

Don't let thieves take you for a ride: vehicle theft costs millions

Simple preventative measures can help be sure your wheels stay parked where you put them

A familiar refrain in my personal life is "Do you know where we parked the car?" My wife, who is otherwise an intelligent and capable woman, has absolutely no sense of direction. Zero. She freely admits this, so rest assured I'm not blowing her cover and setting myself up for a colourful conversation over spaghetti this evening.

At any rate, she can recount a couple of times where she has wandered aimlessly around a parking lot, trying to look intelligent and purposeful as she desperately searched for our car in the section where she was positive she left it.

It's embarrassing for her, yes, and infinitely amusing for me, but nothing more serious than that.

But, for 9,000 people each year in Manitoba, the car isn't a couple of lanes from where you thought it was. The car is gone.



**Road
Wise**

**Paul
Allen**

\$19 million

You read that right: last year close to 9,000 Manitobans filed auto theft claims, at a cost of \$19.3 million to Autopac customers—in other words, you. Think about it. These criminals are not just stealing cars, they're taking money right out of your wallet.

Manitoba is not alone in this 'war on the streets.' Nearly 160,000 vehicles were stolen across Canada in 1994—the highest number yet recorded. Putting this in perspective, one out of every 111 registered vehicles in Canada is being ripped off.

Now, even though the cost and incidence of vehicle thefts has tripled in Manitoba since 1992, you may still think those 9,000 thefts seem pretty insignificant when measured against the 160,000 across Canada. Think again. We have the dubious honour of having the highest relative provincial auto theft rate in Canada (12 out of every thousand vehicles in Manitoba are stolen each year, on average).

MPI has been working to reduce the number of auto theft claims. The corporation's Special Investigation Unit works specifically to solve suspected vehicle-related crime. Typically, they'll investigate about 1,500 claims involving theft, fraud or vandalism each year, saving an estimated \$3 million per annum. Crime doesn't pay, by the way: they go after adults and youths convicted of theft, recovering the costs paid out on the damage they caused.

MPI has also teamed up with Manitoba Justice, police agencies and community crime prevention groups to take the battle against auto theft and vandalism to the community level by offering a program that allows community groups to develop their own projects to combat auto crime.

The Help Eliminate Auto and Truck Theft (HEATT) committee reviewed a number of anti-vehicle theft proposals from community groups and allocated funds for qualifying initiatives.

Status seeking

What drives people to steal your car? A British Columbia study showed that theft for recreation or status seeking made up a whopping 73 per cent of the volume and 65 per cent of the costs.

What can you do to avoid being the 'fun' in a thrill-seeker's agenda? Target-harden your vehicle. If it's too hard to get at, thieves will move on to easier pickings. Park in well lit areas,

under street lights if you can. Always lock your doors, of course, and make sure nothing attractive lies invitingly on display in your car. Don't give them a reason to try harder to get in.

Steering wheel locks are a cheap and very effective way of avoiding a theft claim. Alarms and immobilizing systems cost more money, but are also a good way of keeping your vehicle safe.

Keep in mind that even though your car may be parked in front of your home, or even in your driveway, it's not safe unless you've taken every precaution to make sure it stays there.

That's it for this week. In the meantime, be **RoadWise**.

Paul Allen is Road Safety Manager for Manitoba Public Insurance. He would like to hear from you. His e-mail address is ppallen@mpi.mb.ca and his mailing address is Room 824, 234 Donald Street, Box 6300, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4A4.