# Car thefts in the UK reach record high as keyless entry vehicles are targeted



Car thefts in the UK have reached a record high not seen in 15 years, with experts attributing the surge to the prevalence of 'smart keys' that enable keyless entry to many modern vehicles. According to reports, almost 130,000 car thefts were documented in the year 2023/24, accompanied by over 700,000 reported break-ins, marking the highest figures since the 2008/09 period.

Thieves are using advanced devices, roughly the size of an iPad, to mimic electronic key fobs, allowing them to access high-end vehicles with alarming efficiency. Gang activities targeting luxury cars, particularly Range Rovers, exploit security vulnerabilities that, according to campaigners, have been overlooked by manufacturers. Official data indicates that in 40 per cent of vehicle thefts, offenders utilise such devices to interfere with signals from the remote locking mechanism.

Admiral, the UK's largest motor insurer, noted that around two-thirds of vehicles reported stolen in 2023 were keyless models. The Daily Mail highlights that the issue is drawing the attention of lawmakers, leading to the introduction of new legislation intended to ban the use of electronic devices typically employed in car thefts. Under these new laws, manufacturers and sellers of signal jammers could face penalties of up to five years in prison or unlimited fines.

The rising trend in keyless vehicle thefts has provoked local authorities to respond. London Mayor Sadiq Khan has written to car manufacturers urging them to rectify security flaws that contribute to the ease with which modern vehicles can be stolen. The Metropolitan Police London reported an alarming rise in incidents, with some thieves brazen enough to steal cars directly from driveways under the cover of darkness. For instance, CCTV footage captured a theft where a man’s £25,000 Ford Ranger was taken within one minute as thieves used a signal-scanning device.

In a notable incident from March last year, footage emerged showing criminals unlocking a Bentley Bentayga, valued at £169,000, parked in a gated driveway. The theft was executed using a "master device" to copy and transmit the signals from the vehicle’s keys, demonstrating the sophistication of techniques employed by modern thieves. Four individuals involved in this case have pleaded guilty to charges related to conspiracy to steal and to acquire criminal property, resulting in sentences totalling 12-and-a-half years.

Further investigations revealed a crime gang responsible for a series of burglaries targeting luxury vehicles across Surrey, amassing more than £215,000 in stolen cars. Their operations included scoping out vehicles and either stealing keys through burglary or using illicit devices for keyless entry. In another case, Lillie Powell recounted how her expensive car was also taken using a device that replicated the key fob's signal.

The impending legislation aims to impose strict penalties for possession or distribution of electronic devices linked to vehicle theft, shifting the burden of proof onto the owner of such devices to demonstrate their legitimate use. Dame Diana Johnson, the Minister for Policing, Crime and Fire Prevention, stated that these thefts significantly impact victims' day-to-day lives, thus necessitating legislation that targets the sources of vehicle crime.

As the government moves to tackle these issues, law enforcement and the judicial system will be granted enhanced powers to combat the distribution of these devices and to apprehend those who engage in organised vehicle crime.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://fleetworld.co.uk/one-car-stolen-every-8-5-minutes-in-2024/> - This article supports the claim that car thefts remain high in the UK, with a significant number of vehicles stolen each day. It highlights the most stolen cars and the frequency of thefts.
* <https://www.fleetnews.co.uk/news/most-stolen-cars-revealed-in-new-dvla-data> - This source corroborates the high rate of car thefts in the UK and provides details on the most stolen models, including the Ford Fiesta and Range Rover.
* <https://movingintelligence.co.uk/blogs/general-news/most-stolen-cars-in-the-uk-in-2024> - This article provides insights into the top stolen cars in the UK for 2024, including the Ford Fiesta and Volkswagen Golf, and discusses trends in car theft.
* <https://www.courts.michigan.gov/49008a/siteassets/publications/benchbooks/evidence/evidbb.pdf> - Although not directly related to UK car thefts, this document discusses legal aspects of evidence, which can be relevant to understanding how digital evidence is used in vehicle theft cases.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10311201/> - This article explores the use of digital evidence in criminal cases, which can be relevant to understanding how law enforcement handles vehicle theft investigations involving advanced technology.