



National Motor Vehicle
Theft Reduction Council
driving down vehicle theft

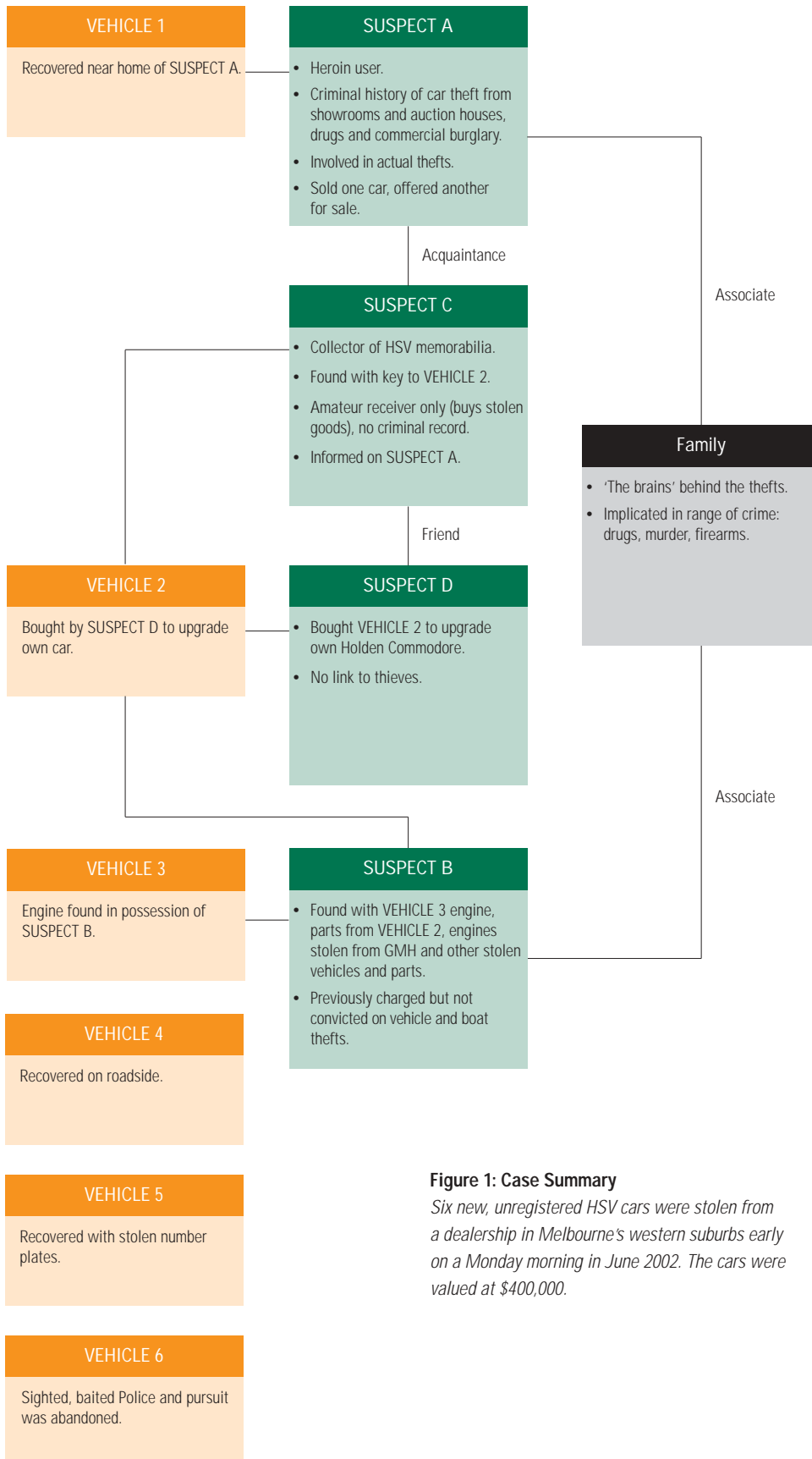
Investigation Case Study Series

Dealer Hit For Six: A Multiple-Theft Case Study

Six new, unregistered HSV cars were stolen from a dealership in Melbourne's western suburbs early on a Monday morning in June 2002. The cars were valued at \$400,000.

CSS1

Dealer Hit For Six: A Multiple-Theft Case Study



The Incident

Between 2am and 4am on a Monday morning in June 2002, six new unregistered HSV vehicles were stolen from a car yard in a western suburb of Melbourne.

The stolen cars – five Clubsports and one SV300 – were held in a locked tin storage shed toward the rear of the car yard premises. The vehicles were tightly parked at the back of the building behind a large number of customer vehicles left on-site for servicing. All the vehicles in the shed had their keys in their ignitions. Police estimate that it would have taken six to eight people to shift the other vehicles before the HSVs could be removed from the shed.

