

Joy Riders Prefer Taking Spins in VAZ, Japanese Cars

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Heavy trucks and specialized equipment are also increasingly being targeted for theft, police statistics show. **Vladimir Filonov**

Drivers of Japanese cars and Ladas might want to invest in some extra security measures.

More than 13,000 vehicles were stolen in Moscow last year — and Japanese brands and cars made by VAZ were the targets of choice.

There were more than 10,800 thefts for profit or resale in 2011 — up by 780, or 7 percent, on 2010, according to Andrei Baranov, head of the seventh department of Moscow's criminal investigation department.

Russian law distinguishes between theft for profit (*krazh*) and the lesser crime of stealing for personal use (*ugon*) — the latter category includes teenage joy riders, for example.

The less serious category soared 20 percent. "There were 2,100 such crimes in 2011 — 373

more than the previous year," Baranov told reporters.

Lada, which is the biggest-selling brand in the country, is also the most popular amongst thieves. Some 1,625 VAZ cars were stolen in Moscow in 2011, accounting for 15 percent of all thefts.

But while domestic brands lead the criminal market, thieves seemed even more interested in anything from Japan. Moscow's thieves stole 1,063 Toyotas, 992 Mitsubishis, 904 Mazdas, 847 Hondas and 482 Nissans, Baranov said. The least popular brands were Hyundai (384) and BMW (389).

It's not entirely clear where stolen cars end up, or who is doing the stealing. Sergei Udlov, executive director of the Avtostat research agency, repeated an oft-heard opinion that most stolen vehicles leave Moscow and head to the regions. "I think one way to tackle the problem would be closer cooperation between regional and Moscow traffic police, so you can more easily trace whether a vehicle has been reported missing," he told The Moscow Times.

But that is only part of the story. Of the 700 car thieves Moscow police arrested last year, just over half were not residents of the capital, RIA-Novosti reported.

Thieves are also increasingly targeting specialized equipment. "We're more and more often faced with the theft of heavy trucks and specialized vehicles. In this period we've seen 304 thefts of lorries including KamAZ, ZiL, MAZ and Map, and 209 thefts of special equipment," Baranov added in comments carried by RIA-Novosti.

"I'd say it reflects the market," Udlov said. "The new car market grew this year, so you'd expect to see a parallel increase in thefts. As for specialized equipment, cranes and so on — that obviously reflects demand. You don't steal something like that unless you're going to sell it."

Sales of new cars rose nearly 40 percent in 2011, according to figures compiled by the Association of European Businesses.

Baranov told reporters Wednesday that while Moscow's car thieves may be getting more inventive, they are being helped by modern cars that are getting easier to steal.

A popular model among car thieves in the 1990s, the Toyota Land Cruiser 80, took 40 minutes of work and a good deal of manipulation to steal, he pointed out.

"Today, the new generation of that car — the Land Cruiser 200 — can be stolen in five minutes," he said in comments carried by Interfax.

Even an unskilled criminal can use a scanner to release the remote control locking signal, he said.

"If you want to stop a thief, any measure that makes the process a little more complicated and a little longer could be enough to make him give up," he said.

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