

AUTO THEFT PREVENTION

Door locks and ignition keys are called "first layer" anti-theft devices. Of course, every vehicle has them. They offer no deterrent to a determined thief.

"Second layer" anti-theft devices provide the most protection for your dollar. These include:

- Steering wheel locks - metal bars designed to prevent the steering wheel from turning. They do their job, and provide an excellent visual deterrent. According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, steering wheel locks decrease the chances of theft by a factor of four.
- Steering column collars - steel collars that fit around the steering wheel and prevent a thief from cracking open the ignition. They offer the same benefits as a steering wheel lock.
- Audible alarms - triggered by motion or impact sensors. Thieves aren't likely to stick around when they go off.
- Theft deterrent decals - an inexpensive way to bluff a thief into thinking that your vehicle is protected by an alarm or other device.

"Third layer" anti-theft devices include "kill switches" that prevent the flow of electricity to the engine unless a special, hidden switch is activated, and "smart keys", which are computer-coded keys that must be inserted before the vehicle will start.

Finally, "fourth layer" theft devices are electronic transmitters that allow the police to track a vehicle after it is stolen. While not very effective in preventing the original theft, these devices increase the chance of recovery. By the time the car is recovered, of course, it may be stripped or burned.

Other than theft devices, there are several precautions that can be taken to decrease the chances of auto theft.

- Engrave the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) of the car on the front and rear windshields (on an edge) and on key engine parts. This will make it difficult for a thief to resell the vehicle or its parts.
- Parking in a driveway or parking garage offers some deterrent to theft. Parking a car in a locked garage greatly decreases the chances of overnight theft.
- If you must park on the street at night, try to park under a street light or otherwise in a well-lit area.
- When parking at shopping malls or motels, try to park near the entrance.