

Safety Tips #19

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How Not to Get Your Bike Stolen

OK, so this topic isn't strictly about motorcycle safety. But it is about the safety of your motorcycle... And it is good, useful stuff.

Most of this information was obtained from my friend and insurance agent, Bill Peterson. Some of it was sourced from a document generated by Sentry Insurance. Some of it I added myself.

This topic is very important to me because my very first motorcycle was stolen and never recovered. When that happened, I vowed to buy the best chain and lock that I could find, so that the chances that any other bike I might get afterward would be severely diminished. I read a review/test in a motorcycle magazine of a chain and lock combination called Cobralinks. The article said that it was impossible to cut through the unit with a hacksaw or bolt cutter. They tried to cut it with a torch, and gave up after a half-hour. I was sold. I found my Cobralinks at a local bike shop. It was big, heavy, difficult to coil up, and expensive, but I bought it anyway. Now, well over 30 years later, I still have it and use it. Twenty-five bikes later, I have not had another bike stolen. It's paid for itself many times over, in my opinion. Of course, as you will see, it's important to chain the bike to something else for this method to work. Merely chaining one part of the bike to another part of the same bike is not advisable, as thieves tend to lift the whole bike up and take it away, and then they can work on the chain and lock in the comfort and safety of their own work space. I have seen Cobralinks for sale as recently as last year, so I assume they are still available. They now have different lengths and thicknesses from which to choose.

Bill told me that he did a survey of stolen bike claims from his agency, over the last 10 years. There were 85 Harleys stolen, and ZERO were recovered. Yikes!

Thieves steal bikes with a large van that has a forklift device installed in the rear end. The driver backs up to the parked bike, presses a lever, and the fork life comes out of the back of the van and locks under the bike. Then it picks up the bike and lifts it into the van. This can take as little as 15 seconds, apparently. So you see that merely locking the bike to itself, or locking the forks and/or ignition would not prevent, or even slow down, this type of

theft. That is not to say that you shouldn't use whatever theft deterrent devices are available to you.

Lock your ignition. Most cycle thefts occur when the ignition is shut off but not locked. Lock the forks and/or disc brakes with large, brightly-colored tags. The tags will remind you that the bike is locked, and will notify would-be thieves that the bike is protected.

If traveling with others, lock bikes together. If riding alone, lock the bike to a secure, stationary object that can't be easily dismantled, such as a light pole.

Add an audible alarm to the bike.

When traveling and spending the night in a hotel, locate an outdoor security camera and park the bike within the camera's view. Or park the bike very close to the room, where you could hear someone tampering with it. I have even parked my bike inside hotel rooms, with permission of the management, of course.

Keep an eye on the bike periodically, especially immediately after parking it at a public event.

In a parking garage, park the bike close to automobiles, blocking the bike in, if possible. Close the garage door and lock it.

Do not keep the title to the bike on the bike. Keep it in another safe place, like at home, in a safe, or a safety deposit box.

Uniquely mark and then photograph the bike and the marking. For example, engraving your name in an inconspicuous place can help to identify the bike if it is stolen. If it is stolen, inform law enforcement of the markings and let them have copies of the photos.

Keep your cycle registration and insurance identification card on you when you ride. This will enable you to quickly identify yourself as the owner and allows law enforcement to file a report immediately.

Be careful about giving out information on where you live, work and play (ride).

If trailering your bike:

- Park the trailer in a well-lit location near security cameras or in plain view of hotel, restaurant or event staff.
- Lock the doors and the hitch.
- Secure doors by backing up to a wall so the doors cannot be opened.
- Know your trailer's ID and license plate numbers.

If selling your bike:

- Know that fake identities have become common in cycle thefts. Don't turn over the title until you can verify that the check or money order is

valid and has cleared the bank. Then simply mail the title to the new owner.

- As the buyer for his or her name, address, date of birth and driver's license number. Then ask to see the license and check that the information matches.
- Be cautious of out-of-state ID's; Thieves are counting on the idea that you are not familiar with out-of-state ID's.
- Note how your buyer arrived at the location. Note if he/she was dropped off by another party and might be planning on taking a one-way "test ride" with your bike.
- Remember that it isn't necessary that the buyer receive the title right away. A written document signed by the seller and buyer indicating price and method of payment also indicates proof of the purchase. The title can be forwarded to the buyer once the check has cleared the bank.
- If you decide to sell the bike on consignment, do not provide a signed copy of the title to the dealership until you have received your money in full. Make sure the dealership is a reputable business before you trust them as an agent. Some dealerships with very little history have been known to sell bikes on consignment and then keep the money. If the dealership goes out of business, you may never get the bike or money.