

Car Key Burglary Analysis 2009



Analysis of the increasing prevalence of “Car Key Theft & Burglary” as a modus operandi by UK car thieves

INTRODUCTION

Nice 1 Ltd are the providers of [Theft Protect](#) Replacement Vehicle Insurance.

The product is provided to the UK motorist by its network partnership with motor manufacturers, dealerships, finance companies and insurance brokers.

As part of its service to the motoring public and network partners, Nice 1 produce regular updates on vehicle crime in the UK, including up-to-date statistical and media information by geographic area, manufacturer theft incident rates, crime ratio's. The company looks closely at police force performance, latest car security measures and the current modus operandi (criminal methods) of the car thief.

Information is provided in conjunction with the Home Office and Thatcham, the insurance industry advisors on car security, so that consumers are informed about vehicle security and car buying decisions, and the effect this has on annual insurance premiums.

For more information please visit the Theft Protect website at www.theftprotect.co.uk

The consumer blog can be viewed by [clicking here](#)

Motor Trade professionals can view their blog by [clicking here](#)

Insurance brokers can view their blog by [clicking here](#)

The British Crime Survey, or BCS is produced once a year jointly by The Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, relevant teams at the Home Office & National Statistics Office.

[Nice 1 Ltd](#) analyse the contents and data to identify geographical and socio economic patterns as they pertain to car crime and more recently offences of burglary. This latter exercise has become more relevant with the advent of "[Car Key Burglary](#)", where an offender will break into a domestic dwelling house, taking car keys and stealing a vehicle as they make their getaway. To read the Nice 1 in depth study [click here](#).

The British Crime Survey, useful though it is as a guide to crime trends, is only published once a year in July, and relates to offences committed in the twelve month period ending in December of the previous year. It is therefore six months out of date on the date of publication.

Nice 1 liaise with Home Office statistical resource facilities and the 43 separate police forces of England and Wales to produce regular, up-to-date crime statistics that are of greater interest and relevance to the motoring consumer and the companies insurance partners.

This report will use extracts from the British Crime Survey and recorded Police Crime data, both historic and current, to perform this analysis. The report will also refer to relevant insurance and motor trade associated articles on the subject in an effort to provide a broader perspective.

The British Crime Survey & Police Recorded Crime

The Home Office publishes figures on the levels and trends of crime in England and Wales based on two sets of crime statistics, the British Crime Survey (BCS) and police recorded crime data. Each source has different strengths and weaknesses but together they provide a more comprehensive picture of crime than could be obtained from either series alone.

These crime statistics are published four times a year; a main annual volume with extensive headline figures and commentary and three quarterly updates which provide a summary of latest BCS and recorded crime statistics at the national level. Additionally, a number of supplementary volumes are produced, containing in-depth analysis of issues such as perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Police recorded crime

The Home Office collates and publishes recorded crime data supplied by the 43 police forces of England and Wales, plus the British Transport Police. This data is supplied on a monthly basis in an aggregated return for each crime within the notifiable offence list. Notifiable offences include all 'indictable' offences that could possibly be tried by jury (these include some less serious offences, such as minor theft that would not usually be dealt with this way) plus a few additional closely related offences, such as assault without injury. Information on recorded crimes that are detected is collected in the same way. Annual data is published on a financial year basis.

Recorded crime figures are an important indicator of police workload, can be used for local crime pattern analysis and provide a good measure of trends in well-reported crimes.

However, they do not include crimes that have not been reported to the police or incidents that the police decide not to record. It is estimated that around 42 per cent of all BCS crime is reported to the police although this varies for individual offence types.

Vehicle offences

The BCS includes offences against private households only and includes cars, vans, motorbikes, motor-scooters or mopeds used for non-commercial purposes. It identifies three vehicle theft categories:

Theft of vehicles where the vehicle is driven away illegally, whether or not it is recovered.

Theft from vehicles refers to both theft of parts and accessories of motor vehicles, and to theft of contents.

Attempted thefts of and from vehicles No distinction is made between attempted thefts of and attempted thefts from motor vehicles, as it is often very difficult to ascertain the offender's intention.

