



Neighbourhood WATCH

Toolkit

Module 13: Vehicle security

This module looks at vehicle security. It covers the security of cars, caravans and motorcycles.

By the end of this module you will be able to:

- identify the types of risk your vehicles face; and
- practise methods of increasing the security of vehicles.

Introduction

A motor vehicle is likely to be either the first one of the most expensive purchase you make in your lifetime. If your vehicle is stolen or vandalised, these are some of the consequences:

- You might be stranded away from home.
- You will probably have the inconvenience of coping without your vehicle.
- Your vehicle might be damaged and require repair.
- You will have to claim against your insurance, which increases the cost of your premiums.

Theft from vehicles accounts for **a significant number of recorded crimes**. A few simple precautions can help to reduce this figure.

In this module we will look at some simple things you can do to safeguard your car, caravan or motorcycle against crime and its consequences.



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Remember

Good security acts as a deterrent. There are some things you can do that cost nothing at all.

Basic car security

Always lock your car

Whenever you leave your car, even when just buying petrol or popping into a shop:

- remove the ignition key;
- lock the car completely (doors, windows, boot and sunroof); and
- set the immobiliser.

If your car is older and does not have an immobiliser, consider having one fitted. Make sure that it is Thatcham-compliant. Alternatively, use a steering lock.



Remove or hide your possessions

Never leave valuables or other possessions on display, even while you are driving. Thieves have stolen handbags by opening car doors or breaking windows while vehicles have been stationary or in slow-moving traffic.

When you leave the car, take your possessions with you. If you can't take them from the vehicle, lock them out of sight in the boot.

In particular, **never** leave the following in the car:

- credit cards, handbags or wallets
- mobile phones
- driving documents and personal correspondence, particularly anything with your name, address or other personal details on it.



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If you can, always remove or lock away:

- the satellite navigation system (sat nav), including the holder that attaches it to the window or dashboard; and
- the stereo system or its removable fascia.

Mark all equipment visibly and permanently with the vehicle registration number, and keep details of the serial numbers in a safe place.

Identify the car

Have all glass surfaces of the vehicle, including the windows and headlamps, **etched** with the vehicle registration number. This will make the vehicle less attractive to thieves.

Safer parking

Whenever you park your car:

- put the aerial down; and
- tuck in wing mirrors.

If you have a garage, park your car in it. Lock the car and the garage. If you do not have a garage, park your car in a well-lit, open location.

If you are parking in a **public car park**, look for one that is well managed and has restricted entry and exit points, good lighting and security cameras.

If possible, use a car park displaying the Safer Parking Scheme, or 'Park Mark' sign. This is awarded to parking facilities where the parking operator has put in place measures that help to deter criminal activity and anti-social behaviour.





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You can find the nearest Park Mark car park by looking at the Safer Parking website (www.saferparking.com).



Remember

Thieves target car parks. Always lock your possessions out of sight.

When you are driving

When you are driving, keep all doors locked and windows closed. Make sure that valuable items are out of the reach of criminals, who can approach your car in traffic queues or when you are stopped at lights.

Buying a car

New cars

Most new cars come with many built-in security features. You can check the 'New Vehicle Security Rating' of most models on the Thatcham website (www.thatcham.org/nvsr). This rates how difficult it is to steal from the car, and to steal the car itself.

Look for the following features:

- Doors fitted with **deadlocks** - sometimes called double locking.
- A **central-locking** system.
- A **visible Vehicle Identification Number** (VIN). The VIN is a seven-digit number that identifies your car from every other car on the road. Some manufacturers now bond the VIN plate to the dashboard, so that it is visible through the windscreen. A thief knows that if they steal a car marked in this way, they will have to remove the whole windscreen and damage the dashboard before they can sell it on. This cuts into profit and acts as a deterrent. A visible VIN also helps the police to check a vehicle's identity.
- **Stereo equipment with a removable panel** and/or **security code**. Some manufacturers now fit stereo equipment with component parts that are dispersed throughout the vehicle. Some cars are fitted with stereos that don't fit into other makes of vehicle.



