

# Auto care

## With care, you can prevent theft

By JANET SUTTER  
Copley News Service

Donald Bledsoe fanned out four long pieces of metal he called "Ford picks" - they can unlock 98 percent of the automobiles made by Ford. Bledsoe got this set legally for \$60; he is a licensed repossessor.

But he picked up many a car illegally when he was an auto thief.

Bledsoe was in and out of prison for some 32 years until a judge and attorney suggested he consider the legitimate business of car repossessing, for which he was already skilled. Bledsoe now is a spokesman for auto alarms made by Alpine Electronics of America.

He has a lot to say about preventing theft of automobiles or anything left inside them:

- Park a car near lots of people and traffic. If it's night, park close to lights. Bledsoe mentioned he had seen a Corvette parked behind a tree in a shopping center, making it difficult to be seen by shoppers. "Somebody could work on that Corvette with no detection from the building. Never park your car in a secluded area."

- Never leave coats, wearing apparel or anything that looks expensive locked in a car. Never leave a purse or briefcase inside and visible. Some times, even a fancy case for glasses that resembles a purse can lure a thief to break into a car. Take time to put packages in the trunk.

- Avoid valet parking, particularly when there is not a secure lot or area for the car. Valets often park

cars on the street and leave the keys in a certain place in the cars, rather than in a key safe, Bledsoe said. "They're looking for a tip and the quicker they can get that car to you, the better," he said. Ask the valet if he has a special secure place to put the keys.

"If you have an alarm (system), under no circumstances give the code to an attendant. People buy that kind of information from those who park cars."

Bledsoe suggests if the street is the only place to park a car, park it yourself or wait until the car is parked and get your key back.

- Park the car close to the house, in the driveway if possible. It is more vulnerable at the curb.

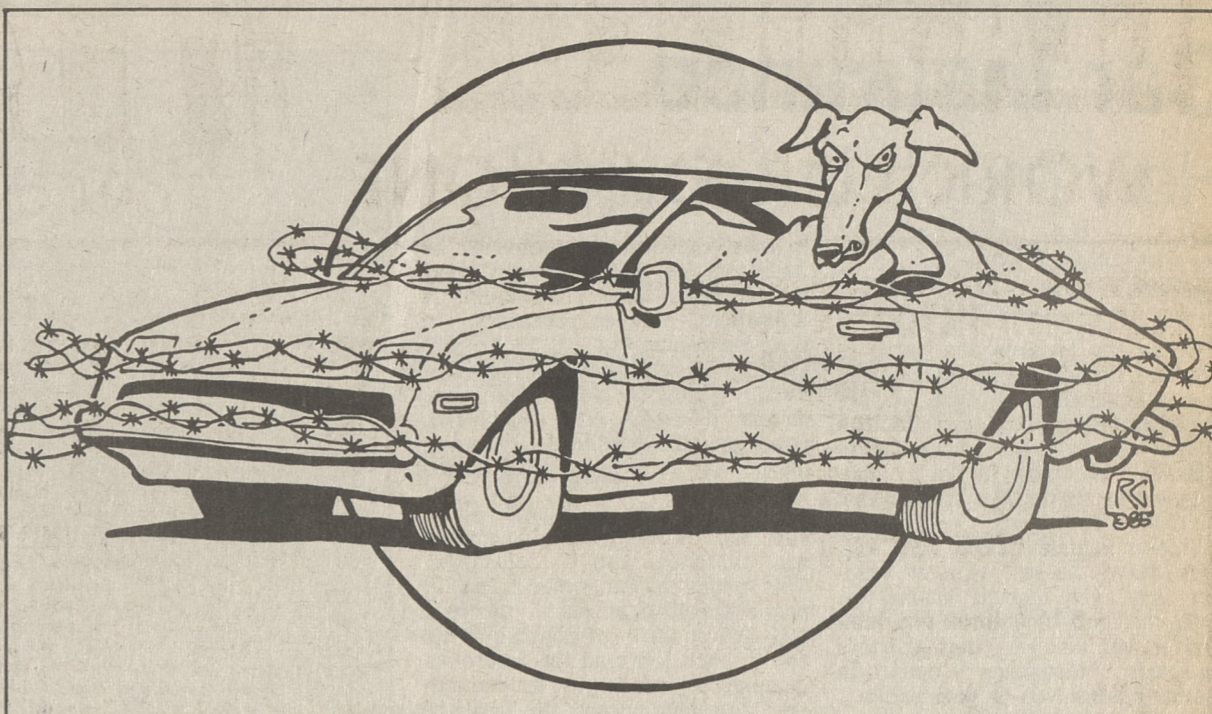
- If you park at the curb, install a light on the house that shines on the car, thus protecting your house as well as the car.

