

# LOCK IT OR LOSE IT

BY MARTIN DERBYSHIRE  
Staff Writer

Joy riding.

It's a phrase York Regional Police Det. Paul LaSalle doesn't like.

"It's not that it doesn't happen. There just aren't that many cars stolen these days for the purposes of driving down the streets whooping and hollering out the windows with your buddies," he said.

"Cars are either stolen for transportation, to be used in another crime or for profit."

Dorothy Low's 1991 Dodge Shadow was stolen from the parking garage of her Richmond Hill apartment building a few years ago.

Police found it a few weeks later in Kitchener.

"I had just gotten gas and you could tell by how much was left they had only driven it there and dumped it," she said. "They must have just needed a ride."

The ignition was damaged and the car had to be towed back to town.

The \$3,000 price tag was picked up by Ms Low's insurance company, minus her \$200 deductible.

"You always think it's never going to happen to you," she said. "And you do feel violated."

Now she uses a security device known as The Club, which locks the steering column into place.

"Hopefully they see that and they'll steal a different car," she said. "It's a terrible experience."

A total of 2,052 vehicles were reported stolen in York Region last year. That's an average of almost six a day.

Last year, police recovered 58 per cent of the vehicles ripped off here, close to the 60-per-cent average of the past four years.

Det. LaSalle's auto recovery unit sets its sights on catching car thieves working for organized crime, leaving other auto thefts to local detachments.

Organized crime in York has a hand in every facet of the stolen car business: shipping stolen vehicles abroad, replacing vehicle identification numbers, stripping vehicles for parts and reselling cars locally, Det. LaSalle said.

Although the unit has

conducted investigations all over York, including rural areas, Markham and Concord have emerged as hot spots for chop shop activity, Det. LaSalle said.

Still, there are signs it may be waning. The number of cars stolen in the region last year was down almost 30 per cent from 2003.

That could be because car thieves are finding bigger profits in stealing fewer, but higher-end vehicles or because new technology is making theft tougher, Det. LaSalle said.

"Car manufacturers are definitely making things more difficult," he said, pointing to technology such as computer chip keys, sophisticated alarm systems and tracking devices as deterrents.

Boomerang Tracking Inc. offers the kind of technology that helps

auto recovery officers do their job.

For an upfront fee and monthly charge, Boomerang will hide a cellular tracking device on your car and track it wherever it goes, general manager Craig Armstrong said.

"We have a 24-hour recovery centre that can pinpoint exactly where the vehicle is and dedicate tracking teams that will hunt it down and call police," he said.

A couple of weeks ago, a Hummer was stolen from the driveway of a Thornhill Boomerang customer. It was tracked heading east on Hwy. 401 and was returned to the victim within 90 minutes.

"The guy was headed to Quebec, but he didn't get very far," Mr. Armstrong said.

While tracking a stolen Porsche Cayenne from Toronto into York Region, Boomerang helped lead local police to a marijuana grow operation and, in another recent case, police were called in by the company after it

tracked a stolen mini-excavator to a heavy equipment warehouse in Concord connected to what may be a chop shop filled with stolen vehicles and parts.

"Tracking devices definitely help," Det. LaSalle said. "They're not the only tool the unit will use, but they're certainly a good one."

The overwhelming majority of cars are stolen using the owner's keys.

Police have seen an increase in home break-ins targeting car keys.

Professional car thieves will also frequent coffee shops and restaurants looking for those who have left the key in the ignition or on a counter top. They will also cruise residential streets on cold days looking for anyone who has started the car and gone inside while it warms up.

Ms Low can't understand why some drivers are so careless.

"I see people who leave their keys in the car to run in and get a coffee and I ask them if they know how easy it would

be for someone to take it," she said. "I guess they just don't care."

There's no question in Det. LaSalle's mind, the best way to avoid having your car stolen is to hold on to your keys.

"People need to start treating their key as if it's got the same value as the car," he said. "If you have a \$100,000 vehicle, that's a \$100,000 key."