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- **Etched glass.** The vehicle registration number and/or VIN should be etched on all glass surfaces as a further deterrent to thieves.
- A car **alarm**.
- **Locking wheel nuts or bolts** - especially if you have expensive alloy wheels.
- **Security glazing.** This is specially strengthened glass fitted to the side windows of your car, which makes it much more difficult for a thief to break in - particularly if deadlocks have also been fitted.
- **Tracking devices** - you may wish to have a vehicle tracking device installed. These enable a car to be tracked by the police or system operator if it is stolen.

Case study: Cloths to cut car crime



Police in South Leicestershire are helping motorists to keep their sat navs secure by giving out free microfibre cloths to clean off the tell-tale suction marks. The cloths are available at local police stations and from local Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

Sat nav owners use the cloths to clean off the marks left by the sat nav cradle when it is taken off the windscreen. Thieves look out for these marks - they often indicate that the device is still in the vehicle, even though it is not on view.

Used cars

Many cars are stolen in order to be sold on to innocent purchasers. Although the majority of used-car sales are trouble-free, always consider the following:



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- Does the dealer use the services of organisations such as **HPI** or **CCN Motorfile**? These organisations can confirm whether or not a vehicle:
 - has been reported stolen;
 - has been written off by an insurance company; or
 - is subject to outstanding finance.
- Be cautious when buying from small ads.
- Check that the vehicle details on the car match the details in the vehicle documents.
- Don't buy the vehicle if the seller cannot produce the registration document.
- Check that any security marks or etchings match the vehicle, and that there are no signs that a security mark has been removed.
- If there is a mark showing the car is linked to a security register, always check it out.
- If you buy at auction, take advantage of indemnity clauses. You will be charged a small fee but you will be protected if you find you've bought a stolen car.
- Consider having the vehicle inspected by a professional. Vehicle inspections are offered by the AA, the RAC and other organisations.



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Caravan security

Caravan thefts are increasing - around 4,000 touring caravans are stolen each year. Parking your caravan at home, in your driveway or garden, is no guarantee against theft - you still need to fit security devices.

There are many ways to protect caravans, as follows.

Security devices

- **Hitch locks** - these cover the tow socket and so prevent the caravan from being quickly hitched up and towed away. Choose one that is manufactured from heavy steel and make sure that it has a good lock.
- **Wheel clamps** - these are a good deterrent when the caravan is stored in a compound or at home. Make sure that the model you choose is strong and resilient, and that the wheel cannot be unbolted with the clamp in place.
- **Wheel stands** - these can be a good deterrent but make sure that they are locked in place. The caravan's chassis manufacturer may recommend axle stands for winter storage.
- **Security posts** - these are useful if you keep a caravan at home and should be securely cemented into the ground. Some types are for the caravan to be hitched to and secured with a hitch lock. Other types are retractable and block the caravan in the drive once the post is lifted and locked.

Other steps to take

- **Photograph** your caravan, especially any distinctive features. This will help to identify it if it is stolen.
- **Etch** the caravan chassis number or your postcode on all the windows.
- **Mark** fittings and contents of the caravan with ultraviolet marker pens.
- **Marking the roof** with your postcode can help the police to identify your caravan from the air. Commercial kits are available or you can do it yourself.



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- A **security alarm** can deter thieves. Make sure that it is reliable and properly fitted.
- Keep a **record** of the caravan chassis number. If the caravan has been Caravan Registration Identification Scheme (CRIS) registered, keep the documents safe and away from the caravan.
- Store your caravan on a **secure site**. Don't choose on price alone. Some sites have high security compounds, 24-hour guards and sophisticated alarm systems. Remember to remove all personal belongings and the caravan's contents before putting it into storage.

Buying and selling caravans

Buying a caravan

These tips on buying a caravan will help you to avoid being taken for a ride!

