

Right: Paul Jefferies



Lock your bike whenever you'll turn your back on it

the right thing by dialling 999 and not confronting him. Why, they asked, would you want to put yourself at risk for the sake of someone else's bike?

This advice chimes well with the official police guidance on what to do in situations like the one I found myself in. When I was carrying out research for this article, Pete Davey, a Metropolitan Police media and communications manager, told me: "As with any crime, if someone witnesses a crime or suspects one is about to be committed, they should just call the police."

He added: "The Met takes every incident of bicycle theft seriously and recognises the distress this crime causes its victims. When a report is received, officers will carry out every reasonable line of enquiry to recover the property and bring any suspect to justice."

GETTING AWAY WITH IT

Unfortunately, however, bike theft victims see justice done in only the very rarest of cases. Home Office data ([gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables)) shows that of the 78,619 bicycle thefts reported to the police in the year to September 2022, no suspect was identified in 83% of cases and only 1.3% resulted in someone being charged or summonsed.

If these statistics make for bleak reading, they're not quite as shocking as those on convictions. Ministry of Justice

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records ([gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-june-2022](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-june-2022)) show that in the five-year period between June 2017 and June 2022, just 159 people (out of roughly 350,000 bike theft cases) were found guilty of bike thefts and only two of these were given immediate custodial sentences.

The truth is that the vast majority of bike thieves operating in England and Wales today can ply their trade with impunity. For them, their crimes are consequence free. The same cannot be said, of course, for the victims.

Keir Gallagher, Cycling UK's campaigns manager, told me: "Bike theft is sometimes perceived as a petty crime, but it actually carries a huge social impact, putting many people off cycling altogether and deterring others from cycling as often as they'd like to if they think their bike may be at risk."

He added: "Local authorities, workplaces and businesses can do more to ensure everyone has access to secure cycle storage, but until criminals believe there is a genuine risk of being caught, this scourge will sadly continue."

Even in my case, the offender somehow escaped a guilty verdict for bike theft. He was, however, given a 22-month prison sentence for being in possession of a spanner within the Highbury area of north London. A prolific thief, he'd been banned from entering several postcodes with the tools he habitually used to steal bikes.

The offender appealed against this sentence, thereby obliging me to attend court again, this time to engage in a verbal sparring match with his lawyer about the type of tool he'd been using. Fortunately, my version of events was accepted by the three judges. ▶

Lock it and/or lose it

Any lock can be broken. Some years ago Cycle ran a feature called 'Gone in 42 seconds'. That was the time it took for us to break the toughest Sold Secure Gold lock we had. It's nevertheless worth making your bike as secure as you can.

- Whenever possible, store your bike behind a locked door. This is easiest with a compact folder such as a Brompton, which can be carried indoors with you.
- Avoid leaving your best bike locked up on the street. Use a cheaper, tatty-looking hack bike instead, such as a secondhand one ([cyclinguk.org/cycle-magazine/can-you-buy-decent-bike-ps100](https://www.cyclinguk.org/cycle-magazine/can-you-buy-decent-bike-ps100)).
- Lock your bike through the frame to a solid piece of street furniture, in clear public view, whenever you turn your back on it. In high-crime areas, use two locks: a D-lock and a heavy-duty chain.
- Prevent the piranha theft of parts by swapping quick releases for security bolts and skewers from Pitlock ([pitlock.de/en](https://www.pitlock.de/en)), Pinhead ([pinheadlocks.com/shop/en/](https://www.pinheadlocks.com/shop/en/)) or Hexlox ([hexlox.com](https://www.hexlox.com)) – or at the very least use Allen bolts.
- Use good-quality, Sold Secure Gold- or Diamond-rated locks from specialist lock brands such as Abus, Hiplok (members get 20% off), Kryptonite or Squire. Short D-locks offer the best balance between portability and protection, as the smaller shackle is harder to attack, while massive chains with a ground or wall anchor are best for home use.

For more on bike security, see [cyclinguk.org/blog/guide-locking-your-bike](https://www.cyclinguk.org/blog/guide-locking-your-bike).

Right: Robert Spanning

