



future torque

With **Pedr Davis**

Secure position

To some thieves, car theft is a multi-billion-dollar-a-year business; to owners it's usually a cause of major grief. But even if your car has an engine immobiliser, it's not necessarily thief-proof. According to a recent ABC Four Corners program, around 85,000 motor vehicles are stolen in Australia each year.

Many are taken when a thief breaks into a home and finds the car keys in an obvious place. Some are winched onto a truck and driven away. Others are ransacked when parked – the intruder busts open the door or smashes a window to get at the luggage, sound equipment or airbags.

Though thefts are still numerous, high-tech devices such as engine immobilisers have made life more difficult for thieves. What's more, some cars are fitted with satellite-tracking devices so they can be quickly located if stolen.

Most late models have an immobiliser that usually works in conjunction with the remote door-locking system. It isolates the starter, ignition and/or fuel delivery systems to prevent the engine being started without the correct key.

Typically, a transponder converts electronically coded signals into radio signals. When the key goes into the ignition slot, a data interchange takes place between the key and ignition. A microcomputer evaluates the data and, if the codes match, the immobiliser is de-activated.

An Australian-invented immobiliser, now used worldwide, employs 'rolling codes' that constantly change, so that even an electronic

'whiz-kid' would need several hours to defeat the immobiliser.

A good unit should automatically reset when the engine is switched off. It incorporates hard-to-bypass wiring and its relays are buried within the electrical system, so they cannot be easily found. The system comes on automatically if any wire is cut.

Some designs have an electronic key pad with a coded device that prevents the engine starting until the correct PIN is entered. An alternative is the coded touch key that must be inserted in a dashboard slot to disarm the immobiliser.

Many cars are stolen for joy riding. Others

are 'rebirthed', that is given a different chassis number then re-registered and sold. Some are stripped for their components.

There are several deterrents against rebirthing. One is to have the windows etched with part of the Vehicle Identification Number. This is best used in conjunction with full electronic security.

DataDot identification technology is a clever deterrent against breaking up a car to sell its components: the dots on the stolen parts shine under ultraviolet light and make it possible to identify and trace the owner. Each dot is about the size of a sand grain and made from a polyester substrate in clear-drying adhesive; it is laser-etched with the vehicle's VIN.

Thieves try to grind them off but many DataDots remain hidden and cannot be easily found. The concept started in 1948 but only recently have several manufacturers adopted it as standard.

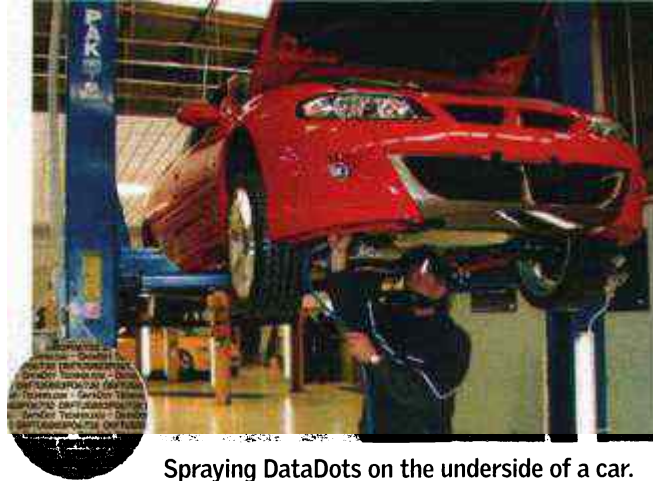
No matter how sophisticated your security system, it is wise to avoid lengthy parking in secluded places. Thieves need plenty of time to enter a car and defeat the anti-theft equipment. Don't give it to them.





The Road Ahead
Monday 25/12/2006
Page: 50
Section: General News
Region: National Circulation: 869,678
Type: Magazines Lifestyle
Size: 213.44 sq.cms.
Published: Bi-Monthly

Index: 1.1
Brief: DATADOT
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Spraying DataDots on the underside of a car.