

The cars thieves love to hate

Some cars we tested this year took our thieves just three seconds to break into and others more than five minutes. Can you afford not to know which is which?

Chances are you own one or more of the following items: a mobile phone, a laptop, an iPod, some CDs or a portable sat-nav unit. So ask yourself honestly, have you ever left any of these in your car – even if they were under the seat or in the glove box?

You probably have done from time to time – most of us have. But if a thief knows such goodies are inside, you'd probably want a bit more protection than some door locks that stand up to a three-second attack, wouldn't you?

That's why we've broken into 24 of the last year's major new cars – to help you choose a model that isn't an open invitation to passing car thieves.

Superminis: poor protection

There has been a plethora of new superminis hitting the showrooms this year. But the ten we've tested show that you still can't guarantee good security on new cars. None was fitted with an alarm and only one, the Nissan Note, resisted our efforts to gain entry for the full five minutes – beyond which most thieves will give up and try an easier target.

Three city cars which share a common design, the Citroën C1, Peugeot 107 and Toyota Aygo, took just three seconds to

get into. And that's without doing any damage or breaking the glass. This is very disappointing – more akin to what you'd find in a car made 30 or so years ago.

It isn't that these carmakers don't know how to design-in security features – we've seen much more secure models from all of them in the past. For example, the Peugeot 1007 is the best supermini we've assessed this year and clearly better than the 107. It looks like Citroën, Peugeot and Toyota have sacrificed security to help build these cars so cheaply.

Medium cars: middling security

At least you get an alarm in most medium cars these days – although the standard isn't always brilliant. The two cars we tested offer a contrast of qualities.

The new Honda Civic's perimeter defences kept our 'thieves' at bay for a fairly creditable (though not exceptional) 155 seconds. This compares well with the premium-priced Mercedes B-class, which resisted attack for a paltry ten seconds. However, once past the locks, the Civic's alarm system doesn't sense air movement in the car; there's no tilt detection, and if the thief manages to isolate power to the sounder, there's no independent back-up supply. In contrast, the B-class' alarm goes off at the slightest movement inside the car or if someone attempts to move it – meaning a thief has to be quick to avoid being caught.

Both cars scored reasonably well overall, but neither matches the class-leading Mazda 3 (see p44 for scores).

Large cars: Lexus is pick of 2006

Large cars generally resist thieves better than smaller, cheaper ones. This year, the most impressive model is the new Lexus



New Lexus IS has a secure glove box

How we test

We challenge all the security features on the cars we test to see how well they resist attack by thieves – whether from smash-and-grab merchants or organised thieves with a good knowledge of security technology.

We time how long it takes to overcome the door locks and to steal valuables from the glove box, boot and other areas. We also check how easy it is to remove and reuse the in-car-entertainment (ICE) system. Then we strip the cars down to see how the alarm is configured, how the locks are designed, and how well components are marked to make them difficult to dispose of.

USING THE TABLE

We score every car out of a maximum 100 per cent for 'theft from' and 'theft of'.

Theft from

Having belongings stolen from inside a car is the most common type of crime, so cars are ranked within each class in order of how well they resist this.

Theft of

Most cars are fairly difficult to steal without the keys, due to immobilisers, but some are still easier than others to steal and sell on.

Deadlocks

These stop the door from opening, even if a thief breaks the window to use the interior handle. 'One-touch' deadlocks are armed whenever you lock the car, so don't rely on your remembering to set them.

Alarms

We rate alarms to account for the following features:

• **Volumetric** – responds to

air movement in the car – for example, if a door is opened or a window smashed.

• **Tilt detect** – responds if the car is moved at all – if someone tries to pick it up, say, or tow it away.

• **Ignition detect** – goes off if the ignition is switched on by anything other than the legitimate key.

• **Doors, bonnet and boot detect** – goes off if any of these are opened.

• **Self-powered sounder** – the alarm goes off even if the car battery is disabled.

Lockable space

Having to remove all your valuables whenever you park is a pain, as few cars have a secure boot or glove box to leave things in. We time how long it takes to get into these storage areas from outside, using the quickest route (possibly breaking a window first).

Parts marking

All cars have a unique vehicle identification number (VIN). The more places on the car this is marked, the harder it is for thieves to change the car's identity or sell parts on.

In-car entertainment

We assess how simply this can be removed. Easy-to-steal, easy-to-sell stereos have traditionally been rich pickings. We grade them as follows:

• **Coded** – needs a unique code to make it work.

• **Multi-part** – the front panel is separate from the (hidden) working parts.

• **Manufacturer specific** – it works only in cars made by that manufacturer.

• **Model specific** – it works only in the car it was fitted to in the factory.