If parts or contents are stolen as well as the vehicle being moved, the incident is classified as theft of a motor vehicle.

The police recorded crime category of offences against vehicles covers private and commercial vehicles (although does not distinguish between the two) and comprises:

Thefts and attempted thefts of vehicles where the intent is to permanently deprive the owner.

Unauthorised taking of a vehicle where intent to permanently deprive the owner is not evident – this would typically include ‘joyriding’ where the car is later recovered.

Aggravated vehicle taking where a vehicle once taken is known to have been driven dangerously, damaged or caused an accident.

Thefts and attempted thefts from a vehicle targeting property in or on the vehicle.
Interfering with a motor vehicle which includes attempts to drive away without apparent intent to permanently deprive the owner. This mostly includes recorded crime offences where there is evidence of intent to commit either theft of or from a vehicle or taking without consent (TWOC), but there is either:

- (i) No evidence of intent to commit one of these three offences specifically, or
- (ii) There is evidence of intent to commit TWOC (TWOC is a summary offence but, under the provisions of the Criminal Attempts Act 1981, it is not legally valid to have an attempted summary offence).

Interfering with a motor vehicle offences are equivalent to the offence class formerly referred to as ‘vehicle interference and tampering’. The BCS cannot separately identify this category. In comparisons with the BCS it is included in the attempted vehicle theft category but in some instances could be viewed as criminal damage or even a nuisance.

The taking of vehicles during robberies (often termed car-jacking) are included within the robbery offence group. As such, reporting the car crime as a robbery artificially suppresses and distorts the car crime statistics in both BCS and Police Reported Crime data.

The Disparity Between The BCS & Police Recorded Crime

It has been stated that the police recorded offence numbers are less than half of those reported by the BCS.

From the 2008/9 survey :-

- The BCS reported a figure of 10,687,000 total offences.
- Police recorded a figure of 4,703,814 total reportable offences.

This disparity causes considerable confusion when assimilating the data within the report.

*"The overall number of BCS incidents are **ESTIMATED** for England and Wales based on the incidence rate and using population estimates for the household and adult populations. In 2008/09 incidence rates for household crimes were multiplied by 23,848,680 households and, for personal crimes, by 44,265,687 adults to provide the number of incidents for each crime type. Published estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000 incidents".*

How do crimes included in the BCS and police recorded crime differ?

- The BCS provides a measure of the level of crime committed against the population resident in households in England and Wales, whereas recorded crime is a measure of those crimes reported to the police (estimated by the BCS to be only 42% comparable crime) and then recorded by them.
- The BCS includes crimes that are not reported to or recorded by the police, but is limited to crimes against adults resident in households, and also does not cover all crime types.
- Differences in the profile of offences between the two sources are influenced by the different coverage of the BCS and police recorded crime; for example, recorded crime includes crime experienced by under 16s and commercial premises, and the BCS does not.
- Some crimes are more likely to be reported and recorded than others, overall less than half of BCS crime is reported to the police.
- The methodology and categories of police recorded crime often produces distortion (usually downward) of the real picture. For instance, Jacqui Smith, when Home Secretary, reported that there were 18,600 offences of car theft (by stealing keys) which were contained within the domestic burglary rates and not reported in the vehicle theft statistics. This suppresses and distorts the car crime figures produced in the 2008/9 report.
- An example of the distortion effect is drugs offences, which show a 95% detection rate. The nature of the offence is such that most incidents are only identified when the offender is apprehended thus producing a disproportionately high detection rate. As the non reported offences are not quantified, it is not possible to determine the real size of the problem.
- A further example is that of property crime. A victim is more likely to report an incident of house burglary or car theft if intending to make a claim on an insurance policy. A crime reference number is the pre requisite for such claims being indemnified by insurers.