- Only buy a caravan from a reputable source.
- If buying from a private house displaying a 'for sale' sign, check to see who lives there. Sellers have been known to use the driveways of empty houses.
- Check the number plate. Is it the same as the tow car? Is it a temporary or hand-written plate?
- Check the caravan chassis number. Has it been altered or removed? If in doubt, contact the local police.
- Caravans manufactured since 1992 should have a 17-digit number stamped into the A-frame and etched into at least three of the windows. The owners should also have a formal registration document.
- You can check the caravan on the CRIS database. You will need to give the caravan's 17-digit number and the name and address of the owner. The check will confirm:
 - the owner's details;
 - whether the caravan is listed as stolen; and
 - whether there is a finance deal outstanding.



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Remember

If you have any doubts about the caravan, walk away and contact your local police.

If you are selling a caravan

Never part with a caravan until the money is safely in your bank account. Cheques (including building society cheques and bank drafts) can be forgeries, or stolen.



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Motorcycle security

Motorcycles are an easy target for a thief. They can be:

- wheeled away;
- put inside a van; and
- ridden off.

Professional thieves target machines:

- for resale;
- to find parts to rebuild damaged motorcycles; and

Motorcycles may seem harder to secure than cars, but basic security can help to prevent theft.



Remember

All machines, however large or small, are at risk.

Park safely

- During the day, park in a busy, public place.
- At night, park in a well-lit area.
- Try to vary your parking place.
- Whenever possible, use custom-built motorcycle areas, especially ones with fixed parking stands or loops.
- Whenever possible, park in a car park displaying the 'Safer Parking Scheme', or 'Park Mark' sign.



Lock your bike

- Always engage the steering lock.
- Always lock the motorcycle with a high-tension steel cable and a high-quality padlock, or a U-lock. Pass the lock through the rear wheel or bike frame. If possible, use the lock to attach the motorcycle to an immovable object or another motorcycle.



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- Don't leave your crash helmet, or other possessions, attached to the motorcycle or in a pannier.

Additional security precautions

- Fit a **motorcycle alarm**, available from DIY or bike shops, and make it conspicuous. An alarm warning sticker will help to put off an opportunist thief.
- **Security mark** as many parts of the motorcycle and your accessories as possible with the VIN, registration number or your postcode. This will
 - make the parts easier to trace;
 - make the parts more difficult to sell; and
 - provide proof of ownership and evidence for police use.

There are various methods of security marking, all inexpensive and easily available, either done yourself or carried out professionally by dealers:

- **Indelible marking** - indelible ink or ultraviolet pens can be used on a motorcycle's non-metallic parts and accessories. The pens are available from most stationers.
- **Ultraviolet marks** are invisible to the naked eye but show up under an ultraviolet lamp. They begin to fade after a few weeks, however, so remember to renew them frequently.
- **Engraving** or **etching** - metal stamps or a glass etching kit can be used.



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Buying a motorcycle

Buying a new motorcycle

When you buy a new motorcycle, always ask the following questions:

- What built-in security features does it have?
- Does it have a fitted alarm, immobiliser and identification numbers?
- If not, will the dealer fit these at a reasonable price?

Buying a used motorcycle

When you buy a used motorcycle, always check the following:

- Have you seen the original registration document? Remember that a photocopy is not legally valid.
- Is the seller's name on the registration document?
- Has the motorcycle's frame or engine number been tampered with?
- Does the frame number or engine number match the number on the registration document?
- Can the seller provide proof of identity and address?
- Will the seller meet you at their home?
- Are you quite sure that the sale is genuine?



Remember

Do not part with any money if you are at all doubtful about the motorcycle or the seller.

Other measures for motorcycles

Control of registration - it is in the interests of all motorcyclists to stop registration documents falling into the wrong hands and being used for stolen motorcycles. If your motorcycle becomes an insurance write-off, ask your insurer to pass the registration document to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing



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Agency (DVLA). The DVLA now encourages insurance companies to return all registration documents for written-off machines to prevent them from being used improperly.

How employers can help - employers of motorcyclists, such as courier firms, should actively promote security awareness among their riders. They could, for example, include theft awareness leaflets in wage packets or with the despatch documents.

Dealers - mechanics should make it standard procedure to check any machine brought in for a service if they do not know its background. This is especially important if they are asked to supply duplicate keys.