

Car Security

Lock it or lose it

Car crime is an unfortunate fact of modern life. The chances are that if you haven't been a victim, you know someone who has. It affects around 12.5 million vehicles in the UK - and their owners - every year.

On the move, on your guard

Thieves are opportunists - they'll snatch it if they can. So don't put temptation in their way, make life as difficult as possible for them.

- A bag, wallet or phone on the passenger seat looks inviting. Tuck any valuable item away, low down or out of sight.
- Keep the doors locked and windows closed to deter a thief from snatching something at traffic lights or in crawling traffic.
- Keep the boot-lid or tailgate permanently locked.

Play safe when you park

When you park the car, you leave it vulnerable to the attention of thieves. Frustrate them as much as you can:

- Always remove the ignition key, even when only leaving the car for a minute.
- Take the key with you and leave the doors locked when you go to pay at a filling station.
- If you're going out of sight of the car, engage the steering lock, arm the car alarm or use any auxiliary anti-theft devices you have.
- Hide valuables: lock them in the boot or better still take them with you.
- Carry your mobile phone with you. Some 40 per cent of car break-ins involve theft of a phone.
- If your stereo has a removable front, take it with you. Don't leave it hidden in the car - thieves are clued up to that trick.
- If you have a garage, use it and lock it.
- When parking at night, choose somewhere well-lit and preferably busy. Avoid dark, deserted places.
- In a multi-storey car park, try to find a space near an exit, well-lit and not concealed by a pillar.
- When parking in any car park, never leave the ticket in the car unless it is pay-and-display.
- Always retract the aerial, to avoid the risk of it being vandalised.

Choosing a car park

Car parks pose a particular risk. A quarter of all recorded car crime happens in public car parks. The Police 'Secured Car

Park' scheme aims to improve car park security by setting high crime prevention standards of internal design, layout and management.

- Look for the scheme's official gold or silver plaque to locate a security-conscious car park.
- Otherwise, choose a car park that appears to be well-lit, has staff on duty and has security cameras.
- If you feel uneasy about a particular car park, for whatever reason, don't use it, park somewhere else.

Minimise the risk

Your state of mind is a vital element in safe driving. Calm, relaxed, alert - that is what you need to be to drive safely and responsibly.

- When returning to the car, have your keys at the ready to open it immediately, to minimise the time spent getting in.
- Don't leave any clues visible to indicate that the driver is a woman.
- Never leave your handbag in the car when you're out of it.
- Play safe but don't become paranoid. A significant minority do become car crime victims, but the majority of us don't.

Make it tough for thieves

- Make security features a priority when you buy a car.
- If your car is not equipped with an alarm/immobiliser, consider having one fitted as an accessory.
- Invest in security devices to deter a thief. Consider buying these for added protection: steering wheel security bar, gear-lever lock, locking wheel bolts. Have the registration number 'security etched' on the windscreen glass.