NON REPORTING OF CRIME TO THE POLICE

Percentage of BCS incidents reported to the police 1981 to 2008/09 BCS

Percentages	1981	1991	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Burglary	66	73	61	65	62	61	65	66	64	65
With entry	81	88	77	81	75	72	77	77	73	76
Attempts	42	48	41	43	45	42	47	51	50	49
With loss	85	92	85	87	78	77	81	81	76	83
No loss (including attempts)	48	53	45	49	49	49	53	55	54	53
Vehicle-related theft	41	56	52	50	48	49	49	47	48	45
Theft from vehicles	30	53	48	47	45	45	45	43	44	41
Theft of vehicles	95	99	94	97	95	95	94	93	93	89
Attempts of and from	31	41	40	36	34	37	40	38	40	38
ALL BCS CRIME	31	43	40	41	40	40	40	39	39	38

The table shows clearly that the BCS data indicates that victims report crime in less than 50% of the incidents. As we are examining the effect on Car Crime and Burglary in particular, these are the offences illustrated in the table.

Burglary : Only the offences where loss is occasioned, and presumably an insurance claim will follow reflect a reporting % we would perhaps expect.

Car Crime : Again, only theft of the vehicle results in a higher reporting %, presumably to support an insurance claim. It is striking however, that even this % is reducing. This might reflect the increasing number of lower value vehicles being stolen, where the cost of an insurance claim may exceed the cost of replacing the stolen vehicle.

Overall, 65% burglary and 45% car crime reporting figures are considerably lower than we might expect to see.

The BCS reports a variety of reasons by interviewees as to why the offence was not reported:-

Percentages			2008/09 BCS
	Burglary	Thefts from vehicles & attempts	All BCS crime
Trivial/no loss/police would not/could not do anything	72	87	76
Private/dealt with ourselves	18	7	14
Inconvenient to report	4	7	5
Reported to other authorities	3	2	4
Common occurrence	4	1	2
Fear of reprisal	2	1	2
Dislike or fear of the police/previous bad experience with the police or courts	0	1	1
Other	6	3	5

Figures may add to more than 100 as more than one reason could be given.

It is reasonable to conclude from the “Car Key Burglary” analysis later, reflecting the under-reporting of car crime, and the high incidence of non reporting, that car crime is significantly higher than the levels recorded by the police.

- The data relating to car crime incidents is flawed. The existing offence per 1000 data is displayed per 1000 head of population. The number of vehicles on the road is a more accurate comparator. There are 34million licensed vehicles vs 61million head of population, so the rate per 1000 is almost twice the rate actually presented.

The Distortion Of Car Crime By Reporting as Burglary/Robbery

The true scale of vehicle crime is being masked because of how offences are recorded and a change in the way thieves are targeting cars.

Figures published by the Home Office reveal a fall of 14% for car theft in 2008, based on police figures and the British Crime Survey.

But, according to research carried out by Nice 1, the crime figures are artificially suppressed by misallocating car theft statistics under house burglary, where an offender breaks in to steal car keys. The former Home Secretary Jacqui Smith when pressed for these numbers, revealed that 18,600 incidents of car key theft occurred in 2008 across the 43 police forces of England and Wales. The effect of this distortion is shown in tables that follow later in the report.

According to insurer esure, 90% of high value car thefts in 2008 involved the use of the original keys, with a high proportion of them stolen from the owner's home.

So, while the Home Office is reporting a fall in vehicle crime, it indicates a rise in burglary, concealing the real problem of rising car theft.

Home Office findings suggest that criminals are now concentrating on stealing car keys in order to get around immobilisers. A Home Office analysis of 8,303 incidents of thefts and attempted thefts of cars in the Northumbria and Greater Manchester areas concludes that there does appear to be some evidence of an increase in the theft of keys over time, particularly through burglaries.

Key points of the Home Office Analysis

- For cars registered after 1997, keys were used in 85% of incidents where the method of theft was known.
- The most common methods of obtaining keys were through burglary (37%) and through the owner leaving the keys in the car (18%). Here, cars were targeted in sites where drivers were separated from their vehicles for a short period and where normal security measures may be neglected (e.g. private driveways, business premises, petrol stations, outside shops).
- There was a rise in the proportion of key thefts during robberies, almost doubling from around 2% to nearly 4% over the 3 years. Although these numbers are very small, this could be evidence of a trend towards more concerted attempts to steal cars.

