

Thieves love your tires,

especially when they are easily accessible.



Because a good wheel thief usually works in a group during the overnight hours, they make off with the rims in a matter of minutes, usually going unnoticed by sleeping car owners, according to Frank Scafidi, spokesman for the National Insurance Crime Bureau.

“The best defense is to make your vehicle less of a target, but if someone really wants your wheels, they’re going to do whatever it takes,” Scafidi said.

Theft Methods

Wheel thieves typically work in groups, much like a pit crew on a racetrack. A car must be elevated to get the tires and wheels off, and this is a dangerous task to attempt alone, especially when you’re trying to do it quickly without getting caught. Thieves, therefore, work together to jack a car up onto a set of blocks. Once the car is in the air, the thieves each take a side and go to work on pulling the wheels off the vehicle.

In some cases, thieves bring a tow truck to elevate the car. While not as common, it has happened in the past. An experienced group working in tandem can remove all four wheels in under ten minutes if all goes well. Your goal as a car owner is to put up barriers that make the process of wheel removal take as long as possible. If a thief thinks that it will take too long to remove the tires from your car, or that the risk of getting caught is too high, he moves on to an easier vehicle.

Prevention

At home

1. Park your car in a closed garage whenever you can. If you live in an apartment or have a house without a garage, this is often not an option. However, a garage works as a barrier that has to be bypassed, and thieves usually have a harder time getting your car elevated in a garage without alerting anyone in the house.

2. Install a car alarm that includes sensors that attach to the wheels. The alarm detects when the car gets tilted, and the wheel sensors also detect when the wheels get tampered with.
3. Lock Your Wheels: Remember the trusty anti-theft steering-wheel lock, The Club? Well, for the uninitiated, they make locking devices to protect wheels, too. Use wheel locks on each wheel, including your spare. The locks fit on each wheel and make the lug nuts extremely difficult to remove without a key. It's important never to lose the key because you'll need it if you ever get a flat tire. However, the locks greatly reduce your risk of losing your wheels and tires. Lug nut locks are also useful since they require a specially sized wrench to remove. However, the lug nut locks can be melted quickly with a blowtorch to make them fit a regular wrench, so they are not as effective as wheel locks.
4. Talk to Your Neighbors: Do your part and develop bonds with people who live on your block to increase the odds of someone seeing something unusual and calling our constables will help. It's not easy for law enforcement to track down stolen tires. Without evidence such as home-surveillance video or fingerprints, their work gets harder. Usually there aren't even witnesses since it tends to happen in the middle of the night.

Away from home

1. Park Close to the Curb: Parking your vehicle as close to the curb as possible could help deter thieves. Jacking up a car to remove the wheel assembly requires space, so thieves are more likely to move onto the next target if the tire's proximity to the curb is too tight. Turning the steering wheel toward the curb when parking will also make the wheels harder to remove.
2. Park in an area with a lot of traffic when out in public. The more car and foot traffic going by where you park, the less likely thieves want to risk detection by stealing wheels or tires in that area. Park where there are surveillance cameras whenever possible.
3. Park in High-Traffic Areas: If you don't park in a public garage, try to find parking on busier streets with more traffic and a heavier pedestrian presence. Criminals prefer to work under the veil of night and with the added confidence that no one will walk by.
4. Turn your wheels when parking. This makes the wheels harder to remove because they get stuck in the wheel well. The car's steering column lock makes it difficult for the thieves to turn the wheels forward again without a key in the ignition.

Final thoughts

People often spend a lot of money on their rims, wheels, and tires. Whether this is for performance or aesthetic reasons, they represent a sizable investment and often have sentimental value as well. Thieves steal them either to resell them to other collectors or to just get money for scrap. The first step in preventing this is not believing that it can't happen to you. Secondly, get your wheels and tires insured against theft as part of your car insurance policy in case you do suffer theft. Once you make the realization that you're vulnerable, you can take the necessary steps to protect yourself and your car.