- If you have an alarm system, it is good to have a backup power source or two separate alarms, because if a thief gets to the power source, such as the battery, he can dismantle any alarm system.

- A very loud alarm is the best security, although Bledsoe admits a thief given any time can dismantle any system. An alarm buys time; it slows down a thief.

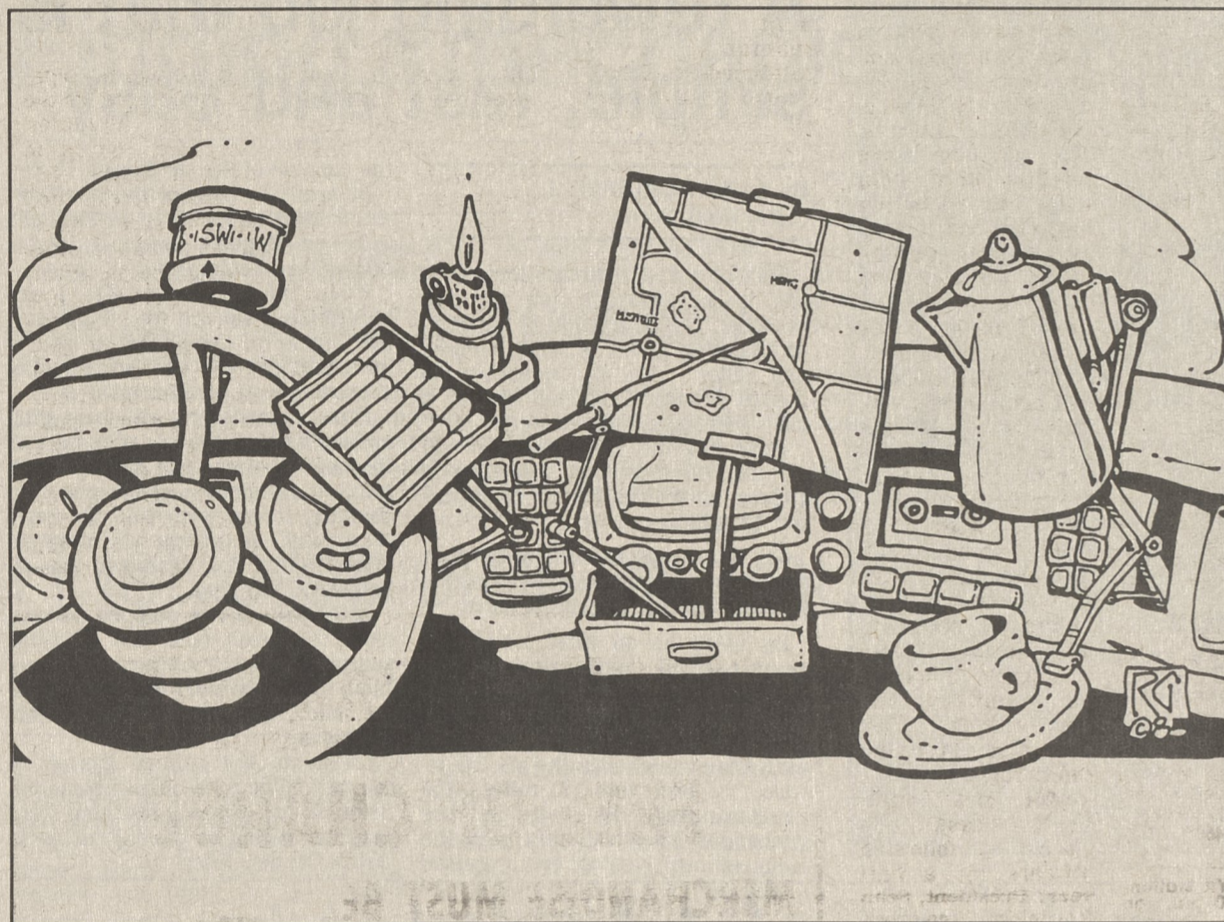
What happens when you actually see somebody trying to steal your or a neighbor's car? Don't rush up and accost him and certainly don't shoot, says Bledsoe, or you'll be the one to wind up on trial.

