

KEEP YOUR CAR SAFE

MOST PEOPLE IN THE UAE OWN A MOTOR VEHICLE. BUT SO FEW TAKE ALL THE PRECAUTIONS NECESSARY TO PREVENT THEFT FROM THE CAR OR THEFT OF THE CAR ITSELF. HERE ARE SOME EXPERT ADVICE TO HELP YOU DO BETTER. REMEMBER, SECURING YOUR POSSESSIONS IS PRIMARILY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

BY ORLANDO WILSON



For residents and visitors to the UAE, violent crime usually isn't a big worry, as this is one of the safest countries in the world. However, theft is a concern – as in any prosperous country, there are people here who'd steal something they want rather than work hard to earn it.

Car crime is a major problem globally, be it valuables being stolen from cars or the cars themselves being stolen to be resold, exported, or broken down and sold for parts. It is everyone's personal responsibility to do whatever they can to protect their valuables and their vehicles from criminals. Police forces in the UAE do everything they can to prevent crimes and catch the criminals, but it's the general public's responsibility as well to not be negligent and give criminals a chance to steal in the first place.

Recently, Sharjah Police warned people to ensure that they locked their vehicles when unattended and not to leave any valuables in the cars after a spate of thefts. The police stated that criminals had been breaking into parked cars and stealing laptops, mobile phones, wallets, and credit cards left in the vehicle. Sharjah Police have arrested many suspects in these crimes but are still urging the public to take precautions.

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MICHELLE GOMEZ

Renowned US repossession expert

Access to the car

To know how to defend something, you need to know how to attack it. So, **999** spoke with renowned US repossession expert and bounty hunter Michelle Gomez, who makes her living in tracking down and repossessing high-end vehicles and assets for banks and insurance companies. She told **999** about a few tricks used by experts in her industry.

Asked how a repossession agent would access someone's car, Gomez gave us a few examples: "With the older vehicles,



BASIC PRECAUTIONS FOR THE CAR

1. Always park your car in a well-lit area that is covered by CCTV.
2. Do not leave valuables in your car.
3. Always lock the car doors, even if garage parked.
4. Ensure the garage you're using is secure and has CCTV.
5. Keep control of the car keys and fobs.
6. Do not leave your car unattended with the engine running.
7. Fit a car alarm.
8. Fit a GPS tracking device.
9. If valet-parking the car, make sure your valuables are with you or locked in a secure place.
10. Report to the police anyone you see acting suspiciously.



there are tools and keys commercially available that can open a car door. If you've ever locked your keys in your car and called for assistance, I expect the agent would've used a wire hook and plastic wedges to open your car door. Someone skilled with the basic equipment can do this in seconds," she said.

"With the newer, high-end vehicles, we try to get access or a copy of the key fob and there are several ways we can do this," she added.

1 Our contacts at the dealership will provide us with a copy of the car key fob. Note: there are master keys to all cars.

2 We try to intercept the key fob, for example when the debtor hands the key to a hotel or restaurant valet.

3 We can use social engineering and

VARIOUS DEVICES IN THE MARKET USED TO HELP SECURE YOUR VEHICLE AND VALUABLES



1. Steering wheel and pedal locks: These can be relatively affordable, and they lock the steering wheel or pedals in place to prevent the car from being easily stolen. If the criminals see that your car is not an easy target, they'll move on to easier pickings.



2. Wheel clamps: Usually employed for parking enforcement, wheel clamps can also be used to stop your car from being stolen, especially if, say, you're travelling and leaving your car unattended for an extended period.



3. Car safe: Even though you should never leave valuables unattended in your car, there may be times when travelling or valet-parking that you may have to. There are discreet car safes available for storing your valuables. We recommend car safes mainly for those moving valuables and cash between secure locations; if the car is hijacked, the valuables will be hidden and secure. Hopefully, the criminals will be apprehended by the police before they have time to access the safe.



4. Blinking LED light: There are solar-powered blinking blue and red lights that can be placed on the dashboard of your car to give the impression that the car has an alarm or security system running. This is a very affordable security option and a good criminal deterrent.



5. Car alarm: There are many car alarm systems on the market, but sadly people tend not to pay much attention to them in many places when the alarms go off. So, ensure that if you fit an alarm system, it has the loudest and most annoying alarm sound you can find!



6. GPS trackers: These are an essential device to fit in your car to help the police recover it quickly if it's stolen. Also, GPS trackers can be used to keep track of those that might be borrowing your car, such as family members or employees. These days, there are a lot of affordable tracking systems on the market that can be monitored from your smartphone.



