

Auto theft is a fast-track to wealth for criminals

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Canada or shipped to another country.

The trend in Halton mirrors statistics recently released by the Insurance Bureau of Canada that describe Canada as the "car theft capital of North America."

Auto theft is now a \$20-billion business annually, second only to the drug trade, and a fast-track to wealth for the criminally-minded. Insurance bureau spokesman Robert Tremblay said organized crime groups, notably the Russian mob, started moving into the business after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. He said cars stolen in Canada can end up in the United States, South America, Africa, and eastern Europe. The free trade agreement has made it easier to move stolen second-hand vehicles through the United States to foreign markets. Normally, the cars are placed in sealed containers in Canada and shipped by rail to ports in the United States where they're placed on ships to foreign destinations.

Mr. Tremblay said it's a highly profitable way to move the vehicles because its costs only about \$5,000 to rent a container, which can hold as many as three or four luxury cars. A Jeep Cherokee, for example, which costs about \$50,000, sells for about \$100,000 on the foreign black market.

Halton police Detective Greg Sullivan said the region appeals to professional car thieves because luxury vehicles can be easily plucked from dealerships along the QEW, an easy escape route.

Det. Sullivan said the thieves have an international network that allows them to move a car from Halton to almost any part of the world in about two weeks.

"The global village as we

know it has really shrunk," he said. "These people are highly sophisticated. They keep up with technology; (some are) former members of the KGB and military intelligence."

He said he believes professional criminals are drawn to auto theft because it provides big profits with little risk compared to drug trafficking and bank robbery. Even if they get caught, they probably won't get much jail time because it's considered a non-violent "property crime."

Typically, a street level thief — who is a kind of foot soldier in the auto theft hierarchy — gets \$500 to \$1,000 for each car he delivers to the boss. But a Mercedes with the keys, earns as much as \$5,000.

Det. Sullivan said the boss of a car theft ring, however, can easily become a millionaire.

Halton police Detective Brian Smith — an expert in car theft — said about half a dozen sport utility vehicles worth more than \$50,000 each disappeared from car dealerships in Georgetown last summer.

Two of the vehicles were later found in Montreal. Coincidentally, the thefts occurred while the Quebec-based Rock Machine motorcycle gang was trying to establish a chapter in the town.

Det. Smith said professional car thieves made their presence known in Halton five or six years ago, when the stolen car recovery rate dropped dramatically.

About three years ago, Det. Smith went to Germany to track down 10 SUVs and two Harley-Davidson motorcycles stolen from Halton and shipped to Europe. Det. Smith suggested a special squad should be set up to deal with professional car-theft rings, rather than fighting the problem piecemeal.

— *Torstar Wire Service*

Prevention is key to fighting thefts

How to prevent your car from being stolen:

- Have immobilizer approved by the Vehicle Information Centre of Canada installed or purchase a vehicle with a factory installed system.
- Don't leave your car unlocked and never leave your keys in the ignition.
- Ask police and motorists' associations for advice on which cars are hardest to steal.
- If you can, park in well-lit areas, preferably where there are lots of people.
- When you park at home, ask neighbours to keep an eye on your vehicle. And do the same for them.
- Know the pedigree of any

second-hand parts you buy. If the price is too good to be true, chances are they're stolen.

- Mark some of the more expensive parts on your car in an inconspicuous place with an engraving tool, using your car's vehicle identification number. On metal parts, cover the number with rust-inhibitor.
- Glass etching is a good deterrent. Thieves don't like cars with parts that can be traced.
- If you have an alarm on your vehicle, set it.
- Avoid leaving your keys with others. Keys can be stolen or copied. If you must leave a spare key outside of your car, be sure that it's well hidden.

