

Car theft, clout increasing in Eugene

Cars may not be safe even in locked parking garages as theft continues to be an increasing problem

Caron Alarab

Crime/Safety/Transportation Reporter

It took 10 confused minutes, several traced steps and two frantic phone calls before he came to the inevitable conclusion no car owner wants to accept.

It was gone.

Despite the protective guise of a locked parking garage, Sam Tanner's car had been stolen.

"Get an alarm," the West University resident said with a shrug. "There isn't a lot you can do."

According to preliminary Eugene Police Department statistics for 2002, "car theft" — theft of the entire vehicle — and "car clout" — theft from the vehicle — are constant problems in the neighborhoods surrounding the University. Car thefts in the West University neighborhood almost doubled from 35 in 2001 to 60 in 2002, while citywide numbers show an increase from 683 in 2001 to 834 in 2002. Out of the 2,310 car clouts reported in EPD's 2002 statistics, 175 were reported in the West University neighborhood.

But as the incidents reported to property managers range from stolen vehicles to stolen hubcaps, EPD Community Service Officer Erik C. Humphrey said parking garages may actually attract more criminals than deter them.

"Put yourself in the mind of the thief," he said. "Where are you going to be the most comfortable?"

According to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design — a nationwide law enforcement concept — the three components that determine if a car is a target are locks, lighting and landscap-

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Erik C. Humphrey
EPD

ing. Hence, if an underground garage isn't locked properly, well-lit or isn't open to public view, criminals will flock to it. Humphrey added a fourth criteria of his own: visible items to steal.

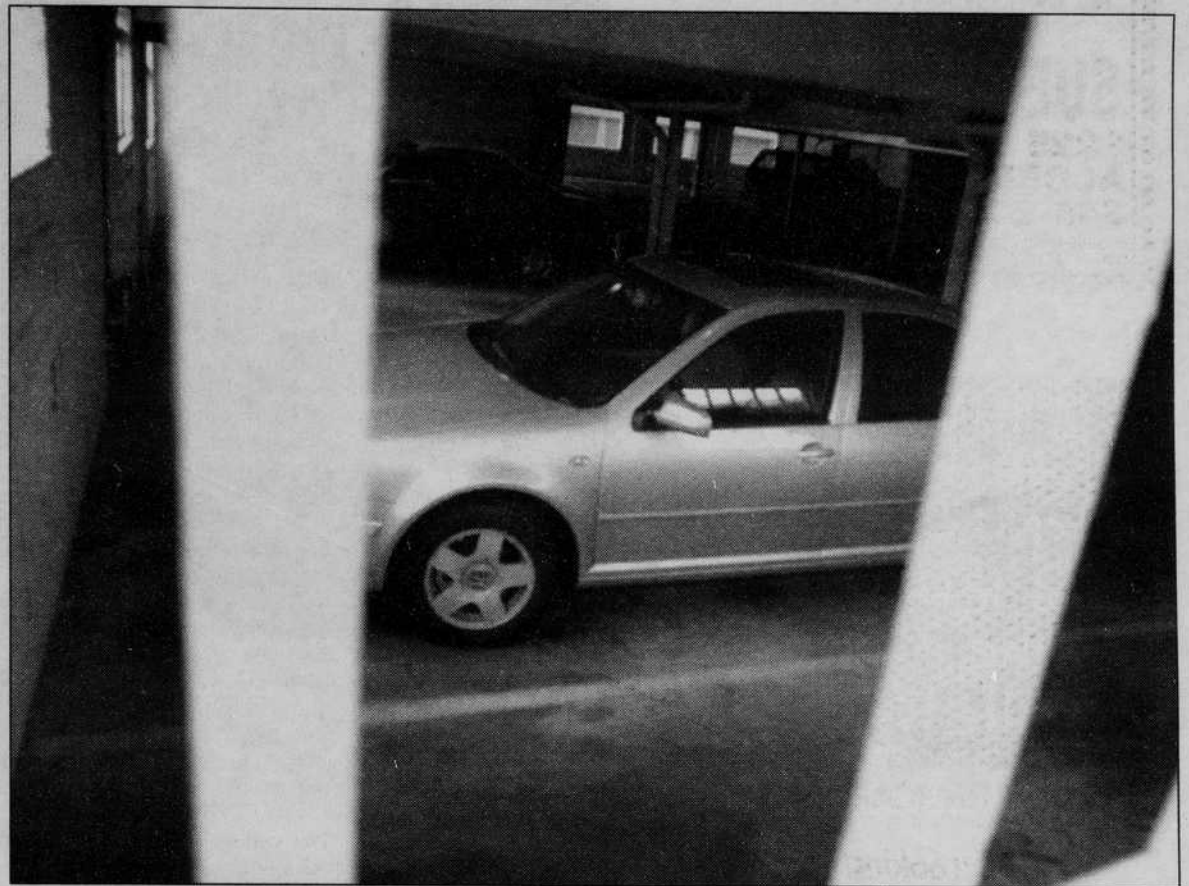
"More often than not, a criminal won't know what's in the gym bag in the back seat," he said. "But if it looks like anything, they'll break in just to take it."

