

# Car security — alarms, locks and more

By Monica Perez  
special writer

**W**HOA — THERE went one! Depending on which statistics you read, in the United States a car is stolen approximately every 22 seconds.

By the time you finish this article, another five or six of the 1.43 million cars that get snatched this year will be heading for the border or a "chop shop" to be stripped and sold in parts.

Four out of five stolen cars don't have locked doors when they're taken, according to the Insurance Information Institute, and one in five are recovered with the owner's keys still in them!

THE INSTITUTE suggests the following ways to reduce the chance of your car being ripped off:

- Always roll up windows, lock the doors and pocket the key.
- Have your vehicle identification number etched onto the windshield, flip top and sunroof.
- Sharply turn the front wheels of the car to make it difficult to tow backward. On front-wheel-drive vehicles, engage the emergency brake and set the gear in park to lock all four wheels.
- Put packages and valuables out of sight.
- Keep the license and registration in your wallet or purse.
- Park in well-lighted, highly visible areas.

THE INSTITUTE offers free consumer information about car, home and business insurance; write to it at 110 William St., New York 10038.

## Most stolen cars

Live in an area with a high rate of auto theft and break-ins? You might not want to purchase the following, which, for the years of 1987-89, had the highest insurance claim frequencies (break-ins and car theft), according to the Highway Loss Data Institute:

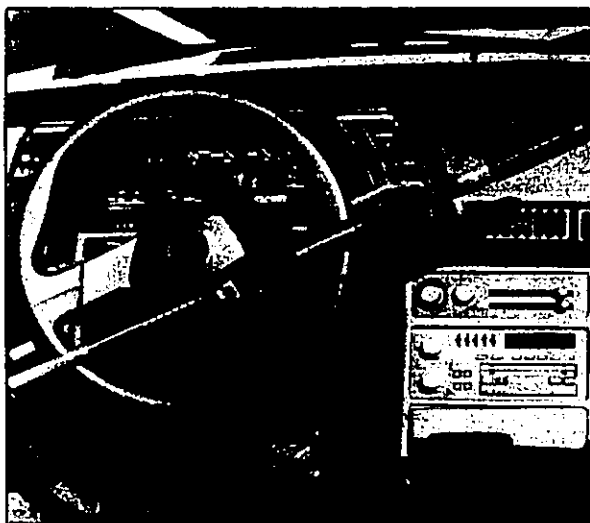
Volkswagen GTI  
Volkswagen Scirocco  
Volkswagen Jetta - 2 door  
Volkswagen Golf - 2 door  
Volkswagen Golf - 4 door  
Volkswagen Cabriolet  
Hyundai Excel - 4 door  
Cadillac DeVille - 2 door  
Volkswagen Fox - 4 door  
Porsche 924

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The technology available in car security these days is phenomenal.

The simplest is a locking device on the steering wheel, such as the much-publicized The Club. This locks on the steering wheel, rendering it undrivable; it's endorsed by police departments in a number of U.S. cities. It doesn't however, prevent your stereo from being ripped off. The cost is around \$50 to \$60; and it's sold at auto supply stores and major department stores.

If an alarm system is more what you had in mind, for an affordable \$100 you can install the Fox Guard I, a black box with a cord you plug into the car lighter. A red light alerts thieves of its presence; when triggered through a current sensor, a motion sensor and/or a glass-break detector, it blasts two sirens and a strobe light.



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Protecting your vehicle can be as simple as using a steering wheel lock or as elaborate as a laser alarm system.

PASSIVE SECURITY systems are those that automatically switch themselves on a few moments after you leave your car; some even lock the doors for you. These are the systems favored by insurance companies, many of which will reduce your premiums by as much as 10 percent (in some states, they're required by law to do so).

The range of options in this category is staggering, the least expensive of which start at around \$250. Some can tell the difference between a nudge from another car and an actual break-in.

Systems that must be armed manually can sometimes get you a 5-

percent rate break from your insurance company; before you go shopping, call your agent and see if there are particular brands they discount for.

Perhaps the most high-tech systems to date are the ones that track your car via transmitter. In California, the Mobile Electronic Tracking System has a central station hookup; when the alarm is alerted, the station calls the owner to verify it has been taken. If so, the police are alerted. Cost is around \$600 installed with a \$10 to \$15 monthly service charge.

Copley News Service provided this report.

# Finding a tuned-in mechanic no easy task

By Sharon Achatz  
special writer

**I**F YOU put the pedal to the metal and your Cougar pussyfoots around rather than clawing into action, you will be on your way to find a mechanic — pronto.

No matter what your make of car, today's high-tech automotive wonders demand more from a mechanic than the grease-monkey image of TV's Goober of Mayberry.

Today's mechanics often are called technicians and have highly specialized training. According to Home Mechanix magazine, one person simply can't keep up with the complexity of all technological advances, so one technician will specialize on steering and suspension, for example, another on heating and air-conditioning systems.

This is good news if you know your

problem is a muffler, transmission or brakes since you can then go to one of the nationwide chains that specializes in these repairs and, for a reasonable price, know you are getting a technician who knows his stuff.

The same strategy applies if your vehicle needs a paint job or body work — if the business has a good reputation, a specialty shop is probably your best bet.

**BUT IF** you are uncertain of the cause of your automotive nightmare, do not waste time and money spinning the auto repair wheel of fortune in a hit-and-miss attempt to find a qualified technician.

Instead, find a shop that employs competent mechanics in a variety of areas. The following American Automobile Association tips can keep you from being taken for a ride:

- Get recommendations. Ask

friends and co-workers, especially if they own a car like yours, where they get their cars serviced.

- Call the local Better Business Bureau or Chamber of Commerce to check the business's reputation.

- Check for certification. Auto repair businesses that are members of AAA's Approved Auto Repair Program have passed inspections for cleanliness, training, quality of work, efficiency and courtesy.

Mechanics with ASE credentials are called certified master technicians, which means they have taken and passed written examinations sponsored by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence. The tests cover topics such as engine repair, transmissions, brakes, electrical systems and engine performance.

- Inspect the auto shop. Look for a

clean, neatly organized and well-equipped shop to tell you the management is serious about its business and prepared to provide good service.

**ONCE YOU** have narrowed your options to qualified full-service shops, you will need to build a relationship of trust with your technician.

Start by accurately describing the symptoms of your car's problems. Tell the mechanic how your car sounds, such as whether it screeches, buzzes or thumps, and tell him when such sounds occur, such as when the car is parked or when you are accelerating. Ask the technician to take a drive with you so he can experience the problem firsthand.

Once the technician has an idea of where he can start looking to solve the