

Old school methods beat new car thieves

Car owners using “old school” security devices have helped drive down the number of vehicles stolen in Scotland by almost a fifth

Police Scotland says members of the public are using traditional wheel locks and steering locks, as well as faraday bags and ring camera surveillance systems in a bid to thwart organised criminal gangs from successfully taking and driving off with their vehicles.

Data shows there has been a “significant decrease” in motor vehicle crime compared to the pre-Covid period with 1232 fewer crimes – a reduction of 17.9%.

The number of vehicles stolen between April and September fell by 539 compared to the previous year, down 8.7%, while the only crime to increase slightly was attempted thefts of vehicles, which were up by 62 or 24.7%.

Assistant chief constable Tim Mairs said: “One possible explanation for this is... members of the public are becoming more aware of deterrence tactics and are utilising tools such as faraday bags, surveillance systems such as ring cameras and wheel locks that may be preventing offenders from successfully taking and driving off with the vehicle.”

According to the ACC, “proactive policing, community engagement and vital partnership working” were also key to reductions in the number of cars being stolen.

AC Mairs said: "To increase our understanding of vehicle crime in Scotland... a national overview into the theft of motor vehicles was undertaken.

"This identified success in terms of the volume of this crime type – a decrease of 4.9% – highlighting that proactive policing, community engagement and vital partnership working was key to the reductions.

"The identified areas for future focus relate to organised criminals utilising the 'keyless theft' modus operandi, exploiting emerging technology to steal high-value vehicles from driveways via a 'relay' device.

"Working with partners, including vehicle manufacturers will therefore be given due emphasis in the forthcoming period."

Research has found that car crime worry is so prevalent that more than a third of owners are using additional security measures popular in the 80s and 90s, including steering locks and bollards.

Motoring organisations say the return of these old-fashioned security products has been driven by increased concerns regarding keyless vehicle thefts, with over three quarters of luxury cars featuring keyless entry and start systems.

According to the RAC, adding a visual deterrent is a good way to avoid car theft and often enough to make a thief look for an easier option.

They say: "Use a sturdy lock for the steering wheel, pedals or gearstick and have your car's registration number etched onto the windows.

"These might be old-school deterrents but they're making a comeback in the digital age. Many thieves are opportunistic and they might pass on a car they perceive to be too much hassle."

The RAC says wheel locks are an effective visible deterrent adding an extra layer of difficulty for potential thieves as they require specialised tools to remove them, making it riskier and more time consuming for thieves.

Steering locks are also a clear signal to thieves on the prowl that the car is protected, and are known to hinder their ability to drive the vehicle away quickly or quietly, while faraday bags shield devices such as keyless car fobs from outside signals to prevent data from being altered, deleted or added.



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