

By Dunc Malcolm

A Quality Solution for Boat Security



It only takes a minute for a thief to break into your boat and steal it from the dock, so says West Vancouver Police Detective Jamie Gibson in commenting on increasing boat thefts throughout British Columbia.

According to RCMP statistics, over \$60 million in boats and equipment are stolen each year and over 80 percent of these are never recovered. Gibson reports that there were 6,000 outstanding cases in the year 2000 with 14 percent of these originating in British Columbia. He has personally dealt with 30 reports of stolen boats since November 2002, all being powerboats between 21 and 26 feet in length.

Drug trafficking seems to be a major element in the increase of boat thefts. "Organized crime accounts for 50 percent of all boat thefts," says Gibson. "Since 9-11, the borders have literally shut down," he says, describing the easier method of shipping drugs across the water to some secluded beach on the US coast.

He says the favourite targets for boat thieves are 26 foot Bayliners with their 400 lb. payload, although Zodiacs are also popular. "Thieves will take anything they can get their hands on," Gibson says, adding that powerboats make up the bulk of the cases and sailboats are less affected.

Police departments across the province also have noted a rash of onboard break-ins reflecting a burgeoning market in stolen electronic equipment.

So, what can the boat owner do to combat theft? "It can be the simplest things," says Gibson. He suggests some basic measures like using a titanium chain to secure

the boat to the dock or installing a battery kill switch. He advises anything that creates an obstacle often will deter a thief. Gibson also recommends replacing the manufacturer's ignition switch as many units can be started without the dedicated key.

Police departments are working closely with marinas, manufacturers, and the public in an effort to address the problem. Through information seminars conducted by groups like the International Association of Marine Investigators and appearances at

HIN's do not contain a check digit that can readily identify the number as being invalid. Gibson says that numbers often are duplicated by thieves on similar craft or fabricated out of thin air. Although verification of the numbers can be done, he says the process takes far longer than it should.

Presently, recovery methods include receiving reports from concerned citizens and vigilant businesses, scrutinizing classified ads, and good old-fashioned police work.

A newcomer to the loss prevention and recovery scene is the ESP 3000 made by SilverTip Marine Inc.

Introduced at the Vancouver Boat Show in February 2004, the ESP 3000 is aimed at owners of boats 20 feet in length and over. According to SilverTip's press release, the advanced technology "provides cost-effective security solutions specifically designed for the marine environment."

Company CEO Ian McEachern identified the need for such a system after a near miss

with an attempted theft of his own boat. "The dealers couldn't provide a security system that met my needs," he explained, so he set out to design his own. His idea for a GPS-based unit, furthered by a research grant and assistance from students at BCIT, was in development for a year before McEachern incorporated his company.

The ESP 3000 combines features like an onboard alarm with the ability to track a boat and receive alerts from anywhere in the world. The tracking component is of major benefit to law enforcement officials.

SilverTip claims that the tracking function will notify the owner immediately if a problem occurs, regardless of where in the



SilverTip Marine's ESP 3000.

Photos courtesy of SilverTip Marine.

various boating events and shows, law enforcement are trying to emphasize the importance of marine theft prevention. "I would like to see more effort on the part of boat owners and a greater presence of law enforcement," commented Gibson in explaining how the trend of increased thefts might be reversed.

Theft prevention is just one side of the coin, with loss recovery being the other.

Interestingly enough, a major obstacle to successful recovery is the lack of a central registry for hull identification numbers.

