

# Electronic crime stoppers

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Take theft precautions now, and avoid becoming yet another statistic as thefts of GPS and Sat-Nav devices from vehicles soar.

Theft of electronic equipment from parked vehicles is common, especially with the increased popularity of Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) equipment and Satellite Navigation (Sat-Nav) systems spurring on thieves. The increase is attributed to their growing popularity and car owners not taking simple crime prevention steps like locking doors and closing windows.

NSW police figures released in October 2009 show that window and dash-mounted GPS devices are popular targets for thieves, with over 5000 stolen from NSW cars in the previous 12 month period or approximately 15 each day\*. The devices are more commonly stolen from front yards, streets, car parks and boats.

Aside from losing a valuable piece of electronic equipment (some GPS units cost upwards of \$800), vehicle owners are lumbered with the additional inconvenience of having to repair the damaged vehicle. What's more, as most people store their personal details in their 'favourite addresses', the thief gets the 'added bonus' of directions to their home.

## Leaving tell-tale signs

Many drivers hide valuable electronic equipment, such as laptops and mobile phones, out of sight in the boot or glove box when leaving their car unattended. Once hidden, it is difficult for thieves to detect that these devices are locked in the boot of the car.

But this strategy doesn't work so well with GPS and Sat-Nav devices, given many vehicle owners fall into the trap of leaving tell-tale signs in full view, such as the cradle or cables. Cunning thieves even look for the marks left on the windscreen by the sucker that adheres to the cradle.

The good news is that it only takes a few simple precautions to minimise your risk of becoming yet another theft statistic.

## Proven theft deterrents

Steps you can take to reduce your chances of falling prey to a 'smash and grab' Sat-Nav/GPS theft – and increase your chances of recovering the device if it is stolen – include:

- When purchasing a new vehicle, opt for a fixed unit.
- Park in your garage rather than driveway overnight. A recent UK study found that nearly two in three Sat-Nav thefts happened after 4pm, with 38% of incidents occurring between 8pm and midnight.
- Remove the GPS device from the car whenever possible when leaving the vehicle unattended. Store the cradle/cables out of sight and wipe telltale sucker marks off the windscreen/dashboard.
- Consider using personal digital assistants (eg BlackBerry) or a mobile phone with GPS capabilities in place of a portable GPS unit.
- When purchasing a portable GPS/Sat-Nav device, get one that has a PIN code.
- Register your purchase with the manufacturer and notify them if the device is stolen. If stolen, the manufacturer's website should recognise that it is stolen and refuse to download data.
- Keep a record of your device's serial number, make and model.
- Consider using a security pen (that shows up under ultraviolet light) and record a mobile number or name on the device for easy recognition.
- Be vigilant where you park. If on business during the day, park in visitor car parks or within sight of the business premises. At night and away from home, park in secure car parks or at least in well-lit areas.

\* GPS Device And Gadget Theft From Cars On The Rise - [www.themotorreport.com.au/](http://www.themotorreport.com.au/)