The car yard where the thefts occurred is of substantial size and although it fronts on to a main road, it backs on to an industrial estate. In the early hours of the morning there is little activity on the main road and less, if any, around the adjoining industrial sites. The car yard's security patrol operates only at the front of the business from the main road.

The thieves accessed the car yard by cutting through a cyclone wire fence at the rear of the premises. There was only a minimal amount of internal wall space in the storage shed which was free of obstacles. The thieves entered the shed by peeling back the tin on the only two clear wall spaces available. This shows knowledge of the premises and initially led police to suspect employees or security staff. It was later determined however that one or more of the thieves had conducted reconnaissance visits to the site during business hours.

Vehicles blocking the theft targets were cleared from the shed by the thieves to make way for the removal of the six HSVs from the premises. The absence of fingerprints or DNA on the moved customer vehicles or later recovered stolen vehicles suggests that the thieves were wearing gloves.

Figure 1: Case Summary

Six new, unregistered HSV cars were stolen from a dealership in Melbourne's western suburbs early on a Monday morning in June 2002. The cars were valued at \$400,000.

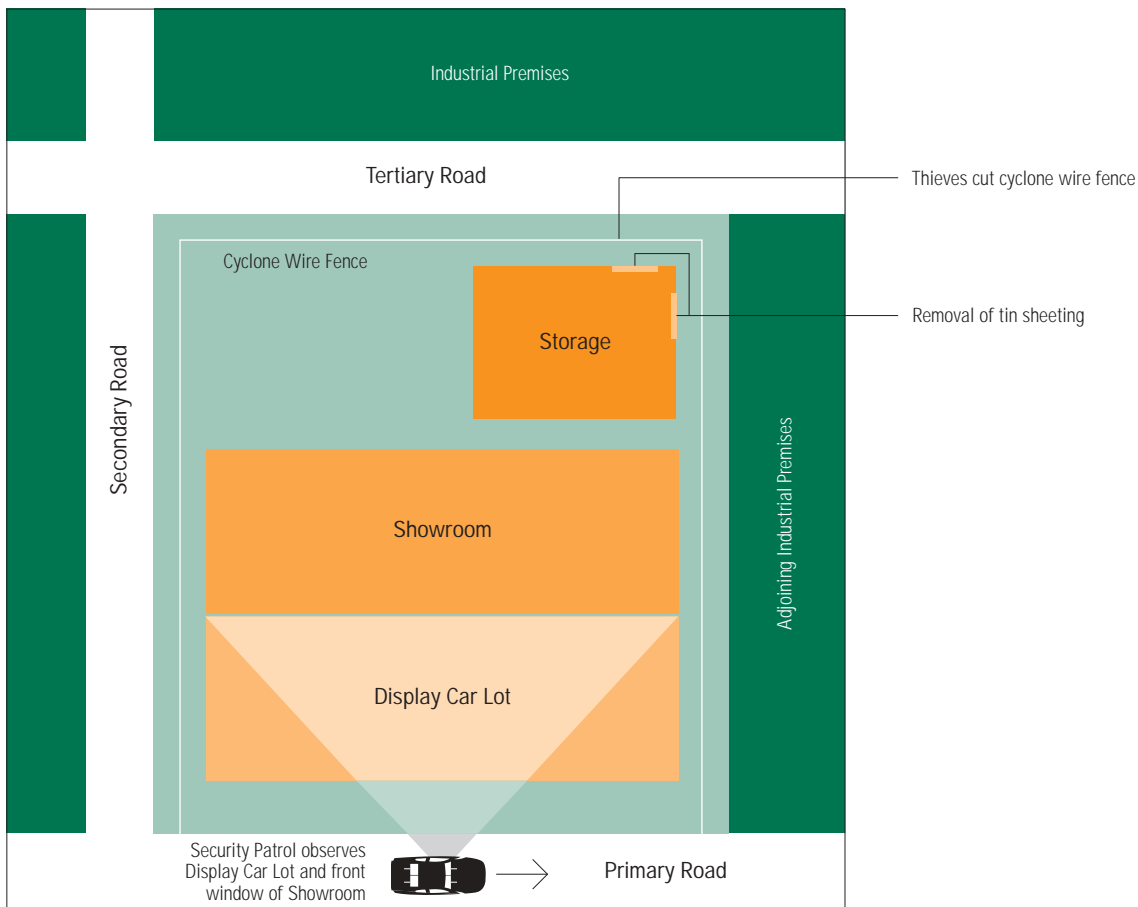


Figure 2: Site Map

Three Vehicles Recovered

Three of the stolen HSVs were recovered the following day and checked for fingerprints and DNA. Each appeared to have been carefully parked with the intention of being collected later.

