

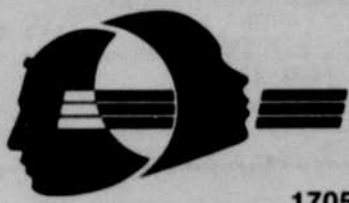
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Incidence of bike theft increasing; officials advise keeping bikes locked

By Charles Korn
Emerald Contributor

Riding a bike over slivers of glass is frustrating, battling oblivious motorists is maddening, but getting a bike ripped off is just plain grievous.

It's a bad year for bike theft in Eugene. Reported thefts through August totaled 864, an increase of 12 percent from last year's 771. And that's only the reported thefts.

"An amazing number of bike thefts go unreported," said Tim Birr, Eugene Police department public information officer. "Bike theft is a major problem in this city. There's a ready market out there."

Despite the recent increase, the incidence of bike thefts has remained consistently high since the late '60s, when the two-wheeler boomed as a stylish and economical way to get around town and campus.

But today's thefts aren't quite as numerous as they once were.

If this year's rate of 108 reported thefts a month continues, the total would still fall about 60 short of the 1,357 figure of 1970, when Eugene had some 20,000 fewer inhabitants.

However, the current dollar value is up considerably. The average stolen bike in 1970 was worth less than \$60; now it's worth \$200.

In a recent 24-hour period, the city received reports of six bikes stolen and five bikes found, but not necessarily with any connection. Birr said that many recovered bikes are never claimed.

Like carcasses in a slaughterhouse, more than 200 bikes hang on hooks at two Eugene impounding facilities. About 75 more are stored by the Office of Public Safety (OPS) at the University. Cable locks are coiled around several of the seat posts.

Most of these bikes aren't "hot" or even lukewarm. Some were abandoned. Others, especially on campus, were im-

pounded for being illegally parked in places such as doorways and handicapped-access ramps.

The Oregon finder's law requires that each bike be held for six months before it can be sold. Bikes still unclaimed after that time are sold at auctions, typically held every six months by the city and once a term by the University. The next auction on campus will be in January.

"Sometimes people pay a lot more than they're worth," said Margurite Hoglund, a city property clerk. She attributed that to the excitement of the bidding.

On the other hand, some bikes are auctioned for next to nothing. Suzie Hunter, OPS bike officer, said that some "sad-looking" bikes have sold for 25 cents. Even some high-quality frames have sold for less than a dollar, she said.

"We usually end up getting rid of everything," Hunter said.

Hoglund, who supervises the city's impounded bikes, said, "The sad part is that people haven't taken the responsibility to know their serial numbers."

All bicycles are inscribed with a serial number by the manufacturer. As an added precaution, the City of Eugene will engrave for no charge an Oregon driver's license number on the bike. (To make an appointment for that service, call 687-5189.)

Since June 1985, all bikes parked on campus are required to be registered through the OPS. The registration program is free and ensures the serial number is kept on record.

The OPS also loans engraving devices to students who want to mark their bikes and other valuables.

"The thing that frustrates me are people who have had their bikes stolen more than once and still haven't written down their serial number," Hoglund said.

Both Hoglund and Hunter said it's rare for the city or the OPS to release bikes without proof of ownership by the serial number. One exception might be when someone can open up a lock that's attached to the bike, Hoglund said.

Hunter said that nine out of 10 people who report theft of unregistered bikes don't know their numbers.

Birr said that even if the number has been filed off, police labs can bring it back through a process called "acid-etching." Serial numbers are entered in a national computer network, which makes it possible for stolen bikes to be retrieved far beyond the city or state, Birr explained.

Most stolen bikes, however, remain in the area, hocked for a



Photo by Cliff Etzel

Locking bicycles properly, with a U-lock to a secure object, is one way to curb incidents of bike theft in Eugene.

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