

CABLE LOCKS

Do not use a cable lock as your only anti-theft precaution. Even the thickest cable locks can be cut in a matter of seconds by a thief armed with small bolt croppers. Always use a D-lock or chain as your main lock. Cable locks are useful for securing components such as the front wheel or saddle which could be stolen, but should only be used in conjunction with a D-lock or chain to secure the frame and wheel(s). Also avoid combination locks – these can be forced open much more easily than a proper lock with a key.

D-LOCKS AND CHAIN LOCKS

A large, hardened steel chain and good quality padlock are arguably the best protection available, but are heavy and awkward to carry. A D-lock (also known as a U-lock or shackle lock) is almost as secure, and is much easier to carry around. However, this is not to say that D-locks are invulnerable to attack.

Thieves can sometimes use a car jack to prise open even a good D-lock. To protect yourself against this possibility, try to 'fill up' the whole D-lock shackle by locking it around as many parts of the bicycle frame, wheel, and bike stand/lamp post/railings as possible. This way, there will be no space for the thief to get his car jack far enough into the shackle to prise it open.

Not all D-locks and padlocks are equal. If you buy an £11.99 lock from a superstore or mail order catalogue you can expect to have your bike stolen. A cheap and nasty lock can be identified by its plasticky cover and easily picked mechanism (which has a key that looks like a conventional house key for a Yale lock). Also, cheap D-locks have a thinner shackle and most have the key hole at one end, whereas on the better D-locks the key is inserted in the middle.

In the UK locks are independently certified by Sold Secure (www.soldsecure.com), with three standards: Gold (which is supposed to withstand 5 minutes of attack from a thief), Silver (3 minutes) or Bronze (1 minute). However, some experts have managed to break Gold certified locks in less than 30 seconds so the Sold Secure standards should be treated with a little caution. As a rule, when buying a D-lock or padlock chain you should spend 10% to 15% of the original new value of your bike or £25, whichever is greater.

WHERE TO LOCK

Always lock your bike to an immovable object. Do not lock it to a bollard or even a sign post if the top of the post is slim enough for a thief to simply lift the bicycle and lock over. Beware railings: some steel railings are thin enough for a thief to cut through them fairly easily, and old iron railings will crack or shatter if hit with a hammer. Much better to lock your bike to a lamp post, sign post or proper bicycle stand.

Only lock your bike somewhere public and well-lit - and preferably alongside a more expensive-looking bike! There is no way of absolutely preventing theft, but if you can make it difficult for thieves they probably won't bother, particularly if there is something else nearby which is more attractive and/or easier to steal.

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How to Lock

Some locks are vulnerable to being picked. Always place the lock in such a way that the key hole faces downwards and away from easy access, and if possible pass the lock through the bike frame and wheel in such a way that it cannot be turned around to reveal the key hole. This might make it a little more difficult for you to lock and unlock with your key, but it will make it much more difficult for a thief to see what he is doing if he tries to pick the lock.

Replace your quick-release wheel skewers with bolted or nutted ones to protect against wheel theft. We have these in stock (from £7 per pair), and they only take 2 minutes to fit. Or go for the home-made solution and use jubilee clips or P-clips to clamp your quick release levers closed against the frame and fork.

HOW TO CARRY A CYCLE LOCK SAFELY

Do not carry your bike lock dangling from your handlebars. This can damage the brake and gear cables, and could interfere with the operation of the front brake, wheel or steering. Instead use the bracket provided, or securely attach your lock to a pannier rack, or just carry it in a rucksack or pannier. Remember to oil your bike lock once in a while – just drip a bit of oil into the key hole to keep it all working sweetly.

INSURANCE, BIKE REGISTRATION AND CRIME REPORTING

If you have house contents insurance, it's often fairly cheap to add your bike to that – but make sure that the cover extends outside the home (normally they add your bike as a “named item” of a specific value). Or if you need cycle insurance, we recommend www.cycleguard.co.uk whose insurance premiums start at around £25 per year. Many insurers demand a specific quality of bike lock, often one with a Silver rating (see above).

It's well worth registering your bike (for free) on www.immobilise.com – the database used by the police to track stolen goods, so if your bike gets stolen and then recovered, the police can reunite you with it.

Finally, it is important to report the crime to the police if your bike is stolen, for three reasons: it allows you to make an insurance claim for it; it means that if the police do ever recover it (or if you even spot your bike being ridden by someone else!) it will be much easier to claim it back with a pre-existing crime reference number; and it means that the true level of bike theft will be recorded which should help persuade the authorities that this is a serious crime problem which needs tackling.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Some interesting articles and tips on locking, bike security and the tricks used by thieves:

<http://quickrelease.tv/?p=327>

<http://cycle.standard.co.uk/2009/02/my-battle-with-the-bicycle-thieves.html>

<http://www.ctc.org.uk/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=3634>

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