Simply, from a distance, call out, "Can I help you? That's my car." Then hasten inside and call the police.



### Be prepared

Be sure to do everything you can to protect your car against would-be thieves.



## Auto gadgets spell your personality

By NANETTE WISER  
Copley News Service

Today's consumer spends more money on his or her car than on a year's wardrobe.

So, if the car is the new consumer exoskeleton, why shouldn't it reflect individual personalities?

If your car isn't aglow with the froufrou of modern accessories that promise more mobile comfort, you're missing a chance to communicate who you are to the outside world.

What's hot in car gadgets? Start with car graffiti, from personalized license plate holders to bumper stickers.

If you own a Toyota, you may want a license plate holder that says, "My other car is a Mercedes." If you live in a state where tourism is not always welcome, you may opt for a bumper sticker that says, "Welcome to California. Now go home."

Some bumper stickers are more than graffiti, however. "Friends don't let friends drive drunk" and "Child in car" are safety reminders for the less-than-cautious tailgater you normally can't speak to.

Some parents prefer to go beyond the gentle bumper sticker reminder and follow the recommendation of the Automotive Information Council - and the regulation of many states - and use child safety seats.

Adult safety gadgets are equally important. Some people now attach an eye-level third brake light, an essential in stop-and-go freeway traffic. Other consumers prefer air cushion bags. According to a booklet published by the Insurance Information Institute, air bags could save 9,000 lives and prevent more than 50,000 major injuries in the United States each year. And air cushions are more convenient and less obtrusive than manual or automatic seat belts.

For those who worry about personal safety during

car breakdowns, there's an alternative to outside-the-car flares or cellular phones that allow you to call police from the safety of your car. A highway emergency banner allows you to stay in your car and post a banner that says, "Call police" to passing motorists.

Inter-car communication also can take on a less serious note. If you see a pretty girl in the next car, flash your "What's your phone number" or "Pull over at the next coffee shop for some coffee" flash note for a bit of fun.

Aside from communicating with others or promoting safety, there are gadgets that make your car less drab on the inside. Coffee cup holders that attach to the dashboard or floorboard or mugs with a pyramid-shaped bottom do away with spills while the car is moving. Talking book and language tape cassettes send inane radio chatter into the silent zone and allow the commuter to get smart while getting there. Tissue holders have expanded into compartmentalized mini-files, holding everything from a makeup mirror for easy touch-up to a Dictaphone.

High tech has wheels in today's new cars as well. Fluorescent dashboards, hood raindrop detectors that automatically activate the windshield wipers, soothing female voices that remind you your window isn't closed and digital dashboards with computer screens for electronic road mapping are just some of the innovations.

Fuel gauges aren't what they used to be, either. No more interpreting when the pointer is on "E" - today's car offers a bar chart gas gauge that turns yellowish-orange when fuel is almost nil.

Look to tomorrow for touch-sensitive digital display screens that turn on the radio and regulate temperature. Or punch in your coordinates before a trip and watch an arrow on the dash tell you what direction to head in.

### Gadgets galore!

If your car isn't filled with the most up-to-date in automobile gadgetry, you're missing out on a perfect opportunity to tell people who you are and what you're like.

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