VEHICLE 4, a red Clubsport, was found parked and locked on the roadside, not far from the car yard, by a passing police patrol.

VEHICLE 1, a blue Clubsport, was parked in the space allocated to a vacant unit at a block of flats in the inner west of Melbourne. These flats are close to the home of SUSPECT A. The vehicle was reported to police by a resident of the block.

VEHICLE 5, a white Clubsport, was reported to police by a local resident of a block of commission flats in the city's inner north where the car was parked. The car bore a set of number plates that were reported stolen in a Victorian regional centre. Usually, thieves attempt to match stolen vehicles with stolen plates from a similar vehicle but in this case no attempt had been made to do so.

One Vehicle Sighted

A black Clubsport was sighted on the Western Ring Road within four days of the incident and was assumed by police to be one of the stolen vehicles, either VEHICLE 2 or 6. The driver baited police into a chase however the pursuit was abandoned due to high speeds. The vehicle was not seen again.

The Initial Investigation

The police investigation was resource intensive.

Police attended the car yard to question employees, security staff and others who had contact with the vehicles prior to their theft. Photographs were taken of the scene and forensic samples, such as wire cuttings and fibres, were collected. No DNA was left on site by the thieves.

The recovery sites for VEHICLES 4, 1 and 5 were also attended by police. Surrounding police districts were contacted to identify any potentially related criminal activities that had occurred in the period leading up to the incident.

Police canvassed informants in surrounding areas for reports of suspicious activity or 'known' people seen in the area around the time of the theft. Police learnt that the car belonging to SUSPECT A had been sighted, parked in the line of travel between the incident location and one of the recovery sites, at the time of the thefts.

As part of their initial investigations police also contacted General Motors Holden (GMH) to clarify details about the stolen vehicles and issued a global email alert to all Victorian police about the incident.

Recovery of Engine from VEHICLE 3

Ten days after the theft, the Melbourne Armed Robbery Taskforce issued a search warrant on the property of SUSPECT B for matters not related to the car yard thefts. SUSPECT B had been to court eight times over the previous two years for a range of offences, including car and boat theft, but had never been convicted. In a previous incident, a Commodore seized from SUSPECT B's premises was towed away and SUSPECT B later attempted to break into the police compound to access the confiscated vehicle.

The search on SUSPECT B's premises by the Armed Robbery Taskforce found several rebirthed Commodores and parts from vehicles including a VC Commodore, a motor from a Calais VX stolen from GMH, a Subaru WRX stolen from Albert Park and HSV parts later identified as being from VEHICLE 2. The WRX and HSV parts were quickly and easily identified by police by OEM applied VIN-based microdots.

Also recovered from SUSPECT B's property during the Taskforce search was the engine from VEHICLE 3. The bare engine, without fittings and with the engine number still attached, appeared to have been removed professionally in a proper facility with lifting gear. VIN-based microdots were used by police to verify the engine's identity.

SUSPECT B admitted to police that he had paid \$800 for the engine from VEHICLE 3. SUSPECT B told police that, in his experience, those who steal cars for rebirthing are removed from the actual rebirthing process. Thieves can earn about \$2,000 for stealing a prestige car but the highest financial reward goes to the rebirthers. He estimated that news of the HSV theft incident was common knowledge on the black market within 12 hours of the vehicles being stolen.

Investigations revealed that SUSPECT B was also connected to the sale of a stolen vehicle to a Footscray trader and wheels from a VQ Statesman to a private individual. SUSPECT B is an associate of a well-known criminal family who are implicated in drugs, firearms, murder and other crime. Police believe this family provided the 'brains' behind the HSV thefts.

VEHICLE 2 Identified

Police leading the investigation were notified a month after the theft incident that police in north central Victoria had recovered the stripped and cut-up shell of a black HSV. It was discovered when police investigated a report by a local resident that a box truck, with no registration and no distinguishing markings, had driven up their dead-end country road only to return 20 minutes later.

Aware of the HSV thefts from the global email sent by investigating police soon after the incident, local police called in an officer from the nearest regional centre to perform a forensic inspection on the dumped HSV parts. While all other identifiers had been removed, some microdots were found and used to identify the vehicle as being the black HSV, VEHICLE 2. Also found were some fingerprints and small patches of white paint on one of the vehicle's panels.

Forensic analysis by the police identified the fingerprints as belonging to SUSPECT C. SUSPECT C had a clean record but had previously been apprehended, processed and released without charge in relation to an assault.

Investigating police worked with the Tactical Response Group to execute a warrant on the house where SUSPECT C lives with his parents. SUSPECT C, an HSV fanatic whose bedroom was highly decorated with the manufacturers' marketing paraphernalia, was found to be in possession of a key from VEHICLE 2 which he had kept as a souvenir.