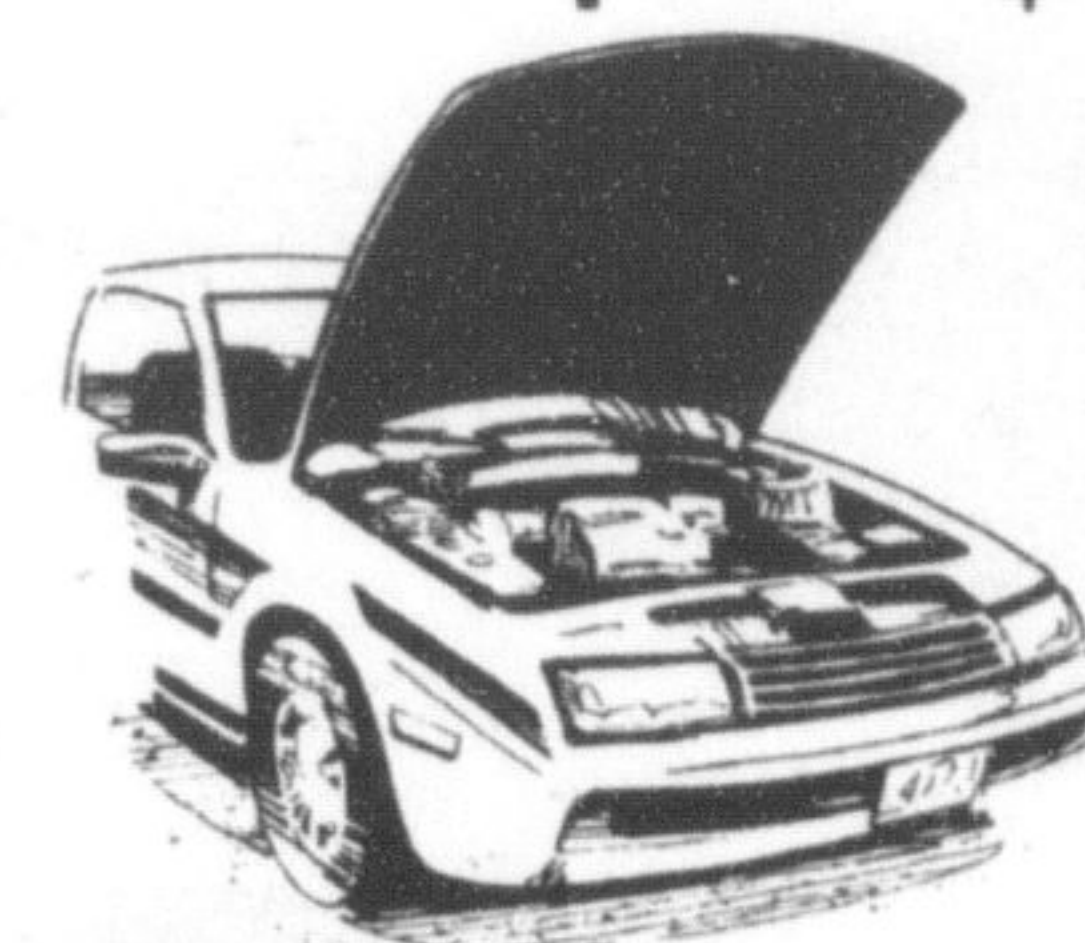
What's stolen most...

Here are the 10 most frequently stolen vehicles manufactured in 1998 and 1999 in order, from most stolen to least.

1. Hyundai Tiburon FX
2. Volkswagen Golf (two door)
3. Acura Integra (two door)
4. Jeep TJ (four-wheel drive)
5. Hyundai Accent (two door)
6. Chevrolet Cavalier Z24
7. Dodge Durango (four-wheel drive)
8. Dodge Dakota (four-wheel drive)
9. Toyota 4Runner (four-wheel drive)
10. Dodge Ram 1500 (four-wheel drive)

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NOTICE OF STUDY RE-COMMENCEMENT and PUBLIC INFORMATION CENTRE

TREMAINE ROAD in Milton

Lower Base Line to Indian Creek (south of Britannia Road)
Class Environmental Assessment Study

In May 2000, the Region of Halton began a study to carry out improvements to the horizontal curved section that occurs on Tremaine Road at Indian Creek, approximately mid-way between Lower Base Line and Britannia Road in the Town of Milton. The study focussed on options to modify the existing sharp bends in the roadway for the purpose of improving roadway operations and addressing potential safety concerns. The work carried out to date has included: an inventory of the existing environment in the vicinity of the sharp bends; preliminary consultation with government agencies; meetings with directly affected landowners; and, an analysis of preliminary alternatives. The Region has identified the need to extend the study corridor southwards to Lower Base Line Road to address other geometric deficiencies and potential safety concerns.

The study with its extended corridor is now considered a **Schedule C** project following the requirements of the **Class Environmental Assessment for Municipal Road Projects (2000)**.

Incorporating earlier work and input, the re-commenced study will also include: an inventory of the existing environment for the new section; meetings with affected landowners; a Public Information Centre (PIC); the identification and assessment of alternative solutions; the selection of a preferred solution, with consideration of public and government agency input; and the preparation of an Environmental Study Report (ESR). We would appreciate receiving your comments or concerns regarding the project.

The PIC is scheduled for **March 22, 2001 at Our Lady of Victory School, 540 Commercial St., Milton, between 5:30 pm and 8:00 pm**. The environmental study report will be completed by July 2001 and construction is tentatively scheduled for 2003.

Please direct any information, comments or questions to the following:

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