

Stolen lives: An in-depth look at the dangerous world of auto crime: These drug-fuelled killers must be stopped

The Province

Sunday, October 2, 2005

Byline: David Carrigg

In the next seven days, close to 1,000 vehicles will be stolen in B.C. Hopefully, no one will die or be injured or maimed for life as a result -- though the chances of that are high. Since the beginning of this year, 11 people and an unborn child have been killed, countless more injured, as a result of auto thefts. This grim toll has nearly quadrupled since 2000 and reflects the changing profile of auto thieves in B.C.

In other provinces, vehicles are usually stolen quietly and driven away to be chopped up and resold. In B.C., cars and trucks are stolen mostly by drug addicts who use the vehicle to commit other crimes, to get high or simply to travel from one place to another -- often recklessly.

Who are these people? More often than not, repeat auto thieves who are impaired while they drive, showing little fear of police or the criminal justice system. They're killing themselves -- and innocent victims.

B.C.'s most recent senseless deaths occurred on Labour Day weekend, when Dustin Carmichael, a serial auto thief and drug addict, drove a stolen Jeep into a car driven by Brad Calder. Carmichael, his passenger, and Brad and Lorene Calder were killed. The Calders' two children survived, severely injured, left orphaned.

A week earlier, Sharon Marina Kaye, 19, of East Vancouver, was crushed to death when the stolen vehicle she was in struck a light-pole. And two weeks before that, repeat auto thief Kyle Tait was shot and killed by a New Westminster policeman protecting his rookie partner, trapped in a police cruiser allegedly being rammed by the stolen car in which Tait was riding.

Startlingly, there are no official records showing how many people are dying Canada-wide as a result of vehicle theft.

Gwynn Edwards of the Insurance Bureau of Canada says that's because it was "never a real big problem until the last five years."

Ken Haywood, an anti-auto-crime lobbyist, hired a researcher to come up with some hard statistics on fatalities. The project was called off last month because the data simply did not exist. Auto theft in B.C. is spinning out of control -- 39,308 vehicles were stolen just last year -- and some thing needs to be done about it.

Over the next seven days, The Province will examine the problem, find the hot spots, interview justice experts, review the "bait car" program and highlight new technology that will allow police to act faster on stolen vehicles.

Drivers will learn of new ways to protect their assets and benefit from information gathered at an auto theft investigators conference held in New Orleans just weeks before Hurricane Katrina decimated that city.

Senior writers Peter Clough and Susan Lazaruk will show the horrific human cost of auto theft in profiles of victims, while several B.C. residents who have just had their vehicles stolen will tell their tales, which The Province will follow during the week.

Next Sunday, The Province will present its 10-point plan to deal with the auto-theft crisis. The authorities will be asked to respond and to make a commitment to address the epidemic of auto crime -- and the crushing theft of lives that goes with it.

dcarrigg@png.canwest.com