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## How Can We Reduce Auto Thefts?



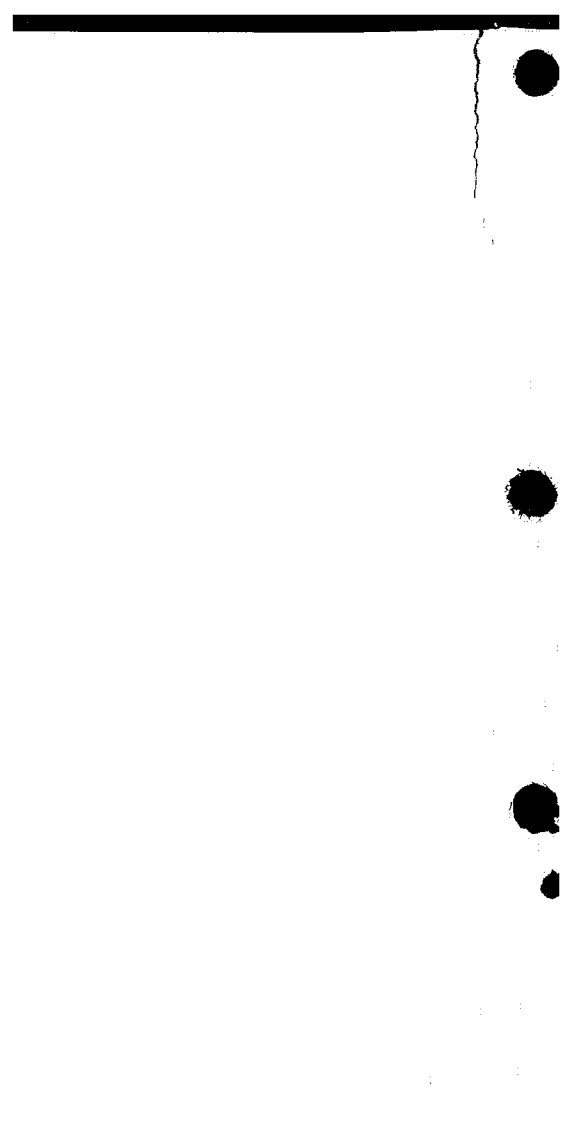
By JAMES J. HOEY

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**MORE THAN A QUARTER MILLION CIRCULATION**

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## How Can We Reduce Auto Thefts?

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By JAMES J. HOEY

**T**HERE'S a bull movement on in the stolen automobile market. It has been on continuously since the automobile came into common usage, as many a motorist can testify who, at one time or another, has experienced that peculiar sensation incident to finding only vacant curb space at the spot where he had parked his car a few moments before.

Fortunately the movement is not so vigorous today as it was a few years back, nor is the bereaved owner so likely to be permanently dispossessed of his motor car. This is true largely because a growing number of states has adopted

certificate of title laws That auto thievery could be still further discouraged through passage of model uniform legislation on the subject by every state few will argue

Yet we find the passage of such uniform legislation in state legislatures beset with difficulties Each state eyes with suspicion, apparently, a law originating in another state; and many are the laws that fail of passage merely because they owe their origin elsewhere The states surrender independence in this respect with all the protest that they challenge encroachment on independence in any other field Even when the advisability of uniformity of laws is well known a state will add to or cut from a model law so as to give it local color, if for no other reason While conceding a uniform law is desirable, each state will except itself from what in convention is agreed upon is a general if not universal condition needing a uniform law

Thus we see state independence, as expressed in this reluctance to adopt model uniform legislation, as a mainstay of auto thievery Today there are about as many different antitheft and registration laws,—to say nothing of traffic regulations and operator's license laws—as there are states No one who has toured among the states by automobile has failed to observe this

## Uniform Code Badly Needed

**T**HE crying need for uniformity of legislation on these subjects resulted in the preparation in 1926 of a group of proposed model automobile laws, known as The Uniform Vehicle Code, by the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety convened by Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce. The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws cooperated in preparing the Code and the American Bar Association has reviewed it and given it formal endorsement.

There may be good reason for resisting uniformity of laws on some subjects or of insisting upon local deviations on other subjects. Some phases of motor vehicle legislation may require special local attention, but the auto theft problem is so essentially interstate that instead of surrendering independence, independence will be best obtained by a uniform law. And even if it were a question of independence a surrender to automobile thieves is a far greater menace than a surrender to one uniform antitheft law.

## Variety Helps Thieves

**T**HE principal beneficiaries of dissimilar antitheft laws today are those thieves who steal in one state and market their cars in another. Such thieves and those who are obtaining fraudulent registrations are the principal beneficiaries of

this sentimental insistence upon so-called independence in this direction

Some 20 states today require original registrations of motor vehicles to be checked before new registrations are granted at a central state office where facilities exist for verifying the information contained in the application. These facilities may include a motor number index or a serial number index of all cars registered or reported stolen.

While no two of these states have identical motor vehicle laws, all of them maintain a central office for checking original registrations. When 48 states have such central offices equipped with motor and serial number indexes of cars registered or reported stolen the thief will find it no easier to register a stolen car in one state than in another. And the defrauder will find it more difficult to victimize an innocent purchaser. Even if a stolen car escapes detection and is registered, the motor and serial number index system will afford means of tracing not available otherwise. To the experienced eye of an expert a lack of correspondence between the motor and serial numbers of a car if either number is altered reveals the change at a glance. Thus the value of the serial as well as the motor number index is obvious.

The percentage of unrecovered stolen cars steadily increased until 1921, when a substantial number of certificate of title laws embodying the idea of a central

checking office became effective. Thereafter the percentage of unrecovered stolen automobiles steadily declined as certificate of title laws have increased.

In 1926 the number of automobiles stolen and not recovered in seven cities located in states having no certificate of title laws was 6,260 out of 1,187,635 registered, while in 14 cities located in states having certificate of title laws the unrecovered cars numbered 3,477 out of 1,276,614 registered. The former figure comes to 5.3 per thousand registered and the latter to 2.7 per thousand.

The National Automobile Underwriters Conference still estimates the automobile theft losses in 1927 at \$20,338,000. Under a federal law (the Dyer Act) which punishes anyone transporting a stolen car across a state line there were, according to the latest 1928 report of the Attorney General of the United States, 2,549 indictments and 2,055 convictions. Add to this the number of thefts within each of the 48 states not mentioned in the Attorney General's report and the importance of the auto theft problem may be appreciated.

The motor-serial index system of checking original registrations at a central office before approval should be universally accepted. It is contained in The Uniform Motor Vehicle Code referred to above (section five of the Antitheft Act). At a minimum of expense to the state it discourages and prevents crime as well

as facilitates capture and conviction  
thieves

The motor vehicle owner whose car  
stolen is assured that his car can be reg-  
istered in no other person's name and  
that recovery of his car will be made more  
speedy and before use, abuse or time has  
depreciated its value. Whether insured  
or not (and more than two-thirds of the  
motor vehicles are not insured against  
theft) the acceptance by the 48 states of  
the central office motor-serial number  
check will benefit every car owner