

Police Break Up Luxury Car Theft Ring and Arrest 16

By MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ
Published: December 11, 2013

The car thieves plied their trade with a certain finesse. No windows were broken or doors pried. Rather, they focused on stealing the high-tech keys of prestigious brands like Bentley, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Porsche.

Then they simply started the ignition and drove away.

The thieves, who operated in New York City and the surrounding region for the past three years, stole 311 cars

worth an estimated \$15.5 million, the police said. This week, the New York police shut them down, arresting 16 people. Two others remained at large.

One of the suspects, Albert Natanov, 29, was also a major distributor of cocaine in the region, the police said. Mr. Natanov, of Flushing, Queens, was known to drive a Lamborghini, Bentley or Mercedes S550, arranging deals on his \$6,000 gold-plated iPhone, the police said.

If a luxury car was stolen in the last few years, there was certainly a chance this group was involved. Car theft in New York, once a seemingly intractable scourge, has declined significantly. There were nearly 150,000 thefts in 1990, according to police statistics. So far this year, there have been 6,797.

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

GOOGLE+

SAVE

EMAIL

SHARE

PRINT

REPRINTS



Log in to see what your friends are sharing Log In With Facebook on nytimes.com. Privacy Policy | What's This?

What's Popular Now

Too Few Girls and Minorities Study Tech Subjects



F.D.A. to Phase Out Use of Some Antibiotics in Animals Raised for Meat



Connect With NYTMetro

Follow us on Twitter and like us on Facebook for news and conversation.



As crime rates have dropped, so too it seems has the caution of car owners. Some of the thefts by the gang arrested this week occurred when drivers left vehicles idling in a driveway or parking lot, the police said.

In other cases, the thieves plucked cars from the lots of dealerships after stealing the keys, the police said. They would also go after valets and sometimes shipments of cars, jumping behind the wheel while the vehicles were sitting, keys in the ignition.

At their most innovative, the thieves would steal one of a pair of identical keys from a car rental company and place a GPS device in the matching car, the police said. Then they would wait for the car to be rented and track it down.

These days, many luxury cars have sophisticated security systems that make it almost impossible to drive a vehicle without its specific set of keys, the police said. That has forced car thieves with expensive tastes to become more creative.

“The ring of thieves arrested in this case treated driveways, dealerships, parking lots and other locations like their personal showrooms,” Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly said in a statement. New York police detectives, he said, “brought these car thieves’ operation to a screeching halt.”

The thefts occurred in New York City and wealthy neighborhoods in New Jersey, in Westchester County and on Long Island, the authorities said.

The investigation into the thefts began in early 2012 after a tip about suspicious cars from a vehicle inspection company called the Carco Group, the police said. Investigators then identified a shop in Queens that was providing fraudulent inspection records.

From there, the police, working with the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, the Queens district attorney and the New York State Department of Financial services, uncovered a plot.

Each person had an assigned role, the authorities said. There were the thieves, like Emmanuel Mateo, 35, and Alexander Santiago, 37, both from the Bronx, who would steal the cars and pass them on to “taggers,” like Henry Pena, 35 of the Bronx, who supplied

new vehicle identification numbers and license plates, the police said. Then brokers, like Victor Pacheco, 34, of the Bronx, or Ronald Dalonzo, 48, of Queens, would acquire the vehicles and sell them, for \$10,000 to \$25,000, to black market dealers. Mr. Natanov, the so-called title washer, would provide forged titles for the cars, according to the police.

Then the cars would be sold, the authorities said. At least one of the stolen vehicles was sold to a buyer in Israel. Another was sold in the United Arab Emirates.

The suspects, all men, were arrested in raids conducted on Monday and Tuesday, the police said. The Queens district attorney charged them in the theft of 48 of the vehicles. Most of the suspects have long criminal records that include arrests for murder, drugs and guns, the police said. At least one was a licensed car dealer.

“They were good at their job,” said Lt. Christopher Gately of the Queens auto crime division. “We were just better than them.”

A version of this article appears in print on December 12, 2013, on page A30 of the New York edition with the headline: Police Arrest 16 as a Theft Ring That Focused on Luxury Vehicles Is Broken Up.

SAVE

EMAIL

SHARE



Try unlimited access to NYTimes.com for just 99¢. [SEE OPTIONS »](#)

Get Free Email Alerts on These Topics

[Robberies and Thefts](#)

[Automobiles](#)

[Luxury Goods and Services](#)

[Natanov, Albert](#)

MOST EMAILED

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU



1. [Video: 35 and Single](#)

2. [After Setbacks, Online Courses Are Rethought](#)



3. WELL
[Exercise as Potent Medicine](#)



4. OP-DOCS
[‘35 and Single’](#)



5. [Google’s Road Map to Global Domination](#)



6. [Baruch College Student Dies in Fraternity Pledge Ritual in Poconos](#)



7. MAUREEN DOWD
[Ain’t Nothin’ Like a Dame](#)



8. [Capitol Leaders Agree to a Deal on the Budget](#)



9. [F.D.A. Restricts Antibiotics Use for Livestock](#)



10. DEALBOOK
[Criminal Action Is Expected for JPMorgan in Madoff Case](#)

Log in to discover more articles based on what you’ve read.

The New York Times Store
[nytstore.com](#)