Auto Theft - Facts and Tips

It happens so often that people rarely think much of it. It's as much a part of urban life as the sun coming up. Everybody knows someone who has had it happen to them, maybe it's happened to you. Each year, more than a million vehicles are stolen in the United States - about one vehicle every 30 seconds. Why? One reason is that cars are easy to steal. Even an inexperienced car thief can steal certain kinds of cars in about ten to thirty seconds. Some cars are easy to steal. Most of the time, when a juvenile commits their first felony crime, it is usually the theft of a car or truck. Lastly, and one of the biggest reasons, is that most victims make it easy for the auto thief to steal their car. For example, nationwide investigators find that:

- 31% of all vehicle owners don't lock their doors
- 80% of the vehicles that were stolen were left unlocked
- 11% of owners admit that they sometimes leave their keys in the ignition
- 40% of all car thefts actually had the keys left in the ignition

Facts About Auto Theft

- The most frequent locations of auto theft are places where there are large numbers of cars parked, like apartments complexes and shopping centers
- The most frequent times cars are reported stolen was from 10 pm to 7 am
- The most common stolen vehicle is General Motors manufactured vehicles.

What You Can Do - Common Sense Tips

No amount of prevention can guarantee that your car will not be stolen, but by taking a few simple precautions you can greatly reduce the opportunity for the possible offender, and of becoming another auto theft victim.

- Lock your car
- Completely close your car windows
- Don't leave your valuables in plain sight even a little change can be an enticement
- Don't leave your car running, even for a minute
- Take your keys with you
- Keep your registration card with you
- Use a steering column locking device
- Engrave your vehicle identification number (VIN) on your windshield
- Use an alarm that shuts off your electrical or fuel systems when activated
- Park your car in well lighted, well traveled areas
- Park in attended lots if possible Car thieves don't like witnesses
- Put all packages out of sight (in trunk or compartments)
- Install a hidden ignition switch
- If you have a garage, park you car in it
- Do not store spare keys in or around your vehicle
- If your vehicle is going to be unattended for a long period of time, disable it

Protect Your Car From Carjackers - And Maybe Save Your Life

Carjackers threaten armed violence. Or worse. But you can help protect yourself and your car by taking some simple precautions.

- Before getting into your car, pay attention to your surroundings and be alert to nearby activity
- Always approach your car with your keys in hand
- Always check the back seat before opening your car door
- Make sure doors you left locked are still locked when you return
- If someone is loitering near your car, don't approach it
- Once you're in your car, keep your doors and windows locked

- Carry a cellular phone and know your emergency numbers Non emergency 385-5000, Emergencies 911 and #77 for Virginia State Police
- Avoid high-crime areas, especially after dark
- Be wary of people who approach your vehicle to ask for directions or change, or to hand out flyers
- When stopped in traffic, leave enough distance from the car in front of you to pull away quickly if necessary
- Stop only at ATM's that are well-lighted and visible from the street pull as close as possible, then check your mirrors and look outside before opening your window
- If an armed carjacker confronts you, don't resist get out of your car quickly; it's better to lose your car than your life

How To Spot The Bad Guys: "Deals Too Good To Be True"

When a car looks like a steal, it probably is. Watch out for:

- Cars sold through the classifieds that's where most stolen cars are parked, along with salvage yards and some used car lots
- Late-model cars with fresh paint jobs
- New license plates on an old car, or new bolts on an older plate
- Sellers without manufacturer-made keys
- Sellers with no fixed address, place of employment or phone number
- A seller whose name doesn't match the title and registration
- Vehicle identification number (VIN) plates that have been repainted or appear to have been altered
- A vehicle identification number that doesn't match the title and registration
- Asking prices way below similar models