

# Crime drops in York after car thief's capture

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When Andrzej Zalewski was arrested in 2011, police found him with about 100 keys for \$5 million worth of luxury cars.

Mr. Zalewski was no amateur. In fact, he was among the best.

He was so good that in the weeks after he was caught, Det.-Sgt. Lou Malbeuf, of York Regional Police's car theft unit, said the occurrence of such crimes in the area fell off a cliff.

"There was a complete drought when he was off the street. There was nothing. That's a good indication of just how active he was," the veteran investigator said.

## TOOK KEYS FROM TRUNK

When he was active, Mr. Zalewski was responsible for between 20 and 30 per cent of this kind of theft and he's been at it for 10 years, he added.

"He's an expert."

Mr. Zalewski and his partner, Damian Kaleta, used several techniques to get their hands on BMWs, Mercedes, Range Rovers and Land Rovers, often filling orders for specific vehicles.

One was quite simple: breaking into homes after scouting residences with the nicest cars.

Once inside, they would grab keys that, for the most part, were kept in the same place in all the homes.

"Think about it: where does

everyone put their keys when they come home?" Det.-Sgt. Malbeuf said. "Near the door, meaning he had very easy access."

Once they had the keys, they had the cars, netting about 10 per cent of the value of the stolen car when sold to chop shops or organized crime rings, which shipped the vehicles overseas.

In many cases, they were then put in containers and shipped to South Africa, where the rules are lax on spotting and reporting stolen vehicles, according to police.

Another successful scheme involved some prize information Mr. Zalewski obtained.

He learned when cars are shipped to a GTA rail yard from overseas, manufacturers left one key in the trunk and one in the glove box. After stealing the keys, Mr. Zalewski would track down the car owner's address, using one of the keys to steal the vehicle in a matter of seconds, according to Det.-Sgt. Malbeuf.

Mr. Zalewski's crimes happened all over the GTA, including Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill.

It was a theft in Vaughan that would kick off the investigation that eventually brought him down, according to police.

It was a 2011 Maserati and, at the time, there were only about five in Ontario, Det.-Sgt. Malbeuf said.

It was the uniqueness of that

crime, in July 2011, that would raise enough eyebrows to start taking a closer look at his spree.

Using a GPS device on Mr. Zalewski's vehicle, police followed him closely and collected evidence before arresting him in October, 2011. He pleaded guilty last week to several break and enters and car thefts.

The good news, according to Det.-Sgt. Malbeuf, is that as a result of this case, the industry is getting smarter about preventing theft.

"They are witnessing all these techniques and getting rid of the loopholes," he said, noting his unit shares information with all manufacturers, especially the foreign luxury car makers.

## TRACKED WITH GPS

Techniques used in other thefts include leasing a car under a false name and then driving it to the United States and reporting it stolen, changing the VIN on a stolen vehicle to that of a similar vehicle that had been wrecked in a crash and parting out stolen cars, often selling these parts through the Internet, police said.

Thieves also recruit dealership mechanics to access the codes used in the chips in electronic car keys.

Mr. Kaleta was in a Newmarket court Wednesday.

Mr. Zalewski will be sentenced Feb. 12.



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When Andrzej Zalewski was arrested, police found him with about 100 stolen car keys.

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