How car theft stands nationally

- Thefts of vehicles accounts for around 6% of all crime recorded. All vehicle related theft incidents account for nearer 20%.
- Most recent figures suggest that 76% of car thefts were of cars more than 3 years old.
- Overall then, new cars are more secure and can not simply be stolen by forcing the ignition, car keys are being stolen instead.

UK Car Crime Dec 2008 - Feb 2009						
Forces reporting a decrease in car theft where burglary is on the increase						
Police Force Area	CAR THEFT			BURGLARY		
	2008	2009	+/-	2008	2009	+/-
Cambridgeshire	1873	1866	-0.37%	1764	2505	+42%
Surrey	626	612	-2.24%	642	862	+34%
Dyfed-Powys	396	372	-6.06%	448	545	+22%
Cumbria	504	464	-8%	545	642	+18%
Gtr Manchester	1000	831	-17%	1904	2203	+16%
Hampshire	4034	3532	-12%	1293	1466	+13%
Lincolnshire	974	859	-12%	1393	1486	+7%
Leicestershire	2608	2137	-18%	2645	2805	+6%
Essex	3973	3161	-20%	3553	3663	+3%
Forces reporting an increase in car crime						
Police Force Area	CAR THEFT			BURGLARY		
	2008	2009	+/-	2008	2009	+/-
Sussex	2835	3991	+41%	2771	2726	-1.62%
Gwent	1636	1881	+15%	613	590	-3.75%
Dorset	1114	1246	+12%	1228	1458	+19%
Derbyshire	1914	2098	+10%	2206	2320	+5%
Suffolk	1124	1198	+7%	1325	1556	+17%
Durham	1155	1224	+6%	1486	1639	+10%
Warwickshire	1267	1333	+5%	1323	1410	+7%

A glance at this table tells the story. Cambridgeshire reports a small reduction in car crime, yet a 42% increase in burglary. How many car thefts resulted from those burglaries and do not appear in the car crime statistics?

Greater Manchester reports a 16% reduction in car theft, yet a 17% increase in burglary. Lincolnshire reports a 12% drop in car theft yet a 7% increase in burglary. Again, how many car thefts are being masked by the rise in burglary numbers?

We have only published here, the forces showing a decline in car theft and a rise in burglary to illustrate the discrepancy. Hidden among the other force areas are many thousands of car theft incidents lost amid the burglary statistics.

Many forces are undoubtedly performing well and they are to be commended for their efforts. The UK motoring public however, has a right to freedom of accurate information about crime in the UK. With so many car thefts occurring following a theft of keys during a burglary, the car theft numbers are reported in a distorted manner.

A Parliamentary answer given by Home Secretary Jacqui Smith suggested that last year over 15,700 cars disappeared because the keys were stolen during a burglary and a further 2,900 drivers were robbed to obtain keys by, for example, mugging, pickpocketing or carjacking. This represents 11 per cent of the 170,000 cars recorded as stolen during 2007/08 in the 2008 British Crime Survey published by the Home Office.

Rank: Police area	Robbery	Burglary	Total
1: Metropolitan Police	1000	2479	3479
2: Greater Manchester	627	1851	2478
3: West Yorkshire	112	2113	2225
4: West midlands	377	1134	1411
5: Thames Valley	40	843	883
6: Merseyside	92	783	875
7: Essex	79	579	658
8: South Yorkshire	45	605	650
9: Nottinghamshire	47	434	481
10: Hertfordshire	16	407	422
UK totals	2858	15741	18599

Top 10 police force areas for cars 'Stolen during a robbery' and 'Stolen during a domestic burglary' (source: Answer by the Rt. Hon Jacqui Smith MP to a question posed by the shadow Home Secretary, Chris Grayling MP on 23rd March 2009). This is the first time these figures have been made available and, according to the Home Secretary, from April 2009 they will no longer be collected.

The important point for the purposes of this statistical analysis, is that 18,600 car crime incidents are omitted from that category in both the BCS and recorded police offences within the 2008/9 survey. This implications of this point will be examined in closer detail later.

