

Stolen bike returned 5 years later

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As a young man, Chris Ward was heavily into motocross, a popular sport in his home state of Georgia.

It wasn't until he turned 21 he finally decided to get a street bike.

Being "young and stupid", as his father would later describe him, he avoided paying theft insurance on his new Yamaha 600, largely because it would have cost him more than the bike payments.

As is common where he lives, in Milton — a suburb of Atlanta — his motorcycle was stolen from his apartment complex with a mere 400 miles on the odometer.

He was heartbroken. That was in 2008.

Just days ago, the ex-Marine, now working for the Milton Police Department, was sitting in a local courtroom when the proceedings were interrupted by a receptionist, who burst in to give him a message from York Regional Police.

"They found your bike," she mouthed to him, trying to be discrete.

The case ended up having to come to a halt to allow her to speak up, but the news meant so much to Mr. Ward, no one minded much.

"I was so excited, really thrilled," he said. "I couldn't get on the phone to them fast enough."

With time off granted by his boss, Mr. Ward embarked on a 1,000-mile journey to Aurora to reclaim the bike, seized by York police's auto and cargo theft unit while investigating a motorcycle theft ring.

Ironically, it was the lack of theft insurance that allowed investigators to find Mr. Ward, as he was still listed as the owner, rather than an insurance company, as would be the norm after a claim was paid out.



STAFF PHOTO/JEREMY GRIMALDI

Chris Ward of Milton, Georgia, picks up his motorcycle at York Regional Police headquarters in Aurora Tuesday. The bike was stolen in 2008.

'In all my 10 years and with more than 5,000 vehicles reclaimed, I have never actually met a victim, let alone hand him back a set of keys.'

Det.-Sgt. Lou Malbeuf
York Regional Police

"In all my 10 years and with more than 5,000 vehicles reclaimed, I have never actually met a victim, let alone hand him back a set of keys," said Det.-Sgt. Lou Malbeuf, who heads up the unit. "It's strange (the bike) would travel so far. Who would have ever thought? It goes to show you that crime has no borders."

At the unit's Aurora headquarters Wednesday, southern smile and all, Mr. Ward was re-united with his beloved bike. Although it had been partially painted orange and had more than 14,000 miles on it, the bike also had the odd upgrade.

"Thanks for that," Mr. Ward offered up to the thieves.

To top it off, Mr. Ward made his final payment on the bike last month.

Along with a number of Milton police patches Mr. Ward brought to give to the members of the unit, he also brought a key to the city, which is rarely bestowed on anyone.

"This was given to me by our mayor after he heard the story," he added. "It's not much, but it's a token of our appreciation."

Should anyone from the York force ever visit the suburb, Mr. Ward said they would receive a king's welcome.

Although the officer responsible for the find cannot be named, due to the nature of her role, Det.-Sgt. Malbeuf praised her work in the case.

"She started with nothing and, through hard work, it blossomed into 25 bikes," he proudly said.

To make Mr. Ward's visit more comfortable, Elliott Towing threw in free delivery, Yamaha donated lube and accessories and the York Regional Police Association put him up for the night and hosted a small celebration.

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