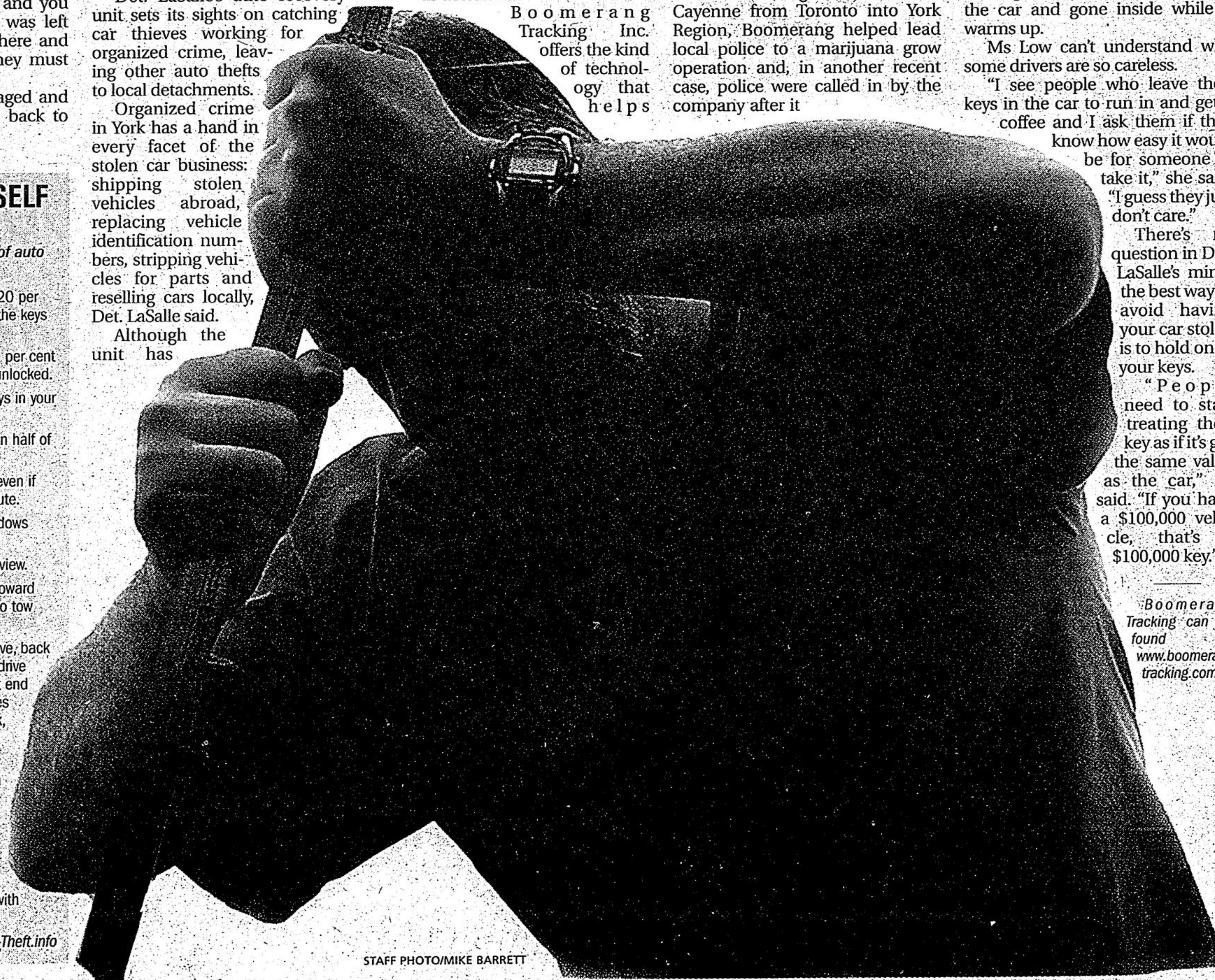
Boomerang Tracking can be found at [www.boomerangtracking.com](http://www.boomerangtracking.com)

## PROTECT YOURSELF

These tips will reduce your chances of being the victim of auto theft.

- Always take your keys. Nearly 20 per cent of all vehicles stolen had the keys in them.
- Always lock your car. About 50 per cent of all vehicles stolen were left unlocked.
- Never hide a second set of keys in your car.
- Park in well-lit areas. More than half of all vehicle thefts occur at night.
- Never leave your car running, even if you will only be gone for a minute.
- Completely close your car windows when parking.
- Don't leave valuables in plain view.
- Park with your wheels turned toward the curb. Make your car tough to tow away.
- If your vehicle is rear-wheel drive, back into your driveway. Front-wheel drive vehicles should be parked front end first. On four-wheel drive vehicles the rear wheels sometimes lock, making them difficult to tow.
- Always use your emergency brake when parking. In addition to ensuring safety, using the emergency brake makes your car harder to tow.
- If you have a garage, use it and lock the door.
- Replace T-shaped door locks with straight locks.

— From Auto-Theft.info



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## THE EYE DOCTOR IS IN

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### Ortho-keratology: Reshaping the Eye with Contact Lenses

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age, as long as their eyes are healthy. It holds particular appeal for anyone who leads an active lifestyle. If you participate in exercise or sports, or if you work in dusty environments that can cause problems for regular contact lenses, then Ortho-k can give you the necessary freedom. Because Ortho-k offers similar benefits to LASIK refractive surgery, but poses no risks of surgery, it's also appealing to adolescents and teens, who are not eligible for LASIK.

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