

The logo for Burnt Tree Vehicle Rental is contained within a white rounded square with a grey border. It features the text "BURNT TREE" in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. Below this text is a horizontal row of seven red dots. Underneath the dots, the words "Vehicle Rental" are written in a dark blue, sans-serif font.

BURNT TREE
● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Vehicle Rental

A large, light blue silhouette of a van is positioned on the right side of the page. The van is shown from a side profile, facing right. The silhouette is solid and lacks fine details, serving as a background for the main title text.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR BUSINESS FROM VAN THEFT

A guide for SMEs

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DO YOU KNOW WHICH VEHICLE IS MOST FREQUENTLY STOLEN IN THE UK?

The chances are you guessed it was a German luxury car like the BMW 7 series, the Audi A5 or the Mercedes ML.

While thieves frequently target these cars, the vehicle at the top of their shopping lists is rather more humble.

It's the Ford Transit.

Nor is it the only LCV that's disappearing from yards and driveways across the UK. The Mercedes Sprinter regularly makes the top 10 of most stolen vehicles, with the Volkswagen Transporter rarely far behind.

And when they go walkabout, the damage to your business can be significant. Not only do you lose productive time that should be spent on the road, but you've also got to deal with the hassle of informing the police and your insurers before you can even think of finding a replacement vehicle.

Worse, if your stolen van was full of expensive tools, the inconvenience and replacement costs rocket.

Luckily, there are measures you can take to protect your vehicles and significantly reduce the chance of them being stolen.

This guide is here to show you how to implement them.



47,000 COMMERCIAL VEHICLES ARE STOLEN EACH YEAR, COSTING £152 MILLION IN LOST ASSETS - EXCLUDING LOSS OF TURNOVER AND EXTRA OPERATING COSTS.
Source: Police Crime Survey

ARE MY VANS AT RISK?

If you own vans, thieves will have their eyes on them. While the Ford Transit most often disappears from driveways, parking lots and forecourts, all makes of LCV are at risk - as you can see from this chart of most-stolen vans in the UK.

| Most stolen vans and commercial vehicles, by percentage of thefts | |
|---|-------|
| Ford Transit | 17.6% |
| Land Rover | 17.6% |
| Mercedes Sprinter | 11.8% |
| Volkswagen Transporter | 11.8% |
| Fiat Ducato | 5.9% |
| Ford Ranger | 5.9% |
| Nissan D22 | 5.9% |
| Nissan Navara | 5.9% |
| Peugeot Expert | 5.9% |
| Renault Trafic | 5.9% |
| Vauxhall Vivaro | 5.9% |

Source: www.rammobile.com/NewsArticle/Latest-Vehicle-Theft-Statistics

In fact, some vans are so desirable that there are reports of them being stolen within hours, and sometimes minutes, of being delivered to new owners.

Worse, new techniques used by thieves mean that some vehicles can be stolen, started and driven away in under four minutes - without breaking a single pane of glass, bending any door panel or cutting through any locks.

When you learn how easy it is for a thief to steal your vehicles, we're certain you'll start looking at van security in a whole new light.

FOUR MINUTES AND IT'S GONE – HOW THIEVES GET THEIR HANDS ON YOUR VANS

Take a look at these Government statistics on vehicle theft. They make alarming reading:

| Percentages | 1995 | 2001/02 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
|--|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Offender forced lock/ tried to (attempts) | 65 | 61 | 51 | 36 | 48 | 35 | 22 |
| Offender broke window/ tried to (attempts) | 13 | 17 | 20 | 20 | 18 | 19 | 14 |
| Door was not locked | 3 | 7 | 10 | 9 | 2 | 13 | 9 |
| Offender forced/ broke/bent/prised door | ... | ... | 3 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Offender used a key | 9 | 12 | 15 | 19 | 24 | 26 | 46 |
| Window was left open | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 12 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 7 | 16 | 11 |

Source: ONS, Nature of Crime tables, 2011/12 - Vehicle related theft.

(Note, percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could provide up to two options.)

As you can see, there are two stand-out trends. While the number of thieves forcing the locks on vehicles has dropped steadily over the last 17 years, the percentage of criminals using a key has increased exponentially — now accounting for almost half of all thefts.

