

## CRIME

# Residents charged in car thefts

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Gone are the days when you could let your car warm up in your driveway.

Your vehicles, especially imported ones, are now so highly sought after that orders are being placed in Africa and filled in York Region.

"Cars can disappear that morning while owners are letting them warm up and can be in a shipping container that night," said Insp. Fred Moffatt, senior officer with York police's auto cargo theft unit.

What is the difference between the olden days of car jacking and now?

Insp. Moffatt said these new car theft rings are all about "sophistication and technology".

These tricks of the trade were on display Tuesday after York police teamed up with Durham officers to bust a \$1.19 million car theft ring in which cars were taken from the GTA and shipped to Africa via Montreal and Halifax ports.

After the most recent bust, seven people, including two residents of Stouffville and one from Markham, were charged with more than 50 offences after 29 cars were recovered, many in a Dec. 8 operation.

According to Insp. Moffatt, cars were being stolen from southern York Region, including Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill, along with Toronto and Durham, only to be outfitted with fake registrations and vehicle identification numbers (VIN), often stolen from cars in the United States, and shipped to Africa.

There were many different operations linked to the group involved, including the thieves, who actually take the cars, a licensed

car dealer creating false registrations at the Transportation Ministry, someone replacing the VIN numbers and those shipping the cars out of country.

One worrying detail Insp. Moffatt noticed during the investigation was that cars were being stolen without keys, but then showing up with keys. He said car keys being manufactured post market is something that was unheard of until now.

"The bad guys are getting that technologically advanced," he said. "It's not rampant, but that's what we're beginning to see."

The cars most typically stolen included Toyotas, Hondas and Land Rovers.

As for what happens to the cars that already made it over to Africa, he said they are almost always unrecoverable.

"They're gone, it's not unheard of to claim them back, but it's almost impossible for us," he added.

Insp. Moffatt said the group was substantial and police expect to see a reduction in car theft considering many from the group are now in prison.

Police also recently busted a car theft ring from GO stations and from car dealers, something that police say shows criminals are getting very creative with their targets.

"Theft deterrents in cars are now so good that unless you can have someone manufacture keys or steal them when they're warming, they're almost impossible to take," he said. "This is plan B, this is what they're doing now."

During the busts, police also found one gram of cocaine, 15 grams of heroin, \$11,000 in cash and fraudulent documents. Police said more suspects are expected to be arrested in coming weeks.

### Cocaine found in Stouffville man's car: Police

A 45-year-old Stouffville man has been charged with cocaine possession.

York Regional Police officers came across the man Dec. 4 around 5:30 p.m. while on routine patrol and investigating suspicious vehicles in the area of Ringwood Drive in west-end Stouffville.

— Sandra Bolan

Wishing you a  
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and a New Year filled with  
*Peace and Happiness*



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**Joy, Hope**  
and **Wonder of Christmas**

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**York Region**