

NEWS

Steals bikes from the rich, sells to the poor

BY WILSON LEE

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Like flies and shit, thieves and bikes often go together.

In as little time as it takes to tie your shoes or make a phone call, an enterprising thief could be the proud new owner of what was, a moment ago, your bike. And as quickly as it is stolen, an enterprising thief can sell your bike for as little as two months' bus fare.

In the world of the black market, bikes have become just another commodity.

David, a bike thief who calls himself an opportunistic entrepreneur, agreed to provide some insight into the economics of bicycle theft.

"The equation is simple, it's like this: It takes two to transact, the most elementary laws of supply and demand are operationalized. There is a huge demand for bikes, but that demand is unsatisfied by the prohibitive costs of new bikes," he said.

"On the other hand, there is an existing and increasing supply of bikes which you see around you. I merely ensure redistribution from the haves to the have nots, so call me Robin Hood or Mr. Hood."

David (not his real name) said he doesn't have any moral hangups

about stealing bikes.

"On a slow day I'll see and sell about 10 bikes, and at \$100 bucks a shot any question of morality or conscience is easily suppressed by the weight of the cash, tax free," he said.

On the other side of the coin, there is Simon, a University of Toronto student who recently bought a hot bike for \$100. He justified his purchase by saying his last bike had been stolen.

"The way I see it, I just lost my bike, which cost me \$700," he said. "I'm just paying \$100 to get my bike back. Kinda like on insurance policy."

"I didn't even bother reporting it... it's not like they're going to find it"

Ram Hasson, a commerce student at U of T who recently had his bike stolen, was stoic about it all.

"I guess it's just part of the risk you take when you ride your bike," he said. "What can I do, I didn't even bother reporting it since I didn't record my serial number and it's not like they're going to find it."

Pitching his wares and marketing himself as the king of hot discount bikes, David, who has a business card and a pager, operates a small ring of bike thieves.

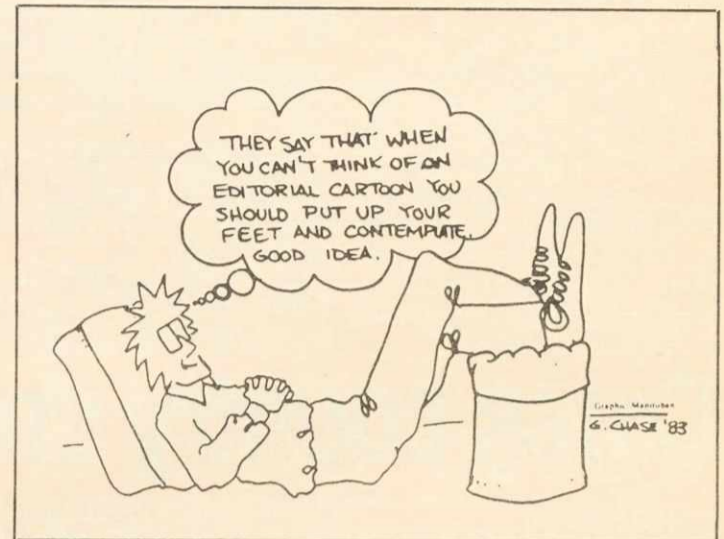
"I deal with about five to ten guys who get me bikes, just buddies from school who'll snatch a bike for some quick cash."

According to David, the market for stolen bikes is as large, if not larger, than the market for legitimately purchased bikes.

"I got a waiting list with about twenty names on it all for bikes, the preference is for mountain bikes, but they'll take racing bikes for \$100," he said.

Bernie, one of David's partners in crime, said the most popular way of stealing bikes is to fit a hollow pipe over the extending lock portion of the U-bar lock and lever it open. Other locks are simply cut with bolt cutters. In some instances, thieves will just use a hacksaw to cut the frame and take the bike, to be stripped later for parts. The frame is either junked or rewelded.

"Sometimes a freezing agent such as freon or liquid nitrogen is used to



freeze the lock and then it's smashed with a hammer shattering the lock. Thieves will go to almost any lengths and devise ingenious ways to get bikes," he said.

However, Bernie had little praise for such high-tech methods.

"That's bullshit man, why should I waste my money on that shit, and my time sitting around for the lock to freeze so I can get busted, when I can just as easily and more quickly lever a lock open or use my cutters."

David said the sum of the bike parts total more than the whole bike.

"Off a decent bike I could probably make double on the parts than

off the whole bike, the only problem is that it takes twice as long to sell the parts than the whole bike."

Paris said while there isn't much one can do to deter experienced bike thieves, he suggested registering the bike, purchasing the new Kryptonite "rock" lock and a plumber's T bar to go over it and parking and locking the bike in well-travelled and well-lit areas of campus.

But even these precautions won't stop Bernie.

"My favourite way is to just hop on a bike and ride away," said Bernie. "The guy is just left standing there and I just disappear into traffic, it's so simple, it's stupid."

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