Note: Data is not available for South Wales or Humberside. Scottish figures are not collected by the Home Office.

The Effect Of Misallocating "Car Key Burglary" Statistics

Table 2.01 Trends in BCS incidents of crime

Numbers and percentage changes

	2007/08	2008/09	Variance	%
Burglary	737,000	744,000	7,000	0.95%
With entry	438,000	452,000	14,000	3.20%
Attempts	299,000	292,000	-7,000	-2.34%
Vehicle-related theft	1,508,000	1,514,000	6,000	0.40%
Theft from vehicles	1,002,000	1,059,000	57,000	5.69%
Theft of vehicles	162,000	150,000	-12,000	-7.41%
		18,600		
	162,000	168,600	6,600	4.07%
Attempts of and from	344,000	305,000	-39,000	-11.34%

This table is a straight lift from the BCS section on property crime.

Firstly, there exists a disparity between the BCS number of vehicle related thefts and the police recorded figure in table 2.04 on the next page.

- The BCS figure is 1,514,000 for 2008/09

- Police figure is 592,117 for the same period

The theft of vehicles incidents from BCS is reported as 150,000 for 2008/09. This reflects a 12,000 reduction on the 07/08 year -7.41%

Factoring in the 18,600 offences known to have been reported as house burglary increases the BCS figure to 168,600 reversing the trend to a 6,600 increase +4.07%

The disparity between the BCS vehicle crime incidents and that of the police recorded figure is dramatic, with the latter representing only 39% of the BCS. Even factoring in the non reporting of crime element, the difference appears hard to reconcile.

Which figure is nearer to the true picture?

	BCS	Police	Variance
Total Vehicle Crimes	1,514,000	592,000	922,000
Theft from vehicles	1,059,000	396,990	662,010 ✓
Theft of vehicles	150,000	137,749	12,251 ✓
Attempts of and from	305,000	0	305,000 ✓
Interference	0	47,657	47,657 ✓
Aggravated vehicle taking	0	9,721	9,721 ✓

The theft from vehicles & attempts figures from the BCS would seem to be closer to the actual numbers, bearing in mind the under reporting of 62% & 59% reflected in the earlier table.

Taking into account the 18,600 misallocated thefts of vehicles mentioned earlier, it is reasonable to assume that the BCS figure is closer to the actual number of incidents.

As there are no comparators for the interference and aggravated offences, the police recorded numbers should be treated as accurate.

The conclusion we would therefore draw, is that the overall vehicle theft incidents presented by the BCS is likely to be more accurate than the police recorded numbers.

Table 2.04 Police Recorded crime by offence, and % change between 2007/08 and 2008/09

Offence	2007/08	2008/09	% change 2007/08 to 2008/09
Burglary in a dwelling	279,134	282,989	1
Aggravated burglary in a dwelling	1,574	1,456	-7
Total burglary in a dwelling	280,708	284,445	1
of which: distraction burglary	10,058	9,092	-10
Burglary in a building other than a dwelling	302,792	296,769	-2
Aggravated burglary in a building other than a dwelling	214	183	-14
Total burglary in a building other than a dwelling	303,006	296,952	-2
TOTAL BURGLARY OFFENCES	583,714	581,397	0
Aggravated vehicle taking	10,332	9,721	-6
Theft from a vehicle	432,387	396,990	-8
Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	159,684	137,749	-14
Interfering with a motor vehicle	53,993	47,657	-12
TOTAL OFFENCES AGAINST VEHICLES	656,396	592,117	-10

Table 2.04 (amended) Police Recorded crime by offence, and % change 2007/08 vs 2008/09

Offence	2007/08	2008/09	% change 2007/08 to 2008/09
Burglary in a dwelling	279,134	282,989	1
Aggravated burglary in a dwelling	1,574	1,456	-7
Total burglary in a dwelling	280,708	284,445	1
of which: distraction burglary	10,058	9,092	-10
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Theft from a vehicle	432,387	396,990	-8
Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	159,684	137,749	
		18,600	
	159,684	156,349	-2
Interfering with a motor vehicle	53,993	47,657	-12
TOTAL OFFENCES AGAINST VEHICLES	656,396	610,717	-7

Applying the refactoring of the missing "Car Key Burglary" (CKB) offences into the police recorded crime statistics has the following effect :-

	Less CKB	Inc CKB
Theft of vehicles offences	137,749	156,349
% Variance on 07/08 year	-14%	-2%
Total Vehicle Theft Incidents	592,117	610,717
% Variance on 07/08 year	-10%	-7%

Some observations should be clear from this exercise.

