

# Tis the Season: Auto thefts spiking in Alton during cold weather, here's how to prevent it

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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ALTON – It's that time of year again, when cold mornings drive Riverbend residents to start their cars in order for them to warm before the daily commute to work, and they go inside for that last sip of coffee or that final brush of their hair before returning.

While most people will go about their mundane morning tasks and return to their car in their driveways or in front of their home or local establishment still idling as they left it, many will find nothing. In fact, the colder it gets, the higher the spike in auto thefts in the Riverbend, Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons said late Tuesday morning. In order to ensure cars are not stolen across the area, Simmons advises people do not leave their

cars idling in the morning without remote start, adding it is important to not only keep keys from the ignition, but also out of the car entirely.

“If thieves are going to get into your car and ransack it, they will take the entire car if they find the keys – even if you just have an extra set in the glove box,” he said. “That's a big no-no.”

His warnings have been issued by law enforcement bodies across the area who also suggest people keep their valuables out of their vehicles, especially if they are left unlocked. Opportunists may find money, including spare change, electronics and even firearms in unlocked and unattended vehicles.

Simmons said as many as six vehicles have been reported stolen in Alton since Halloween. One over the past weekend was stolen from Maurice Street, but was later recovered, after keys were accidentally left inside of it. Another vehicle owner is not so lucky, however.

Daniel Harris, who works at Bossanova, went to his car in a hurry to retrieve his cigarettes and phone while it was parked across from his place of employment in a well-trafficked Alton parking lot. It was taken some time between 3-10 p.m. and has yet to be returned. Harris admitted he accidentally left the keys in the seat when he went for his things.

Harris's vehicle is described as a dark blue 2009 Chevrolet Cobalt with a Stutz sticker on the trunk. It does not have hubcaps and there is a scratch over the gas cap. Simmons said the vehicle has not been tracked across the Clark Bridge using its camera system, meaning it is either still in the area or the thieves took it across the river into St. Louis by way of Illinois Route 3, where there is not such a camera system. Simmons also believes the thieves would have switched the license plate of the vehicle at this point.

“Usually, that's where we find these cars – in the city,” Simmons said. “St. Louis Police recover them after a pursuit or abandoned, and they realize the cars were stolen from us. Sometimes kids around here find cars running or something, and they are found usually abandoned within a few blocks from schools.”

“It's been without my car,” Harris said in a Facebook message. “It's like waking up and feeling like a part of me is missing. It had everything in it like the El Pollo Loco mask (a mask Harris wears while performing with his band) and gear and all my cigs. To the people who stole my car, I hope they needed it more than me, and hope they understand all I've done is work hard for my stuff my whole life, and it's scary.”

Harris said insurance will not cover his loss, meaning he is being forced to seek a new car to buy.