



Champion COMMUNITY Page

Car stolen every two days in north Halton

By KAREN SMITH
The Champion

Your car could easily wind up overseas, in a chop shop or abandoned at the side of the road just out of sheer bad luck.

A vehicle is stolen in north Halton every two days and thieves aren't always picky in choosing their targets, according to police.

Of the 109 cars stolen in Milton alone last year, the majority were taken for joy-riding — youths in need of transportation, said Det. Marty Power of Halton Regional Police.

"Kids want to visit a buddy in Acton, for example, so they take a car and then dump it there," said Det. Power, one of north Halton's two police officers who investigate stolen vehicles.

Any kind of operating car will do for joy-riding, he said, but vans, which can hold a lot of people, are often popular.

Cars are sometimes stolen for parts, which are in turn sold cheaply to garages. The remaining body of the vehicle is cut into pieces at a so-called chop shop for easier disposal.

Chop shops

Believed to be a chop shop, a unit in a Main Street industrial complex was raided by police in May. Det. Power said the shop was used to strip stolen cars from Toronto.

"They (chop shops) can be found anywhere from a barn or industrial unit to a legitimate repair garage," he said.

And just recently, police found the body of a Ford Mustang chopped into 10 pieces at No. 10 Sideroad and Guelph Line. The car had been taken from Toronto.

Other newer, more expensive cars — often sport utility vehicles — are stolen and shipped to the Middle East and Europe by organized crime groups.

"Depending on where they're being exported overseas, cars can be worth three times their value," Det. Power said.

Some vehicles are stolen on the spur of the moment when unsuspecting drivers leave themselves vulnerable to thieves.

Earlier this year at the Petro Canada service station on Ontario Street at Derry Road, a man drove off in a vehicle left with the keys in the ignition while the owner paid for gas.

"Someone was lurking around there waiting to do that because they needed a car to drive," Det. Power said.

Fraud claims

And then there are people who have their cars stolen and torched in order to make fraudulent insurance claims, he said.

Cars parked at GO stations and car pool lots are often taken and used in break-ins because they're not usually reported stolen until later in the day.

So, such thefts are usually carried out in the daytime, while car heists from residences predominantly occur overnight. And parking lots of apartment complexes are often hit because there are lots of cars and hiding places to choose from.

Chrysler vehicles are particularly popular targets among thieves, according to Det. Power. "The information on how to steal them is out there."

But there is some good news. About 80 per cent of stolen cars — mostly ones used for joy-riding — are recovered, however they're not always found in the best of shape. Between \$500 and \$800 damage can be caused to vehicles' doors and ignitions in the theft process. The other 20 per cent of stolen cars are never



Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

Det. Marty Power examines the shell of a chopped five-litre Mustang and (inset) a burned out BMW. The stolen vehicles were found abandoned in town.

sure to give thieves a hard time so they go somewhere else.

Det. Power said keeping vehicles locked is important for deterring thieves, who prefer to target ones that are left open.

"It's one more step they have to go through to get your car," he said.

Alarm systems and other anti-theft devices such as The Club have proven to shut down thieves as well, Det. Power said.

Another simple, but effective crime-prevention method was introduced in May to help commuters deter thieves in GO Transit parking lots.

Motorists can now put a highly visible decal on their cars to give would-be thieves second thoughts about stealing a vehicle from a GO station lot.

Commuter-Combat Auto Theft (C-CAT) is an extension of the original Canadian Automobile Association-sponsored CAT program that has been effective in reducing the risk of auto theft since it began in Ontario in 1995.

A displayed CAT sticker gives police permission to stop the car anytime between 1 and 5 a.m. seven days a week, when the vehicle isn't normally operated.

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seen again.

Any way you look at it, experienced, determined thieves usually succeed in taking the vehicles of their choice, Det. Power said.

By simply using a screwdriver, thieves who know what they're doing can unlock doors, tamper with ignitions and be off within 30 seconds.

"If someone wants your vehicle, they're going to take it," he said.

But car owners aren't totally helpless. Motorists can use mea-

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