



Whats App for thieves

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Motor thieves are using encrypted WhatsApp groups to plan and execute car thefts as the UK vehicle crime wave continues, according to vehicle protection specialists at **AX**.



Criminals draw up and share 'shopping lists' of makes and models so that vehicles can be stolen to order, says the provider of intelligent vehicle protection and management technologies for the automotive and insurance industries.

Fuelled by encrypted social media platforms which are impossible to break into and read, the wave of thefts has been intensified by the vulnerability of 'keyless' systems which criminals are able to exploit using key signal amplifiers and decoders costing thousands.



Home Office figures show the number of vehicles stolen in Britain has almost doubled in the last five years. In 2017-18, nearly 112,000 cars were taken illegally, up from 75,308 in the 2013-14 financial year.

The insights from AX's Director of Investigative Services, Neil Thomas, exposes the newly favoured tactics used by today's car criminals. From the initial theft and removal of trackers, to the dismantling of vehicles for parts and networks through which cars are exported.

"The highly organised criminal networks are constantly looking for more secure ways to carry on their 'businesses' online and use social media with encrypted messaging capabilities or even online games to covertly communicate with each other" said Thomas.

"The sheer volume of thefts is practically a car theft epidemic and is enabling criminals to purchase costly technology which then fuels even more car crime."

Typically, criminals - or whole gangs in some cases - mobilise on social media where they agree their preferred targets, pricing and buyer before preparing bogus number-plates from similar vehicles to rapidly clone vehicles.

Thomas added: "The thieves who take the initial risk get the cash payment, then the buyer, who now has a tracker-free car can then take their time to strip it, clone it or export it. This is where the profit is, especially in terms of the parts which can amount to much more than the complete vehicle."

"We've been highly successful in recovering vehicles for our clients. However, it is usually only possible if they can be traced and this requires specific technology as well as the instinct of experienced professionals."

Stealing cars in five steps

1 Research the demand for specific makes and models with criminal associates and find a



buyer

2 Identify ways to combat factory fitted security measures using online research and sometimes 'friends' who work in the industry

3 Locate and steal the vehicle by overcoming security features

4 Dispose of vehicle through criminal network and receive payment

5 Repeat process