7. Kill switch: The kill switches stop the car from being "hotwired" by cutting off the electricity in the car. When fitted, the switch usually takes the form of a small button hidden in the dashboard that needs to be switched on before the engine will start.



8. Smartphone applications: There are numerous smartphone apps that can be used in conjunction with car security systems. Systems such as Viper allow the users to remotely control their car from the smartphones and receive alerts when the car doors are opened, the engine starts or when the car leaves a designated area or goes over a certain speed.



9. Video surveillance: Surveillance cameras are available for in-car use to be able to monitor anyone who's driving the car. There are discreet Wi-Fi camera systems fitted with GPS trackers that will enable you to know where your vehicle is and what's going on inside the vehicle.



10. Biometric fingerprint recognition: Biometric car starters only allow a car to be started when a recognised fingerprint is scanned. I think, in the future, we can expect to see more use of biometrics for car security, including facial recognition.

try to get the debtor to give us access to the car – a classic ploy is to use a female agent and get the debtor to let her drive his car; a lot of men are happy to do this when they're trying to impress women. Well, their face changes when they realise their cars have just been repossessed.

All the info on the web

Gomez said that it never ceased to surprise her how many people never locked their cars when they are parked in a garage. She said, "These days, a lot of garage doors are electronically controlled, and their opening systems can be hacked.

Once we have access to the garage, a lot of times the cars are not locked, which makes our work a lot easier."

Repossession is regulated and agents must work within the law, but Gomez points out that the relevant information is all out there, for anyone to use it.



“Careful not to leave your valuables exposed inside your vehicle that might encourage the weak souls to steal what’s inside”



COLONEL ARIF BIN HUDEIB

Director of Media and Public Relations
Department of Sharjah Police

“It’s unbelievable when you look on the Internet and there are videos and information telling people how they can open electronic garage doors, clone a car key fob etc. and this is publicly accessible,” she told **999**. “A lot of the high-end criminals are using the dark web, where everything is for sale, and criminal hackers who can provide equipment and information on how to access cars remotely are available for hire. This is going to make car security a big problem in the future.”

To finish up, we asked Gomez what was the one piece of equipment that made her life a lot easier when trying to repossess a high-end car, and she replied, “A GPS tracker. If we know where the car is and its movements, we just wait for the right moment to gain entry and pick it up; without the GPS, we have a lot of time-consuming detective work to do.”

Quick breach of doors

In December 2017, a gang of four car thieves were arrested in Ajman after seven vehicles were stolen from various places. All the vehicles were stolen at night from dimly-lit areas. This gang used the cars for joyrides before dumping them in deserted areas.

In October 2017, a Ferrari 458 worth Dh1.2 million was stolen from the parking garage of Palm Jumeirah Hotel in Dubai. The police located the car within 24 hours and apprehended the perpetrators, who had sold the vehicle

to another criminal, who was planning to break it down and export the parts for sale in other countries.

One thing that became clear during **999** research for this article was that a lot of car crimes happen in garages, supposedly secure areas. So, this magazine sought the opinion of an expert on forced entries to see how easy it is to break into garages. We spoke to Allan London, a veteran rescue expert with over 40 years’ experience who lives and works in South Florida, US.

London explained that firefighters needed to know how to quickly breach doors of all types, as someone’s life could depend on it. Asked about parking garages, he said, “If it’s not a solid door, and is say, a metal grill, you usually find in an apartment parking garage, we can usually gain access within 15 seconds. If it’s a solid door, then we need to cut our way in, which, with the tools we have, can be noisy but not a problem.”

About breaching gates to courtyards that you find on private residences, London said, “They’re easy to defeat, as

long as we have access to the motors that are usually on the inside and next to the gates.” We won’t describe in detail the techniques he shared with us, but even with high-security gates, professionals like London wouldn’t have much trouble getting in. Colonel Arif bin Hudeib, Director of Media and Public Relations Department of Sharjah Police, warned the public not to leave the doors of their vehicles open even for just a few minutes, and not to stop their vehicles in dark places. He added, “Careful not to leave your valuables exposed inside your vehicle that might encourage the weak souls to steal what’s inside. Avoid negligence so as not to be exposed to theft.”

Hopefully, now you have a better idea of how to secure your vehicles and make life difficult for the criminals. Remember, it’s your responsibility to take the necessary precautions to protect your valuables. The police are there to help with any problems you may have, but it’s better to avoid the problems by preventing them from happening.



About the writer: Orlando Wilson has worked in the security industry internationally for over 28 years. He is the chief consultant for Risks Inc. and based in Miami but spends much of his time travelling and providing a wide range of kidnapping prevention and tactical training services to private and government clients.