Although Graduate student Matthew Robins never leaves anything visible in his car, especially after a small history of break-ins and four stolen stereos, his only deterrent is a detachable face-plate.

"If there is stuff in my car, I'll hide it," he said.

Robins has rented in the West University neighborhood since summer and said neither he nor his neighbors have reported any problems with car theft or clout. During the summer, he safely stored his car in the building's garage for three months without an alarm. But according to Humphrey, Robins was lucky not to fall victim to an increasingly related crime: identity theft.

"Students will leave vital information like registration information, old bank statements and even their student IDs in their car while still saying to themselves 'It'll never happen to me,'" he said.



Adam Amato Emerald

Erik C. Humphrey, an EPD officer warns that cars are targeted in parking garages because of locks, lighting and landscaping.

As the largest supplier of student housing around campus, von Klein Property Management L.L.C. recognizes the problem, stands by posted warnings and takes no liability.

"We are extremely concerned at all times," said Larry von Klein, an Oregon licensed real estate broker and part owner of the company, which manages more than 700 rental units.

He said all von Klein parking areas and garages post signs not to leave valuable items in cars, while managers advise against giving out gate codes or remote controls.

"Existing tenants give friends the gate codes even when managers tell them not to," he said, adding that he highly endorses renters' insurance for personal property.

Junior Megan Dorney has been renting in the West University neighborhood since September, and in the past three months, her dealership hubcaps and the emblem on her hood have been stolen.

"I think the alarm with the blinking light is what saves it," she said in regards to never having a break-in. "And it's really loud and annoying, too."

Since the incidents, Dorney has purchased cheaper replacements for her hubcaps and said she won't consider investing in dealership quality until she moves. With a term and a half left in her nine-month lease, her advice to potential victims of car crimes isn't exactly what would be posted on the wall of a parking garage, but it's what most tenants might expect: "Keep your fingers crossed and hope for the best."

Contact the reporter at caronalarab@dailyemerald.com.

News brief

Transportation bill in progress

Sens. Gordon Smith, R-Ore., and Ron Wyden, D-Ore., have worked closely on a bill to obtain federal funding for transportation projects and urban and community development programs across Oregon. The passage of the Omnibus Appropriations Act by the U.S. Senate on Thursday will provide funding for water treatment, transportation infrastructure, technology centers and community development centers in Oregon.

The bill included several features that will benefit University students and other citizens of Lane County. The Lane Transit Bus Facility will receive \$6 million for station improve-

ment, facility maintenance and bus purchase. Another \$750,000 is earmarked for area concept development for the Eugene Federal Courthouse. The bill will fund \$250,000 for drinking and waste water improvements in Eugene and Springfield. Finally, the Lane County Planetarium Learning Center will net \$1 million in federal funding.

"This bill funds a wide range of projects that are important to improving the quality of life in communities throughout Oregon," Smith said in a statement. It "will provide municipalities of all sizes the help they need to make their communities better places to live."

The bill must now be considered by a joint House-Senate conference before being sent to President George W. Bush for his signature.

— Jennifer Bear

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