

Hills police team keying on car thefts

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

IT WAS the middle of the night. Farmington Hills undercover surveillance officers waited patiently and inconspicuously in the apartment parking lot. Sure enough, two youths drove up in a dilapidated car, eyed the rows of parked autos and stopped by a snazzy Z-28 IROC Camaro.

Like termites in a lumber yard, the youths devoured the IROC piece by piece.

"They were busy little beavers. It was just a gutted piece of nothing in seven minutes," said Sgt. Albert Havner, Special Patrol Operational Team (SPOT) commander.

The scene is a familiar one for Havner, who heads the department's auto theft crackdown. He can provide the lowdown on just how youths, primarily ages 15-23, like a good living from stealing cars for parts.

And they are slick. Many youths carry beepers on their belts for contact with the chop shops that buy stolen parts.

The youths might have an order for a navy blue Pontiac 6000 STE. If they can't find precisely the right model, they contact the chop shop to

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see what other type of auto is needed.

Auto thieves also come prepared with radar detectors to determine exactly where the police are using surveillance.

POLICE ARE smart, too.

The increase in arrests has far outstripped the 30 percent increase in the number of auto thefts in the past year.

The 445 auto thefts reported in 1986 put Farmington Hills in seventh place in Oakland County. Southfield and Troy captured the first and second rank in having the highest number of auto thefts.

"We're also going to get another increase this year," Havner said. "But in arrests, we're above last year already."

Havner attributes the increased arrests to his surveillance group, which is able to nab many of the thieves in the act.

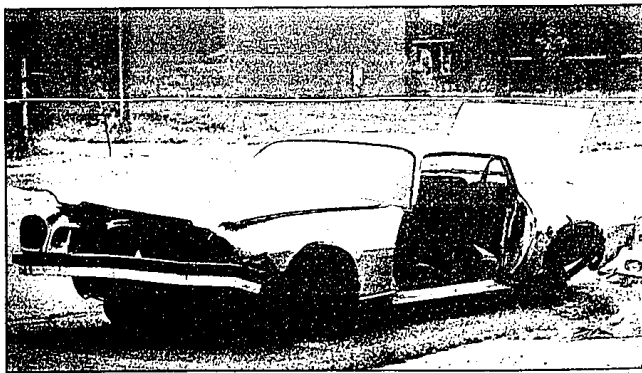
"Any city without a surveillance group, look out," he said.

"Auto theft is not new. It's been on the increase for many years. But we get a lot of support (from department administrators). That helps a lot," Havner said.

Fraud accounts for a good part of the increase. Many car owners leave their cars in a particularly conspicuous place, primed and ready for theft.

"Some people do it because they are tired of their car, putting money into the car," said Conrad Golemba, administrator of AAA Michigan's

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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

This Camaro was probably a sharp-looking car before it was stripped for parts and left to rot and rust on a Detroit residential street. Only the seats remained in the car, which was

minus its engine, tires, steering column and steering wheel when this picture was taken May 14.

Thieves see dollar signs in GM autos

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

If you drive a Chevrolet Camaro, Pontiac Firebird or Pontiac Trans Am, your car is in demand — by auto thieves.

"Eight out of 10 stolen autos are General Motors," said Farmington Hills Sgt. Albert Havner, Special Patrol Operational Team (SPOT) commander.

Pontiac Grand Am and the Pontiac 6000 STE also are popular with thieves, especially those loaded with optional equipment like \$800-\$1,000 stereo systems, Havner said.

Rarely does Havner and his five-man surveillance team come across stolen Fords or Chrysler-Plymouths. As far as Havner is concerned, the reason is simple. Fords, Chrysler-Plymouths and foreign autos are more difficult to start without a key in the ignition.

"It just takes too long (to start), and they (thieves) don't have the time," Havner said.

Conrad Golemba, administrator of AAA Michigan's anti-theft programs, agrees with Havner that there's just more GM cars on the road, increasing the demand for parts.

"They (GM autos) are stolen more frequently because there are more of them around. It's the sheer numbers," Golemba said.

NATIONALLY, PONTIAC Firebirds, Mazda RX-7s, Chevrolet Camaros and Buick Rivieras head the stolen car list. Statewide, Golemba said, Buick Regals and Oldsmobile Cutlasses top the list.

As picky as thieves are about the type of auto they steal, they are equally so with where they steal the autos from. Thieves, Havner said, know exactly what they're doing and where they plan to do it.

Chop shops seize parts

Farmington Hills is a haven for auto thieves. Like other western Oakland County suburbs, Farmington Hills has a healthy supply of autos that are generally fairly new and loaded with optional equipment.

But Farmington Hills fits yet another pattern. It sits near freeways — I-686 and I-96 — and has major thoroughfares leading in one configuration or another back to Detroit.