SUSPECT C cooperated with police confessing that he had helped to dismantle VEHICLE 2 for his friend, SUSPECT D. SUSPECT C had been offered the car for \$7,000 by an acquaintance, SUSPECT A, but had declined, instead offering the car to SUSPECT D who agreed to buy it as a source of parts for his white Commodore.

In his interview with police in January 2003 SUSPECT C was unable to identify how long after the theft the purchase or exchange of parts took place. The parts exchange had been done by amateurs in a home garage hence the traces of white paint on the cut-up body found in north central Victoria.

SUSPECT C did not admit to where the car was cut up however a later anonymous call to Crime Stoppers led police, in March 2003, to a residential property in Melbourne's outer north. Parts identified

by microdots as being from VEHICLE 2 were recovered at the property. Police believe that SUSPECT C had been the anonymous caller to Crime Stoppers.

SUSPECT C provided police with SUSPECT D's details. Subsequent examination of SUSPECT D's Commodore used microdots to identify the vehicle's rear bumper and front fog lights as belonging to VEHICLE 2.

SUSPECT C was charged but not convicted of receiving stolen goods.

Main Suspect Apprehended and Charged

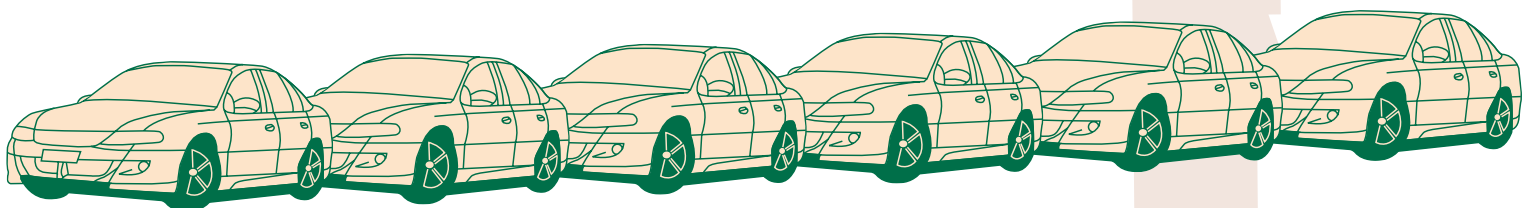
SUSPECT A, a heroin user from Melbourne's inner west, was identified by police as the main suspect in the HSV thefts. SUSPECT C's identification of SUSPECT A as the seller of VEHICLE 2 provided the direct evidence that police needed to charge him.

On the Wednesday after the theft, SUSPECT A reportedly paid \$7,000 cash for a car at a Melbourne auction house. It is believed that the cash had been sourced from the sale of one of the stolen vehicles.

On the Thursday after the theft, an acquaintance of SUSPECT A reported to police that SUSPECT A had offered to sell VEHICLE 4, the red Clubsport, to him for \$5,000. The vehicle had, however, already been recovered at this time. In addition, VEHICLE 1 had been recovered at the block of flats near SUSPECT A's home and SUSPECT A's car had been sighted parked in the line of travel on the night of the theft between the car yard and one of the initial recovery locations.

SUSPECT A was in custody for other reasons when he was charged. He received an 18 month suspended sentence in the Magistrates Court for the HSV thefts. He subsequently breached conditions and is now serving 18 months for other offences.

One of the stolen black HSV vehicles has never been recovered.



Key Points

- Keys left in the ignition of vehicles stored at the dealership allowed the thieves to not only steal the six HSV vehicles but to move a large number of cars in a short space of time to access their targets.
- Failure to ensure that the dealership's security service patrolled both the front and rear boundaries of the premises meant that the discovery of the crime, and the opportunity for police to respond, was potentially delayed by several hours.
- The thieves had knowledge of the dealership premises.
- The thieves were careful to ensure that no DNA was left at the incident site or on the subsequently recovered vehicles.
- The thieves were not involved in rebirthing the vehicles. The process is compartmentalised with different players involved in different processes.
- Reports by members of the public led to the recovery of two vehicles.
- VIN-based microdots allowed police to easily and quickly identify recovered vehicles and their parts.
- Cooperation and communication between different areas of Victoria Police (investigating officers, Armed Robbery Taskforce and other uniformed members) was crucial to the investigation.
- The main suspect is an associate of a well-known criminal family implicated in drugs, firearms and murder.
- Of the six vehicles stolen:
 - three were recovered within a short space of time;
 - the engine of another was recovered;
 - parts and the stripped shell of another was recovered; and
 - one was never recovered.

Notes

Further Information:

- Towards Effective Vehicle Identification: the NMVTRC's Strategic Framework for Improving the Identification of Vehicles and Components
- 'Theft Torque', the NMVTRC's quarterly issues newsletter
- www.carsafe.com.au

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