



# Behind the balaclava



Hijacking is nothing new to the South African way of life – but the truth behind the crime is far more complex than you may think...

Words: Michelle Loewenstein

**A**ttend any dinner party or function in Jo'burg, and the topic of crime is guaranteed to come up.

If you personally haven't been hijacked it's probably safe to say that you know someone who has.

As a society, we've become eerily desensitised to incidents of crime.

The latest stats from the South African Police Force show that the Trio Crimes (house robbery, business robbery and vehicle hijack) are slowly decreasing.

However, there's more to crime than meets the eye – especially when it comes to hijacking.

### THE FACTS

"There are a lot of emails doing the rounds about different types of hijackings," says Advocate Johan Jonck, founder of the Arrive Alive website. "People need to be wary of hoaxes."

According to Arrive Alive, there are five different types of hijackings, each varying in degrees of structure and modus operandi (MO).

Four of the five are of more interest to Sandtonistas, with the fifth one being freight hijackings.

The first one is transport. Your beloved beamer will be used as a way of getting from point A to point B during other crimes like robberies and drug deals. Thereafter the car is either sold for parts or dumped. What better way to ensure that you don't get caught than using someone else's car to do your dirty work?

The second and most chilling type of hijacking is one based on showmanship. Gang members steal cars as an ego crime, to show their peers they're brave enough to do it.

Operational hijackings are carried out by experienced criminals who have a goal in mind and aim to sell off the vehicles

they steal to established contacts.

And lastly, there are hijackings that take place based on the needs of a syndicate. Here a network of hijacking groups work together to achieve the goals of an outside coordinator. These are focused, organised crimes that are carried out meticulously and that are backed by vast sums of money.

"With syndicates, there is a much higher risk factor," says Jonck. "The criminals will go to much greater lengths to get the car that they want."

### FROM THE HIJACKER'S MOUTH

The Arrive Alive website features an interview with someone who is believed to be a hijacker. Some of the answers may surprise you...

**Q: Are most cars hijacked on order by syndicates?**

**A:** Yes, I would get a phone call to deliver a certain type of car by a certain deadline, and then we would go out and search for one. If they needed it quickly, I would hijack. If I had a bit more time I would steal a parked car, as it was safer.

**Q: Which types of vehicles are the most popular among hijackers?**

**A:** We would get orders to steal just about anything. Double-cab bakkies, any make, were in very high demand. Also, 'G-strings' (BMW 3 Series), Polos, Mercedes and Toyotas. I'd get paid a lot more for a double-cab, around R16 000, but only about R500 to R6 000 for a car. If it was an expensive car like the 'Anaconda' (BMW 7 Series) I could get about 15 grand, though.

**Q: Which cars have the lowest hijack risk?**

**A:** There's no such thing. There's a demand for all sorts of cars, old and new. If the vehicle is not sold then it's stripped for spares. The only thing there is not really an interest in is expensive exotics. I once stole a Ferrari from a garage

"With syndicates, there is a much higher risk factor, the criminals will go to much greater lengths to get the car that they want."



## WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

The Community Action Company (CAC), an organisation which operates out of the Gallo Manor police station and aims to promote community safety and community policing, suggests that you have the following numbers saved in your contacts on your phone under these easy to remember names:

Save the following under emergency:

- 10111: this is a charged call, but it goes straight to the police and emergency call centre
- 10177: for all ambulance and fire emergencies
- 112: free emergency call from your cellphone

Under the name ICE (in case of emergency)

- Save the names of the people that emergency services would contact in case of an emergency. Parents, partners and friends fall under this category.

Under the name police

- Save the number of your local police station. Always call 10111 for emergencies, but call the police station to follow up after an emergency. Find the phone number of your police station manager on the interactive map on the CAC homepage (cac.org.za).

Save the following numbers under JMPD:

- +27 (0)11 375 5911 – call centre
  - +27 (0)800 203 712 – JMPD anti-corruption
- City of Johannesburg Metro Police Department (JMPD)*

Save the following numbers under Crimeline

- 32211 and use this to SMS anonymous tip-offs.

## HOW TO AVOID A HIJACKING SITUATION:

Approaching and entering your driveway:

- 2km from your house strategy; be extra alert. Switch off the car radio and concentrate on your surroundings.
- Check your driveway and street before you leave or enter your premises.
- Make sure your driveway is well lit and clear of shrubbery where perpetrators can hide.
- Be aware of unknown pedestrians close to your residential address. Do not turn into your driveway – pass and go back later.
- Liaise with your neighbours – know them.
- Be aware of occupied vehicles parked close to your address. It may be perpetrators observing the area.
- Be alert if your animals do not greet you at the gate as usual. It may be that the perpetrators over-powered them.
- Phone your home and ask for someone to make sure your driveway is safe, and to open and close the gate for you.
- When returning home after dark, ensure that an outside light is on, or have someone meet you at the gate. Check with your armed response company if they are rendering rendezvous services.
- If at any time you have to open the gate yourself, switch off the vehicle, leave the key in the ignition and close the door.
- If you have small children in the vehicle, take the key with you. You need the key as a 'negotiating tool'. The perpetrators want your vehicle and you want your children.



just for fun, drove it around for a while and then left it back at the garage.

**Q: Do most of the cars that are not stripped end up beyond our borders?**

**A:** No, a lot stay in the country. They are given new identities, re-registered and sold here.

**Q: How effective are modern anti-theft and tracking systems?**

**A:** When I was stealing cars three years ago, most of them were a joke. I could break into almost any car and drive it away within minutes. Some cars were very advanced and a lot of work to steal, like Volvos. With tracking systems, it was usually very easy to find where the device was hidden. While one guy drove the car, his accomplices would strip the interior looking for the tracker's hiding place. Then sometimes we'd place the tracking unit into a taxi and trick the police and the helicopters into following the taxi. Nowadays the tracking systems are getting a lot better though, with quicker response times, and towards the end I nearly got caught a couple of times...

**Q: How did you learn how to override these high-tech systems?**

**A:** Experience, and learning from other car thieves. We all shared information. If I was having difficulty with a particular car, sometimes I'd dress up nicely and

go to a dealer posing as a customer. I'd ask the salesman how good the anti-theft system was on that car and he would give me all the details.

**Q: What was your hijacking modus operandi?**

**A:** We would get people in their driveways, on the way to work or on their way home. Rainy weather is the best time to steal cars. When it is raining it makes it more difficult for the tracking helicopters to find you.

**Q: In a hijacking did you normally go for soft targets like women?**

**A:** No, I could take on anyone. I was a professional... Some people wore guns but never got a chance to use them as I was too fast. I'd stick my gun right in their faces and they wouldn't give me any trouble. That's why I never shot or hurt anyone; I was against that. A friend of mine sometimes shot people he hijacked and he used to wake up with nightmares.

**Q: Which areas did you target?**

**A:** Any white suburb – it didn't matter. I never stole in the townships because people were poor there. I also didn't rob black people.

**Q: Is that because you don't like whites?**

**A:** No, it's because darkies are dangerous. If you rob them, they go to a sangoma who would 'take care' of you.