IS premium-priced saloon. Its has doors that resist entry for 155 seconds, a reasonable alarm and a thief-resistant glove box – we couldn't break into it in less than five minutes. However, it's only big enough to hold a few CDs and the like – you couldn't put a laptop in there, for example. Although the Lexus is good, it still doesn't quite match the large-car class leader, the Volvo S40 (see p64).

Three of the others – the Hyundai Sonata, Subaru Legacy and VW Passat – all withstood non-destructive attack for a full 300 seconds. However, none beats the Lexus' overall mix of security features.

MPVs: Mazda on top

The new Mazda 5 continues Mazda's recent efforts to improve security across its new models. It has a decent alarm, clearly marked parts and a stereo that's difficult to steal and sell on.

The VW Golf Plus kept our thieves out for 300 seconds. But the new Vauxhall Zafira is disappointing – it resisted entry for just 18 seconds. The version we tested had no alarm and no secure storage.

Off-roaders and sports cars

The new RAV4 – in common with most Toyotas – has parts and panels which are

We beat the new Zafira's door locks in just 18 seconds

very well marked to make them hard to disguise if the car is stolen. But its 'theft from' score could be better – it's still too easy to break into it and snatch valuables from the glove box, for example.

The more expensive BMW X3 is disappointing, despite its comprehensive alarm and good door locks. The glove box and boot are too easy to get into once a thief breaks a side window.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the latest incarnation of Mazda's MX-5 roadster is also no place to leave your laptop – you'll be best off taking your booty with you when you park up.

Break-in times: 24 new models tested

MODEL	SPECIFICATION				WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE						SCORE %	
	Deadlocks fitted	One-touch deadlocking	Alarm fitted	Manufacturer- or model-specific stereo	Entry time without causing damage (seconds)	Time to steal items from the glove box (seconds)	Time to steal items from the boot (seconds)	Alarm rating	Parts marking rating	Stereo security rating	Overall 'theft from'	Overall 'theft of'
SUPERMINIS												
1 Peugeot 1007 1.6 Sport 2-Tronic	✓				155	10	22	n/a	★★★★	★★★★★	37	81
2 Suzuki Swift 1.3 GL	✓			✓	154	10	15	n/a	★	★★★★	29	71
3 Fiat Grande Punto 1.4 Dynamic	✓			✓	26	10	28	n/a	★	★★★	29	58
4 Renault Clio 1.4 16V Expression	✓				154	10	38	n/a	★★★	★★★	28	73
5 Nissan Note 1.4 SE	✓	✓			300 ^a	10	66	n/a	★★★★	★	25	73
6 Toyota Yaris T31.0	✓			✓	155	10	18	n/a	★★★	★★★	24	72
7 VW Fox 1.2					14	10	39	n/a	★★★	★	18	62
8 Toyota Aygo 1				✓	3	7	13	n/a	★★★	★	14	59
9 Citroën C1 Rhythm 1.0				✓	3	7	13	n/a	★★	★	14	58
10 Peugeot 107 Urban 1.0				✓	3	7	13	n/a	★★	★	14	58
MEDIUM CARS												
1 Honda Civic 1.8 SE	✓		✓	✓	155	10	39	★★	★★★	★★★★★	47	79
2 Mercedes-Benz B-class 170 Auto SE			✓	✓	10	10	20	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	42	68
LARGE CARS												
1 Lexus IS 250 SE	✓		✓	✓	155	300 ^a	29	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	63	81
2 Alfa Romeo 159 Lusso 2.2 JTS	✓		✓	✓	154	10	77	★★★★★	★★	★★★	52	80
3 Subaru Legacy 2.0 RE Sports Tourer	✓	✓	✓	✓	300 ^a	10	41	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	50	77
4 Hyundai Sonata 2.4 CDX Auto	✓	✓	✓	✓	300 ^a	27	29	★★	★★★★	★★★★	42	74
5 Fiat Croma 150 Prestigio	✓		✓	✓	154	10	13	★★★★★	★	★★★	41	82
6 VW Passat 2.0 TDI S	✓	✓	✓	✓	300 ^a	20	28	★★★★★	★★★	★★	40	81
MPVs												
1 Mazda 5 2.0 Sport	✓		✓	✓	155	10	23	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	56	77
2 VW Golf Plus 1.6 FSI SE	✓	✓	✓	✓	300 ^a	15	17	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	42	78
3 Vauxhall Zafira 1.6 Club	✓			✓	18	10	16	n/a	★★★	★★★★	32	60
OFF-ROADERS												
1 Toyota RAV4 2.0 XT3	✓		✓	✓	155	15	67	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	50	79
2 BMW X3 3.0i Sport	✓	✓	✓	✓	300 ^a	20	19	★★★★★	★★★	★★	37	80
SPORTS												
1 Mazda MX-5 1.8	✓		✓	✓	154	18	35	★★★★	★★★★	★★	39	77

^a If a car's doors or glove box can resist attack for 300 seconds (five minutes) they are classed as secure