



Paint spots thieves

Police push mandatory vehicle IDs

By NICOLE COX

WA police are driving a national campaign to eradicate organised vehicle rebirthing syndicates by calling on all car manufacturers to install sophisticated identification systems as a standard feature.

To better trace stolen cars, police commissioners will put forward a proposal at the Australian Police Ministers Conference next month to encourage carmakers to use hi-tech micro-dot products, which carry identifying codes that are invisible to the naked eye.

The pinhead-sized dots are contained in a paint which, once applied, glows under ultraviolet light to reveal a vehicle's unique 19-digit vehicle identification number.

Each car can have up to 10,000 dots sprayed over its major engine components, undercarriage fixtures and in the boot. The codes and corresponding owner information is stored on a worldwide database.

The National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council estimates that 20,000 cars "disappear" in Australia each year, with at least 5000 "rebirthed" as entire cars and many others dismantled for parts.

WA Police Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan said the campaign would target luxury and high-performance cars, such as Holden Monaro and HSV models, which were more lucrative to criminals.

BMW, Audi and Subaru vehicles are among those to have the micro-dot technology fitted on the production line, but Holden, Ford and Toyota do not.

Mr O'Callaghan said the plan had wide support at a meeting of Australian police commissioners in Adelaide a fortnight ago.

"Organised criminals target the high end of the market, and over the next 12 months we will encourage the car industry to look to micro-dot technology," he said.

"In WA, the rate of car thefts is down, but the percentage of unrecovered cars has

gone up because organised criminals are involved in the rebirthing market."

But Mr O'Callaghan said it might be hard to persuade manufacturers to foot the cost.

"It could increase prices by \$200 or \$300," he said.

National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council executive director Ray Carroll said micro-dots were a positive step in curbing rebirthing, but making them mandatory on the production line could be costly and time-consuming for manufacturers.

Only 10 per cent of Australia's 700,000-plus passenger cars were marked with micro-dots during production, he said.

"Rebirthing is a lucrative business," he said. "We estimate the stolen parts market alone at \$300 million a year.

"Until now, it's been relatively easy to counterfeit the VIN number or move it from one car to another. With data dots, the crooks can never be sure they can get them all off. You basically have to destroy the whole car to get rid of them."

Retired superintendent Jim King, now a representative for Australian micro-dot product DataDot Technology, said car manufacturers that had invested in the product had seen great results in reductions in the number of rebirthed cars.

"The proof is in the pudding as far as I'm concerned," said Mr King, who worked in crime prevention for WA Police between 1975 and 1996.

"There has been a 92 per cent reduction in the rebirthing of Subarus since 2002.

"The crims know the cars with dots and they are not pinching them."

■ Last financial year, 920 stolen cars in WA were unrecovered — the fourth highest number of any Australian state, with New South Wales heading the list with 6744. In WA, 140 stolen cars, valued at more than \$15,000 each, were not recovered last financial year.



Sunday Times
Sunday 15/10/2006
Page: 60
Section: General News
Region: Perth Circulation: 347,500
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 422.68 sq.cms.
Published: -----S

Index: 1.3
Brief: RDATA DOT
Page 2 of 2



JOINING THE DOTS: Former police superintendent Jim King demonstrates a new technology to combat car thefts