can do to minimize the chances of auto theft:

- Use common sense every time you leave your car.
- Keep a record of your car's vehicle identification numbers (VIN) so that you can identify it if it's stolen and recovered.
- Close all windows, lock all doors and take your keys with you. One in five stolen vehicles is left unlocked with the keys in the ignition -- and sometimes running.
- Park in well-lighted areas near other vehicles or pedestrian traffic, especially at shopping malls. More than two-thirds of auto thefts happen at night.
- Park with your front tires turned sharply into the curb, with the emergency brake on, to make towing difficult.
- Put packages and valuables in the trunk, out of sight, and consider anti-theft devices to protect your audio equipment. One of six larcenies involves theft from a motor vehicle.
- Lock your car and the garage door at home. If you don't have a garage, back your car into your driveway and keep it locked. Over half of all vehicle thefts occur in residential areas.
- Have the vehicle identification number etched into your car windows. Professional thieves will know your car can be traced easily. Spots of paint or nail polish also can help identify your car.
- Many police officers say the best low-tech implement is a hardened steel rod that locks the steering wheel in place. Its mere visibility can deter thieves.
- A burglar alarm system can be effective, but security experts recommend that it be more than just a noisemaker. An alarm system should disable the starter, preventing the thief from driving away.
- Investigate an anti-hot-wiring device that interrupts the ignition, starter or fuel systems, preventing start-up.
- Install a kill switch that prevents starting by means of a hidden second ignition switch.
- Consider a back-up battery that trips an alarm if the main power source is disconnected or if wires to the alarm are cut or disconnected.
- Try an armored collar that wraps around the steering column to cover the ignition.