

Tactics to protect yourself against carjacking

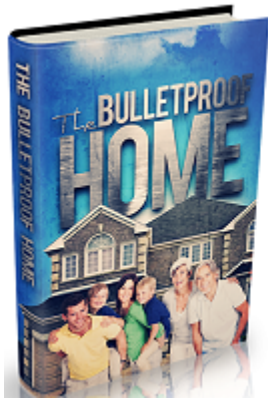
It seems that carjacking rates are increasing in the US, and although the car thefts frequency has somewhat decreased in the last decade, in some cities, cars are stolen at a frighteningly high rate. So what should you do to protect yourself and your vehicle?

Last year, according to the Insurance Information Institute, more than 720,885 vehicles were reported stolen in our country. So even though the coronavirus pandemic has made some noticeable changes in all our driving habits, criminals couldn't care less.

Besides targeting commercial vehicles, carjackers also started targeting more and more private cars as they managed to effectively blend in with the public and conceal their identity thanks to the face masks that became mandatory.

Illinois took the lead in 2020, with Chicago registering the highest number of carjackings in the country (1,415), and Minnesota closely followed it, wherein Minneapolis, carjacking reports shot up 537% that year. And the podium was completed by Louisiana, where the city of New Orleans experienced a 126% rise in carjacking numbers.

Carjackings are violent and unexpected events that leave the victim traumatized, injured, or even dead. Each year, tens of thousands of motorists are left standing in the street, shaking with fear or anger as they watch some low life driving away with their vehicle. Even so, they are the lucky ones since others end up bleeding on the side of the road.



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Tools of the trade

Carjackers don't ask nicely to hand them over the keys to your car, and they either use force or, in more than 70% of incidents, they use a weapon. Since carjackings are classified as armed robberies, it's pretty apparent that some weapon is used to persuade the car owner to abandon their vehicle.

For example, in Chicago, more than 45% of carjackings involved the use of a firearm. Knives and other weapons were also used, but it seems that criminals generally prefer to use a firearm to show they mean business.

The reasons so many carjackings are taking place differ from one state to another. Some criminals seek a getaway vehicle for various purposes, while others try to cash in on the underground stolen vehicles and parts market. And then there are those dumb kids looking to have some fun and get that adrenaline rush at someone else's expense, not realizing that the emotional and financial distress they will cause to the car's owner will get them in serious trouble.

Most law enforcement officers say that carjacking is a convenient crime of opportunity that takes the victim by surprise, assuring a high success rate for the criminals. The victims have little time to defend themselves or their companions, and by the time they understand what's happening, the thief is already gone with their car.

Law enforcement and personal protection professionals recommend surrendering your vehicle when you're caught off guard because it's not worth losing your life over a car. However, the problem arises when there are other passengers in the vehicle.

What if your kids are on the backseat with their seatbelts on or a child secured in a car seat? And what if you don't want to give up your hard-earned vehicle since that's the primary tool you're using to earn some money?

Leveling the field

One option you have is to become a licensed concealed weapon carrier and fight back if you have the opportunity to do so. Sometimes, the would-be carjacker ends up bloodied and begs for help as he rethinks his life choices.

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If the driver decides to fight back and manages to incapacitate the carjacker successfully, they will not be prosecuted. In most cases, the car owner will not be charged by the police because they will cite self-defense as the reason for using the firearm.

Other alternatives

Now, since I know that not everyone wants to carry a firearm, we should look at other viable options people can use to avoid ending up in the statics we mentioned at the beginning of this article.

The first and most critical step in preventing carjacking is your mindset. Understand that there's nothing to be ashamed of if you surrender your car because the main goal here is to make sure you and the other passengers in your vehicle survive the ordeal.

Safety comes first, and if you decide to fight, you have to be fast and decisive. There will be no time for second-guessing or overthinking stuff, and you have to be swift and fierce.

Alternatively, you may want to avoid ending up in a situation where you become a target of a carjacker. Again, you can do some things to prevent the incident from occurring, and even if it may not be simple, these preventive measures will give you the advantage you need to survive this.

Situational awareness

This is not one of our strong habits as a species, and we no longer have that self-preservation instinct our ancestors had. We often get distracted by our phones, by conversation, by our children, and whatnot. How about you live your life but also keep your head on your shoulders?

Using the Cooper color code to establish the level of alertness involving you and your car provides a tremendous tactical awareness advantage. Here's how the code works with you and your vehicle:

White: In this phase, you are unaware of your surroundings. You could be walking to or sitting in your car doing various activities and not paying attention to what's happening around you. You could be texting or talking on the phone without noticing who's walking near you or your car.

Yellow: In this phase, you are more aware of your surroundings and notice who's walking in your vicinity and their apparent behavior.

