

# Stopping by joining \$300m-a-year cost

# car scam the dots of illegal spare parts

## EXCLUSIVE

By RHETT WATSON Police Reporter

IT can take as little as three minutes — stolen cars are being stripped for spare parts in an industry costing \$300 million a year.

And car manufacturers stand accused of being measly for not providing the protection which could help police reduce the crime.

The National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council has accused the automotive industry of neglecting the security of its customers.

"It costs on average \$65 a car to apply micro dots [which provide individual identification for the car's parts] and they're not doing it," executive director Ray Carroll said.

"If we had all of vehicle identification in all new cars right now then in 10 years we'd have this problem licked."

Police yesterday confirmed that the illegal spare parts industry was substantial. A large portion of cars stolen and not recovered were being stripped to feed the industry, with many returning to the legitimate market.

In some cases young thieves were being paid in kind with drugs to steal cars that could be stripped, Mr Carroll said.

More than 6500 stolen cars were not recovered last year.

These were generally either used for spare parts, rebirthed, sold overseas or, in a small number, simply dumped.

In many cases cars are not only stripped down to a skeleton — with thieves taking everything from body panels to internal linings — but then the chassis is sold for scrap metal, to ensure every part is used.

"They can strip a car in three minutes if they're not worried about damaging it," Mr Carroll said.

"Sometimes they're using metal saws to cut out what they want."

The NSW Police's Property Crime Squad has a full-time team tackling organised car theft.

While rebirthing used to be a major problem, squad commander Superintendent Nick Bingham confirmed the police crackdown and changes in vehicle identification rules had reduced the problem.

The illegal spare parts market is slowly taken over.

"The illegal spare parts industry is reasonably large. It would be the largest portion of the problem now," he said.

Supt Bingham said police had backed calls for better overall car part identification.

The problem is that once a part is removed from a car there is nothing to identify where it came from, which means police can not prove it is stolen.

The Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries denied manufacturers were cheap, instead saying car rebirthers were purely to blame.

And executive officer Peter Sturrock confirmed a trial by a small number of car companies using micro dot identifiers had provided "prima facie" evidence of reducing car theft.

However, he said the process of applying the dots was "not inexpensive".

And he claimed police did not have the technology to read the micro dots.

Supt Bingham said this was incorrect and his squad not only had the technology but had used it to make arrests.



WHAT THE PARTS ARE WORTH

No. 1 target ... the Holden Commodore



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## Old bombs stolen for scrap

THE rise in scrap metal prices means those old bombs we thought would never be nicked are now prime targets.

The National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council reports cars 20 years old and older are being stolen, not only for the occasional spare part, but to be recycled into things such as tuna cans.

Executive director Ray Carroll said an illegal spare parts market remained for old cars but that the rise in scrap metal prices meant some were worth more crushed.

"A lot of people think no one will steal their old bomb but you'll find your old bomb is still worth something in parts

and definitely for scrap," he said. "We've noticed a spike recently in old cars being stolen."

The council has reports of people stealing old cars off the street.

"We know of incidents where people have walked out of their houses to see someone winching their old car onto a flat-bed truck," Mr Carroll said.

"They've seen it and yelled out, 'What are you doing?' and the person has just simply said, 'Oh sorry. Must have the wrong street but I thought it was this one to be taken away'."

"I guess at \$150 a tonne, if you do 10 cars a day it's not a bad little earner."