

'Massive threat' to public safety could be out soon: AUTO THEFT: Police fear B.C.'s worst car thief will get early parole

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Robert Jeremy Osborne, B.C.'s most prolific and dangerous car thief, could be back on the streets in less than two months.

"I can't think of a more dangerous car thief," says Cpl. Tim Shields, a member of the Integrated Municipal Provincial Auto Crime Taskforce (IMPACT).

"He has stolen well over 1,000 vehicles in the past 10 years. We know that on many days, he would steal five to seven cars a day -- and he's been doing that for most of his adult life."

Osborne, 29, became world infamous after footage of his June 2004 bait-car theft was broadcast in the U.S., Britain, Australia and Japan.

During the 32-minute clip from a hidden bait-truck camera, Osborne tests a loaded gun by trying to shoot out the truck window, stops and breaks into three vehicles and is heard screaming "oncoming, go, go, go" as he drives head-on toward a police car.

Due to Osborne's dangerous driving, police decided not to give chase that day, giving him enough time to ditch the bait-truck and steal a Honda Accord and escape.

He was arrested a few weeks later in a Surrey parkade after driving a stolen vehicle through three fences.

For stealing the bait vehicle, dangerous driving and being in possession of break-and-enter tools, Osborne -- a chronic repeat offender and drug addict -- was dealt a four-year jail term.

On Dec. 1, less than 18 months after being taken into custody, he will be eligible for day parole.

Shields and auto-theft investigators plan to attend Osborne's day-parole hearing in December in a bid to convince the parole board to keep him inside.

"We want the parole board to be aware of his auto-theft history and that it is violent, dangerous auto theft," says Shields, who attempted to interview Osborne just prior to his sentencing.

"I was at Surrey pre-trial and he just started screaming. It was a big disappointment. I was hoping he would help us by participating in a public-education video.

"He's not intimidating, he's not a big guy and there was nothing remarkable about his demeanor -- except when he went from calm to insane in a second."

Osborne, who is currently in Matsqui federal prison in Mission, has faced 123 charges since he turned 18.

A worker at the Vancouver Provincial Court registry was stunned when he pulled Osborne's record. "My goodness, he's got a lot of files. This guy's hopeless," the worker commented.

- In 1998, he got 21 days' jail after being charged with dangerous operation of a motor vehicle, failure to stop at the scene of an accident resulting in a pursuit and driving without a licence.
- In September 1999, Osborne was given a seven-day jail sentence for operating a vehicle while disqualified, driving an uninsured vehicle and obstruction of a peace officer.
- In October 1999, he got nine months' jail for possession of a stolen vehicle and driving while prohibited.
- In September 2000, Osborne received a \$575 fine for failure to stop, resulting in a police chase, obstruction of a peace officer and driving with a suspended licence.
- In February 2001, he was jailed for four months for possession of cocaine for the purpose of trafficking, and breach of probation.
- In May 2001, he was jailed for one day for drug trafficking and breach of probation.
- In March 2002, he got four months' jail for uttering a death threat, mischief and theft under \$5,000.
- In December 2002, he got 30 days for theft, assault and possession of a controlled substance.
- In January 2003, he received probation for theft under \$5,000, assault, possession of a vehicle while disqualified and possession of a controlled substance.

Osborne has been in detention since his arrest in July 2004.

Because it took a year before his trial and sentencing was complete, when he was given his four-year sentence, the single year in custody was counted as two years.

Dennis Finlay, spokesman for the Correctional Service of Canada, says Osborne is eligible for full parole on Jan. 30, 2006. If he is not paroled, he will be released next October.

Finlay says the Correctional Service of Canada must release prisoners when they have served two-thirds of their sentence, unless they're ruled a danger to society.

Particularly troubling for Shields is word that Osborne has refused drug treatment while in jail.

"It's scary that a guy who poses a massive threat to public safety could be out so soon. It's well documented how dangerous this guy is, and we would be doing a great disservice to the community if he is released early," Shields says.

"We've never seen a car thief deemed a dangerous offender, but some drug addicts simply don't want to be treated.

"They need to be kept locked up for the safety of our children."

Osborne refused a Province interview request.

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