Orange: You have a feeling that something may not be OK. In this phase, your pulse might be increasing as you've noticed something out of the ordinary. You've seen someone checking for unlocked vehicle doors in the parking lot, and it's doubtful that he mistook his car for three or four other

vehicles. Or perhaps you noticed someone following you from the mall's exit, or there's a vehicle that has been following you for the last few blocks.

Red: In this phase, the threat has just become a reality. What you perceived as not being OK in the orange phase has just validated your concerns. The guy that seemed to be following you is targeting you and your vehicle.

Now, the questions you have to answer are:

Do you fight him? Do you give up your vehicle?

What will you use if you decide to fight him?

Is there anyone around you to help?

How are you going to defend yourself if nobody steps in?

If you decide to surrender your vehicle, is there someone else with you? A child or perhaps your significant other?

Start dialing 911 as you figure the answer to those questions.

Black: This is the phase when you are in a go mode, and you will be doing anything in your power not to become a victim that day. The way you act in this phase is greatly influenced by the answers you gave to the questions in the red phase.

Preventive measures

Besides keeping your cool and your head in the game, there are other things you can do to avoid being a victim of a carjacking.

- Parking or getting to your car in a parking lot
- Avoid parking your car near stuff that can be used as a hiding place for any would-be carjacker. For example, don't park your vehicle near dumpsters or bushes.
- Park your car in a well-lit area and think about it even

if you're not going to stay long in a particular place. You never know what might happen and prolong your stay.

- Park your vehicle as close to the entrance or the exit of your destination as possible.
- Don't leave valuable items in your car. If you do leave them inside your vehicle, make you conceal them properly. Never leave your purse or backpack on the seats and put it in the trunk.
- Lock the doors and shut the windows. This may sound like common-sense advice, but people often get distracted and forget these "minor" details.
- Before going to your car, check the parking lot for out-of-the-ordinary elements or potential attackers. For example, if there are many empty parking spots on the lot and someone parked right next to your car, you should be very careful when approaching your vehicle.
- Look in and around your vehicle before entering it.
- If you feel something's off and you don't feel comfortable walking to your vehicle alone. Call for security or ask someone to accompany you.
- When approaching your vehicle, make sure you are in the yellow phase and check your surroundings. Hold your phone and be ready to use it to call 911 or talk to someone, and in case you are attacked, tell them what's going on and let them know your location.
- Check your pose and walk confidently. If you look like a victim, you will encourage the criminal watching you to act.
- If you have a stun gun, a pepper spray, or any item that can be used for defensive purposes, know where that item is and be ready to reach for it.
- When you enter your vehicle, don't linger and drive away immediately.

While driving your vehicle:

- Always be in a yellow phase when driving your car, and

don't get distracted by traffic or your kids.

- Keep windows and doors closed at all times.
- When you stop at a red light or for whatever other reason, make sure you leave enough room between vehicles to maneuver away.
- Scan your rearview and side mirrors regularly when you stop to notice if someone is approaching your vehicle.
- Do not stop for hitchhikers or motorists that appear to be in trouble next to a disabled vehicle. Times have changed, and being a good Samaritan will cost you nowadays. Rather than feeling guilty about not stopping, call the police or roadside service as you drive by.
- Pay attention to the "bump and rob" method. Carjackers often use this method to steal a car. They will bump their vehicle into another one, and once the driver gets out to see what happened and check the damage to their car, a passenger in the offending vehicle will make their move. As the victim is distracted with assessing the injury, the passenger hops in the bumped car and drives away.

Other scenarios

Even your best laid-out plan can often fail, and in most cases, all you're left with are some self-defensive tactics you have to employ.

When confronted with an attacker where you are in your car or outside, here's what you need to do:

- As a precaution, stay in your vehicle with the windows closed and the doors locked for as long as you can.
- Call for help with your phone on the speaker mode and tell the dispatcher what's going on, your location, and describe your vehicle and attacker as best as you can.
- If you can drive away, don't second guess it and do so even if you hit other vehicles or objects while

escaping.

- If the opportunity presents itself, use your car as a weapon against the attacker and don't stop. Drive to the nearest police station and explain what happened.
- If someone tries to attack you while you're going towards your vehicle, run away as fast as you can and scream for help as loud as possible.
- Never try to reason or bargain with a carjacker since there's no point. The life decisions that let them to that exact moment provide little reasoning ability.
- If your attacker has a weapon and you decide to fight them, you must neutralize that weapon through blocking and disarming techniques. Such techniques can only be learned in a professional training environment, and they must be rehearsed regularly. You will need to invest the time and effort in self-defense classes taught by trustworthy instructors and then periodically practice these strategies under supervision before you attempt to use them.

Concluding

Your best option in case of a carjacking incident is always to avoid trouble. By maintaining a high level of awareness, using common sense, and taking responsibility for your actions, you will lower the probability of an attack. The tactics listed in this article will help reduce your odds of becoming part of the carjacking statistics.

I hope the article helped. If you have other ideas or comments, feel free to express yourself using the dedicated section below.



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