While some of these 'key thefts' are down to vehicle owners being careless with their keys, or criminals using wire to 'fish' them through letterboxes, there's a more sinister explanation for others — the easy availability of lock picks on the internet.

Let's take a look at them, and some of the other tricks of the modern van thief.

LOCK PICKS, JAMMERS AND OBD RE-PROGRAMMERS – THE MODERN THIEF’S ARMOURY

1. Lock picks

Go and type ‘tibbie lock pick’ into Google video search.

The videos you’ll find will show you how to break into a Ford Transit van in minutes, using a specialised lock pick available online for just over £50.

These tools allow any amateur to gain access to any unmodified van with a Tibbie lock. You could order one today and start a van theft spree tomorrow.

It’s not just Ford Transits that are vulnerable. Lock picks are available for all kinds of vehicles – ranging from specialist picks to versatile tools that can be used on a range of different vans.

That said, increasing numbers of criminals don’t even bother to pick your locks. They’ve got even simpler technology that prevents you from locking your van in the first place — lock jammers.

2. Lock jammers

You lock modern vans remotely using an electronic signal transmitted by your keyfob.

It’s an elegant way of locking a vehicle, and it quickly becomes second nature. Hop out the van, press the button on your key fob and head off — without so much as looking back at your vehicle.

Thieves know this, and that’s why they’re increasingly using lock jammers to prevent you from securing your van. They target your vehicle, wait for you to get out of it and then activate their special lock jammer device.

This sends out a strong electronic signal that blocks the signal transmitted by your key fob. So you leave the vehicle thinking you’ve secured it, but the thieves have actually tricked you into leaving it unlocked.

3. OBD re-programmers

It might be easy for thieves to gain access to your van, but surely they can't start it up and drive it away? The days of being able to hotwire vehicles have gone, right?

Wrong. Criminals can plug a laptop or code reader device into your vehicle's on-board diagnostics (OBD) port and clone your wireless key fob. It takes a minute or two at most — meaning your van can be stolen in the time it takes you to pop out for a cup of coffee.

In the news:

Source: The Telegraph 20/10/12

4. Catalytic converter / spare wheel theft

These are not hi-tech crimes, but they're increasingly common ones – especially in the current economic climate. Catalytic converters on many vans are held in place by four nuts, meaning they can be stolen in minutes. Spare wheels are usually equally insecure, and are being stolen in increasing numbers.

THE COST OF VEHICLE THEFT

Now you've seen how easy it is to steal your vans and equipment, it's worth thinking about the impact this very real threat can have on your business. As well as the hassle of dealing with insurers to get your vehicle replaced, you can be hit by these additional costs as well.

1. Tool replacement

Tools are expensive. If your van is driven off with all your tools on board, or only the tools themselves are stolen, you face a major bill. The average collection of manual and power tools in a trades vehicle can be worth thousands, if not tens of thousands of pounds. Even if they're insured, it can take weeks to source and order replacements.

2. The cost of catalytic converters

A catalytic converter for a Mercedes Sprinter could cost you £2,000, so this is a theft that can hit your business hard. It can get very expensive too – some insurers will pay for replacements for a maximum of only two thefts. Then you're on your own.

Advice from the AA:

3. Vehicle downtime

When a van is stolen, it hits your productivity hard. If your business is a small one, you may even find yourself unable to serve customers — and that can damage your reputation and drive away future business.

4. Rising insurance premiums

If your vans are stolen, your insurance premiums rise – making it more expensive to run your fleet at a time when margins are increasingly tight.

5. Administration costs

Dealing with insurers, sourcing replacement tools, hiring temporary vehicles, reporting theft to the police, organising road tax refunds, taxing and insuring a replacement vehicle — when van theft occurs it leaves you with a sea of red tape, which eats into valuable time that ought to be spent on growing your business.

STOPPING THE THIEVES IN THEIR TRACKS

So how do you keep your fleet secure at a time when vehicle crime is getting faster, cheaper and more sophisticated?

Fortunately, crime prevention technology is keeping one step ahead of the thieves. So if you want to prevent your business being hit by van theft, we recommend you implement the following measures.

