

Africa a booming market for stolen cars

ABIDJAN, COTE D'IVOIRE: If luxury cars have become a more common sight on African roads that is in part because it is a primary destination for cars stolen from Europe's streets.



Hundreds of cars stolen in Europe end up in Africa where they are seldom recovered. Image: DM7 [Fotolia](#)

Africa, along with Russia, is believed by Interpol to be the top destination for the 250,000 stolen vehicles in Europe in the past five years. Most of the cars have not been recovered

According to Sebastian Schmucker, in charge of combatting the trafficking of stolen vehicles at Interpol, cars stolen in northern Europe usually end up in Russia, while those in southern Europe are shipped to Africa.

Right-hand drive cars stolen from Britain often end up in South Africa.

"Isolated thefts just because a car is beautiful don't exist anymore," said Schmucker.

"The trafficking of stolen cars is part of organised crime, of drugs, weapons and even terrorism. It is relatively simple and the risk is low," he added.

Schmucker said thieves are targeting high-end vehicles particularly SUVs - urban four-wheel drive vehicles - as these are preferred in Africa where the condition of the roads is poor.

Buyers simply order cars

In Abidjan, a source familiar with the market for stolen cars, said buyers place an order with an importer for a car, even

requesting the colour of the seats.

The importer then calls his team, who pore over classified adverts in France until they find a suitable vehicle.

Once they have found the right one, they contact the seller and offer to buy the vehicle.

"The thieves pay for the vehicle using a false bank cheque or pay money directly into the owner's account. Once payment is made the car is released and transfer papers signed," said the source.

He said that by the time the banks realise the cheques have been falsified the vehicles are out of the country.

When a stolen car gets to Abidjan it is registered and the name of the new owner as a used car.

"They don't know where these cars come from," said the source.

The source said French authorities have been investigating the head of the gang, which is believed to be behind around 400 thefts, but the protection he receives in Abidjan as a result of his perceived links to the existing regime mean have prevented him from being arrested.

According to Interpol, 160 stolen cars have been recovered in Africa since 2009. In 2012 in Germany alone, about 18,500 vehicles worth €250m were stolen.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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