

## How to Slow Down a Car Thief

Car theft is a major problem, with over 1.5 million autos stolen annually. In addition, there are close to 2 million thefts of contents and even more thefts of auto accessories every year. Stealing cars is a large, profitable interstate, even international business. Car theft rings can pay gang members upwards of \$1,000 for a few hours “work”. Movies such as “Gone in 30 Seconds” and “Downtown” show that it is difficult to stop motivated professional car thieves if they really want a car. The trick is to cause them a few problems, slow the thieves down and get them to look for an easier car to steal. There are some actions you can take and devices available that can make your car safer.

There are some key things to do – or not do – that will help protect your car.

- DO NOT leave your motor running or the keys in the car while it is unattended, even if it’s only for a short time, the doors are locked and it is in your own driveway.
- DO get into the habit of locking the doors even for a quick stop.
- DO keep car locked and windows up when driving, if possible.
- DO park in a well lit, heavily traveled area such as under a light on a busy street or a lighted garage.
- DO park in a garage or driveway, if possible, even when at home.
- DO NOT leave personal ID documents such as registration, credit cards, insurance cards, etc. in the car.
- DO carry a copy of the car’s license, vehicle ID number (VIN) and the make, model, and year. If your car is stolen, the police will need this information.

- DO mount accessories (CD/tape players, GPS units, phones, speakers, etc.) in inconspicuous locations. If possible remove them for safekeeping when you park the car. Also put all valuables, packages, etc., under cover when you leave the car.

Many products are available at a wide range of prices, which will slow down car thieves, or make it easier to catch them.

- Brake pedal, steering wheel, and wheel locks (the “boot”) are inexpensive (\$30-60) visual mechanical deterrents that are a good cost value.
- Audible alarms are more expensive (\$200-1,000) and may be less effective today since few people seem to pay attention when they go off, especially in an urban setting.
- Personal Alarm Pagers, available in some areas, directly notify the owner via a pager when the car is tampered with. It may be less expensive (\$200-400) but has limited range.
- The GPS vehicle tracking systems (LoJack, OnStar) are effective in many cases in locating both a stolen car and the thief. It can be costly to install (\$700-1,000) and have an annual fee.
- A Passive Immobilizer is a new and apparently very effective anti-theft device. A computer chip that communicates with the car’s engine is embedded in the ignition key. Without the proper key, the car will not start. When Ford made these keys standard equipment on Mustangs, the theft rate dropped 77%. These are now standard on many new cars. However only car dealers can provide additional or replacement keys (about \$200 per key).

When you go to buy a new car, check with your insurance agent or local police as to which cars are the biggest targets for car thieves in your area and avoid these. Be sure to have adequate theft insurance on any expensive new vehicle. Also look for cars with Passive Immobilizer keys as standard equipment.

These actions and devices will make your current car and any new car less of a target.