I. Change the locks

If your vehicles have vulnerable locks, replace them with anti-pick replacement cylinders. Choose models that have been endorsed by the Thatcham Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre or by Sold Secure. These products have been subjected to high intensity security testing, guaranteeing the highest levels of deterrence.

You can also install additional locks to protect tools and prevent access via all doors. Look for accredited Slamlocks that automatically lock doors when they are shut, ensuring you don't fall victim to thieves armed with lock jammers. Other lock technologies include Slamplates that add an extra layer of protection over manufacturers' door handles, and deadlocks that improve security by adding extra locking points – helping to keep both your vans and their contents safe.

2. Install a CATLOC

Catalytic converter theft is rising rapidly as thieves cash in on these easy-to-remove components containing valuable metals such as platinum or gold.

You can protect your catalytic converter by installing a security device called a CATLOC, sometimes known as a CAT Guard. These products have been extensively tested and any attempt to cut the exhaust pipe or remove the retaining bolts will activate the alarm, preventing both the theft of your catalytic converter and damage to your vehicle.

3. Use an OBD protection device

If you use the Mercedes Sprinter, Ford Connect, Fiesta Van or Transit models in your fleet, be sure to fit an ECU/OBD protection device. These prevent thieves from plugging in a laptop or PDA to override your vehicle's immobilisation system and driving away within minutes.

4. Make use of tracking (GPS) services

If you use GPS services to track your fleet, they provide an extra line of defence against theft. While professional thieves will know where to find a GPS device and remove it before driving off, many opportunist thieves will not. If they steal your vehicle, you can then track its whereabouts and alert the police.

5. Think 'thief'

Take simple precautions that make the thieves' lives more difficult. Keep an eye out for people working under cars, park in safe and well-lit places and make sure your drivers are trained to lock doors behind them every time they leave the vehicle. Remember, a van can be stolen in minutes – far less time than it takes a driver to buy a newspaper.

MAKING ANTI-THEFT PRECAUTIONS AFFORDABLE

Compared to the cost of stolen vans and tools, all the security devices we have recommended are sensible investments.

But there's no getting away from the fact that, by the time you've added new locks, slamplates, CAT guards, OBD protection devices, GPS and other security measures, the unit cost of your vehicle increases significantly.

And if you've got a fleet of 10, 50, 100 or more vans, you're looking at a major capital cost to upgrade the security of all your vehicles.

However there is one way to make vehicle security much more affordable — and that's by leasing your fleet.

If you source your vans using a contract or flexible hire package, some firms are willing to install your chosen security features for a minimal addition to your monthly hire fee. It's a great way to share the responsibility for your fleet security — hire companies have a vested interest in you returning their vehicles intact at the end of your contract period.

And if the worst does happen and a van is stolen, the hire company can also supply a replacement vehicle so your productivity doesn't suffer.

There's a catch of course — you need to find the right vehicle hire company, because not all of them have the expertise or willingness to provide the stress-free security modifications you need.

To help you find the right commercial hire company for your business, we've created a free guide — [10 questions to ask a potential LCV fleet hire provider](#).

Download it today and it could save you a lot of money, not to mention hassle — as well as giving you peace of mind that your vehicles are secure.

ABOUT BURNT TREE

As one of the largest commercial fleet operators in the UK, we've got a lot of miles under our belt. Our national network of strategically placed locations means you can find us throughout the UK.

When you choose Burnt Tree, you get the country's leading independent commercial vehicle rental and contract hire company on your side. Whether you need a fleet of vans for five years, a specialist vehicle built to your exact specifications or a car for a single day, we work hard to be the rental partner you can rely on.

From the moment you call us, visit us or land on our website, you'll enjoy the best service we can give, tailored exactly to your business needs. You'll benefit from the expertise of a knowledgeable and friendly team, get help with choosing the right vehicles, and experience fast, efficient maintenance that keeps you on the road and cuts your downtime to a minimum.

Our clients range from individuals and small private businesses to major blue chip organisations and local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales.

So, whatever your needs, choose Burnt Tree for the right vehicles, the best service and a team that's dedicated to keeping you and your business on the road.

www.burnt-tree.co.uk