"Expressways are great. Fifty percent of the time, that's how they get here," Havner said, adding that Northwestern Highway and 12 Mile also are good avenues for thieves.

Apartment complex parking lots, especially those with minimal lighting, serve as a catalogue of potential merchandise for auto thieves. While apartment complexes are targeted at night, commercial and office fa-

cilities are a daytime attraction for thieves.

THIEVES WATCH and know patterns established by everyday people. Those who work will park their cars in large lots. For the most part, the autos will remain unattended in the lot for the entire day, Havner said.

The same holds true for shopping centers.

Women's cars are targeted in a shopping center simply because a thief believes women will shop longer than men will, Havner said.

Time also is an element in auto thefts from apartment complexes, theaters and bars at night. Thieves know that cars parked at these places will be there — without many people intruding — for quite some time, Havner said.

To protect themselves, people simply need to be aware. Improved lighting in dark parking lots, particularly at apartment complexes would do much to solve the problem. Thieves work better in the dark, Havner said.

Auto alarms work simply because they cause attention. The best type of alarm, he said, lights up the dashboard when it's activated.

"We have watched them night after night pass these cars by," Havner said.

One of the most important safety measures to be taken against auto thefts is a little old-fashioned caring for your neighbor.

"One hand washes the other. You watch my car, I'll watch yours," Havner said.

While on surveillance, Havner has noticed that while neighbors may open the blinds when they hear a noise, they don't act on it. They don't even call the police.

"IF YOU see something, call the police. If we don't know where it's happening, we can't adjust our manpower," Havner said.

Fighting auto thefts has become a cooperative venture.

AAA Michigan and other insurance agencies have joined hands to fight increased auto thefts, which, in turn, increase premiums.

AAA will no longer repair stripped and damaged autos with used or restored parts.

"We hear from law enforcement agencies that the 'no used parts' policy is having an effect on auto thefts," Golemba said.

The numerical identification of parts, including windshields, also has served to better control thefts.

Rewards offered by agencies, such as HEAT (Help Eliminate Auto Theft) also are making a dent in illegal auto parts industry, Golemba said.



file photo

The American Legion Groves-Walker Post 348 Auxiliary float in last year's Memorial Day parade was in honor of those Americans who lost their lives in 20th century wars.

In memory

Observance will honor war dead

Brigadier Gen. Stanley Wilk, Michigan Army National Guard deputy commander, will deliver the principal address at the downtown monument following the Farmington Memorial Day Parade Monday, May 25.

Wilk will relate the meaning of Memorial Day, a national day of remembrance. He will help honor the memory of the men and women who made the supreme sacrifice in search of peace. VFW Post 2269 and American Legion posts 346 and 180 sponsor the parade each year.

"It is our duty to honor the men and women who gave their lives for our country and, in so doing, all who have served in the armed forces to protect our liberty," said John Tobin Jr., VFW Post 2269 vice commander.

The Farmington Area Veteran's Council has selected the Army as this year's honored branch of the military service.

Prior to the memorial service, Wilk will lead the parade and be present on the reviewing stand to salute the colors and receive salutes from the passing units. Also present on the reviewing stand and taking salutes from the Navy units

will be Capt. William Devine, U.S. Naval Reserve.

THE ANNUAL parade will step off at 10 a.m. from the Farmington Plaza on Grand River at Mooney. It will head northwesterly along its usual route on Grand River to Liberty, one block west of the downtown monument.



Gen. Stanley Wilk

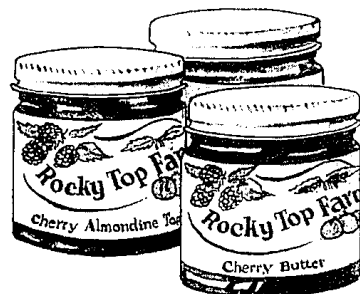
Marchers will include state and local dignitaries, veterans groups and color guards, Scouts, Brownies, Cubs, Camp Fire Girls, Indian Guides, Elks, the Oakland County Mounted Division, armed forces units, police and fire departments, and other church, school and civic groups.

The marching bands of Harrison, Farmington and North Farmington high schools will provide music. Other high school bands will include Clarenceville, Southfield and Birmingham Brother Rice.

Good viewing spots are plentiful along both sides of Grand River, between Mooney and Liberty. Arrive early for choice locations.

Prior to the parade lineup, workers and visiting dignitaries may meet at 8:30 a.m. for coffee and doughnuts at the American Legion Groves-Walker Post 346, 31775 Grand River, Farmington.

After the memorial service, all parade participants may attend an open house for refreshments at the American Legion Post 180, on Nine Mile, just west of Middlebelt, in Farmington Hills.



SAMPLE GOURMET PRODUCTS

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