- The under reporting issue on the higher volume theft incidents render the accuracy of the police recorded statistics for total incidents of vehicle theft as valueless.
- Assuming the police incidents for theft of vehicles is more accurate when the CKB numbers are factored back in, this has a major impact on the -14% car crime figure that has appeared so boldly in media reports. The actual reduction in thefts of vehicles is no more than the -2% shown, and is more likely closer to the 4% increase reflected by the amended BCS figure.

HOW "CAR KEY BURGLARY" REPORTING DISTORTS THE POLICE CAR CRIME FIGURES

A table earlier in the document listed the top 10 forces that record Car Key Burglary as burglary dwelling, thereby suppressing the car theft statistics.

The table below shows the effect of this distortion as it relates to the 10 forces mentioned.

How "Car Key Burglary" Distorts The Police Recorded Car Theft Figures - 2008/09

Force	Population figures (thousands)	Theft of a motor vehicle offences recorded 07/08	Theft of a motor vehicle offences recorded 08/09	Theft of a motor vehicle change 07/08-08/09 (%)	Theft of a motor vehicle offences per 1,000 population 08/09	Car Key Burglary Incidents 08/09	Theft of a motor vehicle offences (REVISED) 08/09	Theft of a motor vehicle REVISED change 07/08-08/09 (%)	T.O.M.V. REVISED offences per 1,000 population 08/09
1. Metropolitan Police	7,549	33,717	28,924	-14	4	2,479	31,403	-6.9	4
2. West Yorkshire	2,181	8,429	8,189	-3	4	2,113	10,302	22.2	5
3. Greater Manchester	2,562	12,403	10,631	-14	4	1,851	12,482	0.6	5
4. West Midlands	2,604	10,741	9,445	-12	4	1,134	10,579	-1.5	4
5. Thames Valley	2,180	6,069	5,364	-12	2	843	6,207	2.3	3
6. Merseyside	1,350	4,561	3,765	-17	3	783	4,548	-0.3	3
7. South Yorkshire	1,299	6,481	5,570	-14	4	605	6,175	-4.7	5
8. Essex	1,688	5,041	4,079	-19	2	579	4,658	-7.6	3
9. Nottinghamshire	1,061	4,203	3,539	-16	3	434	3,973	-5.5	4
10. Hertfordshire	1,066	2,831	2,347	-17	2	407	2,754	-2.7	3
Totals	23,540	94,476	81,853	-13	3	11,228	93,081	-1.5	4

The columns in red are where the Car Key Burglaries have been added back into the car theft statistics to show a more accurate representation of car crime.

Based on recorded items only, the Home Office declared a 13-14% reduction in car crime. When car key burglaries (CKB) are factored back into the numbers, the reduction is nearer to 1.5%.

The effects of this more accurate recording make sad reading for some of the police forces listed.

- West Yorkshire Police reports a 3% reduction. CKB reflects a 22% increase
- Greater Manchester reports a 14% decrease. CKB reflects a 0.6% increase
- Thames Valley reports a 12% decrease, CKB reflects a 2.3% increase

As the table reflects, this analysis only reveals the top 10 forces for CKB, responsible for 11,228 CKB incidents from the 2008/09 BCS. We know that there were 15,741 such incidents, with a further 2,858 concealed in Robbery offences such as car jacking.

The nationwide decrease in recorded car theft, even at the reduced rate of 1.5% would be welcome, if this figure could be relied upon. Unfortunately, the increase in under reporting highlighted by the BCS suggests that the police recorded car theft figures are a fraction of the real problem.