

Etched windows deter car thieves

By Tim Richard
staff writer

There's growing evidence you can reduce the chances of your car's being stolen and stripped if you have its vehicle identification number etched on the windows.

"Thieves must replace this glass," said Leonard Bach, claims director for AAA of Michigan, pointing to an etched car window. "Etching stops thieves."

He chuckled and added, "This Triple-A sticker, which warns that the window has been etched, is even more important than the vehicle number."

Tom Freil, AAA publicist, explained, "This program makes it impractical to 'chop' a stolen car. A chop shop couldn't sell this door to anyone without



McGruff, the federal crime-fighting dog, etches a car's vehicle identification number onto a window to deter thieves and "chop shops."

replacing the glass. And that leaves a paper trail of glass splinters."

FOR FIVE days this week — Wednesday through Sunday — AAA will aid nine southeastern Michigan shopping centers in providing free window etching. It takes about nine minutes or less for a trained worker to copy the vehicle identification number (VIN) from your registration or dashboard and etch it onto the front and rear windshields and each front side window.

At least six workers will be assigned at each mall. If they are kept busy all day, as many as 18,000 cars, trucks and recreational vehicles could be marked in the five days of the program. Cooperating shopping centers are:

Oakland County — Northland (Southfield), Summit Place (Pontiac), Twelve Oaks (Novi).
Wayne County — Westland (Westland), Fairlane (Dearborn), Southland (Taylor), Eastland (Harper Woods).

Elsewhere — Briarwood (Ann Arbor), Lakeside (Sterling Heights).
Directions will be posted in the Hudson's parking lot at each mall. The service will be offered only on dry days when the temperature is 60-85 degrees.

AAA, WHICH insures 25 percent of Michigan vehicles, is building up evidence that etching discourages thieves who sell cars to chop shops.

"We have been etching for members since June of 1983," Freil said. "Our recovery rate on stolen cars is double the rest of the state's."

Specifically, 72 percent of AAA-etched cars are recovered compared to 33-37 percent for all others, Bach said.

Nevertheless, he said, 80 percent of recovered cars are stripped, and insurers must consider them a total loss. For AAA of Michigan, that meant a payout of \$69.3 million in theft claims.

Statewide, the AAA spokesman said, 80,000 cars

were stolen last year — 42,000 of them in Detroit alone. Because suburban insurance rates are tied by state law to Detroit's, the cost is spread across the metropolitan area.

The auto theft rate has tripled since 1978. A Michigan car is stolen every nine minutes.

MANUFACTURERS OF certain theft-prone models will be required to etch their windows starting in 1987, Freil said. The delay is because of the necessity for manufacturers to tool up and the complexity of coordinating numbers when auto parts are made in various locations.

Etching alone won't stop car thieves, some of whom take them for joyrides and others to sell intact.

Bach said the etching program would be run in conjunction with efforts to educate vehicle owners to lock their cars, place valuables out of sight, park only in well-lighted lots and carry their registrations with them rather than leave them in gloveboxes.

Local news you can use

Lesinski is visiting judge

Retired Judge T. John Lesinski has been appointed visiting judge of the Oakland County Circuit Court.

Lesinski will handle the docket formerly assigned to Judge George LaPlata, who was recently appointed to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan in Detroit.

Judge Lesinski began his 30-day appointment as a visiting judge May 20. He is on leave from his Detroit law firm of Lesinski, Krall, Murphy and O'Neill.

Chief Judge Francis X. O'Brien said Lesinski's appointment "will help keep the docket current and thereby enable us to better serve the public."

LESINSKI HAS many years of public service behind him. The Grosse Pointe Shores resident served in the Michigan House of Representatives from 1950-1960.

He was lieutenant governor 1961-1964 and served as vice chairman of the executive committee of the National Conference of Lieutenant Governors 1963-1964.

Lesinski was a Michigan Court of Appeals judge 1965-1976. In 1977, he was appointed by the Michigan Supreme Court to serve as special judicial administrator to bring the Detroit Recorder's Court docket under control.

In 1978, he was appointed administrative and management consultant to the Michigan Department of Labor to recommend revisions in the adjudicatory process.

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