

Cloned vehicles on a rising trend

Statistics released by the South African Insurance Crime Bureau have revealed that more than 66,000 vehicles, valued at approximately R8.5bn, were stolen or hijacked in South Africa last year.



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Car thieves have become experts in getting rid of a car's original identity number and information. But the question still remains, where do all these stolen cars eventually end up?

"It might sound like a sci-fi film but actually, these vehicles actually land up back on our roads using legitimate vehicle details," explains Elmarie Twilley, spokesperson for Afrikaans insurance brand, Virseker.

According to the Crime Bureau, 'cloned vehicles' are in effect stolen or previously damaged cars that are using details of existing vehicles. To clone a car, fraudsters use false number plates taken from a similar, but legitimate car, change the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) and produce a false registration document.

Difficult to combat

"The Crime Bureau also confirmed that cloned vehicles show a rising trend, which is not very easy to combat because large syndicates usually carry it out. Although there is no clarity on the exact numbers, it's estimated that they comprise of between 6 and 20% of all cars on the road. The Crime Bureau also reported that the cloned market seems to be less focused on specific models of vehicles and more on those in a low to medium price class," says Twilley.

"If you have inadvertently bought a vehicle, which is stolen, recourse is not always guaranteed. Remember that buying from a private seller is riskier. The onus is on you to make sure that your car isn't stolen before you buy it," says Twilley. "The car will be yours if you buy a stolen car that is, in due course, claimed or recovered."

Follow this checklist to ensure that your car has not been cloned:

- Buy your car from a reputable dealership.
- Always invest in a history check - it'll immediately reveal if a car is stolen or written-off.
- Inspect all the car documents properly to ensure that they're not fraudulent. Take your current registration document and use it to compare the watermarks, layout and font.
- Never buy a vehicle without a full registration document.
- Check the number plate and Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) match those recorded on the registration document.
- If the seller says he is a motor dealer, meet at his premises. A bona fide trader will also have printed invoices and a landline phone number. Ensure his address matches the address on the documentation.
- Beware of cars sold at a much lower price than similar models. If the seller is willing to drop the price even further, often because there is minor bodywork damage, then make further checks. A criminal will accept almost any amount rather than be caught with a stolen vehicle.