



## **Problem Profile**

# **Vehicles Stolen for Export**



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## AVCIS ASSESSMENT OF TRAFFICKING OF STOLEN VEHICLES THROUGH UK PORTS

This document has been produced by AVCIS on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). AVCIS was launched in December 2006 by ACC David Ainsworth (Kent Police) who holds the ACPO portfolio for vehicle crime. The core aim of the unit is to assist the police service in the reduction and detection of vehicle enabled crime by identifying, developing and sharing good practice, removing the use of vehicles as a crime enabler. Further information can be found at the ACPO web site [www.acpo.police.uk/avcis/](http://www.acpo.police.uk/avcis/)

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## Contents

### FOREWORD

#### Section 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and Objectives .....	4
1.2 Methodology .....	5
1.3 Participants .....	6

#### Section 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 Key Findings .....	7
2.2 Recommendations .....	8

#### Section 3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Criminal Involvement .....	9
3.2 Ports and Traffic .....	12

#### Section 4 INITIATIVES

4.1 Operation Stairway/Plinian .....	14
4.2 Operation Brighton .....	15
4.3 Operation Movement .....	16
4.4 Operation Packet .....	17
4.5 Operation Barton .....	17
4.6 Operation Aboard .....	17
4.7 Summary of Operational Initiatives .....	19

#### Section 5 VEHICLE ENABLED CRIME .....

23

#### SECTION 6 CONCLUSIONS .....

24

#### Appendix 1: Brighton Data .....

26

## Foreword:

Working to the ACPO vehicle crime lead Assistant Chief Constable David Ainsworth, Kent Police, the ACPO Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (AVCIS) provides a focus for law enforcement, insurers, manufacturers and associated industry in collating, analysing and disseminating intelligence, promulgating best practice and offering expert advice and support.

This report has been carried out to assess the nature and extent of the movement of stolen vehicles through the UK sea ports. Despite falling levels of vehicle crime in terms of theft of and from motor vehicles, two key aspects are still potentially a cause for concern. First, vehicle enabled crime is still very much a problem. It is now widely recognised that the vehicle is a primary feature in virtually all aspects of crime, from *vandalism* at one end of the spectrum to international *terrorism* at the other. Second, research indicates that the theft of newer and prestige vehicles by organised criminal groups has remained largely unaffected within overall reductions in vehicle theft statistics. Modern cars are virtually impossible to steal without the key and we have observed rises in key burglary and fraud as organised crime groups (OCG) exploit what is essentially a low risk, high profit crime.

This report aims to highlight the ongoing significant problem of both high value and low value/high volume exports of cars stolen from within the UK and from elsewhere within the EU to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

The concentrated efforts of the police and other agencies at the UK sea ports provides an exciting opportunity for partner agencies to work with AVCIS at various levels of prevention, intelligence gathering and enforcement action in order to take a proactive step towards tackling this area of criminality.



John Wake  
Superintendent  
Head of Unit AVCIS

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Aims and Objectives

The ACPO Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (AVCIS) was launched in December 2006 as a result of an identified gap in policing of organised vehicle enabled crime. AVCIS is developing and promulgating a full range of enhanced capabilities that will enable the police service and partners to incapacitate offenders who use vehicles in the course of their unlawful activities, across the full spectrum of criminal activity.

The aims of the unit are twofold:

1. To maintain the overall downward trend of vehicle crime within the UK by building on Home Office key themes of reducing opportunity, incentive and thus offending.
2. To establish a national centre of excellence, to identify and develop good practice and to improve the capacity of police service to deal more efficiently, coherently and consistently with all levels of vehicle related crime through delivery of prevention opportunities, intelligence product and enforcement tactics.

Fundamental to the success of AVCIS is the ability to engage the commitment, knowledge and enthusiasm of a wide range of stakeholders, including other agencies, organisations and the motor industry.

The aims of this report are to identify and resolve a strategic intelligence requirement; to qualify vehicles stolen for export and subsequently recovered; to quantify the existing level of export of these vehicles from the south-eastern (SE) ports of the United Kingdom; to identify the point of theft, destinations and transit ports; to undertake analysis and highlight case studies from specific operations.

The objectives of this report are to encompass relevant Prevention, Intelligence and Enforcement strands of the National Intelligence Model (NIM), concentrating on crime prevention through the identification of effective interdiction points to minimise opportunities for organised criminals to exploit systemic weaknesses; by working with law enforcement partners and shippers to develop actionable intelligence and processes to disrupt organised criminal activities. Finally, to provide a strategic overview and accurate assessment of the nature and extent of the involvement of OCG in this area.

## 1.2 Methodology

Nine South Eastern ports and the Channel Tunnel terminal at Folkestone are evaluated in this report.

Information relating to vehicles in the process of being exported which were identified either as subject to current finance or obtained through fraud, or otherwise stolen and recovered was obtained from representatives at the SE ports and the Channel Tunnel. This information was analysed to determine the origin, destination, quantity and type of stolen vehicles that were recovered during 2007. SPSS software was used to analyse the data.

A summary of previous policing operations pertinent to this study is also included to provide background, not only to identify the point of theft and destination of these vehicles, but to identify the international relationships of OCG with the United Kingdom.

In order to identify and highlight the relationship of the export of these vehicles to other NIM level 2 and 3 criminality carried out by OCG, case studies are included in this report.

## 1.3 Participants

The main participants from ports listed below have been consolidated under the name Operation Brighton.

Main Identified Ports/Activity –

- **Felixstowe** – Suffolk – Containers
- **Harwich** – Essex – Passenger RO-RO / Containers
- **Tilbury** – Essex – Unaccompanied RO-RO / Containers
- **Thamesport** – Kent – Containers
- **Sheerness** – Kent – RO-RO unaccompanied
- **Ramsgate** – Kent – Passenger RO-RO / Freight
- **Dover** – Kent – Passenger RO-RO / Freight
- **Channel Tunnel** – Kent – Passenger / Freight
- **Portsmouth** – Hampshire – Passenger RO-RO / Freight
- **Southampton** – Hampshire – Unaccompanied Freight and RO-RO / Container

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## 2 Executive Summary

### 2.1 Key Findings

As a result of more pressing operational policing issues, vehicle crime is generally perceived as low priority by UK Ports policing. Given that approximately 5 million passenger vehicles transit through the ports and channel tunnel and over 3 million road haulage vehicles and millions of containers entering and exiting these ports annually, this clearly provides a fertile ground for criminality.

Stolen vehicles are used to facilitate the movement of OCG and their commodities throughout Europe.

Between 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2007 and 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007, 219 vehicles were recovered in nine ports in the SE and the Channel Tunnel. The total value of the recovered 219 vehicles was almost £5M, with prestige German marques such as Mercedes and BMW forming the largest proportion. Nearly half of these were destined for West, North and East Africa.

Almost half of the vehicles were found in containers while a quarter were seized from 'Roll on-Roll off' (RO-RO) ferries. One fifth of the vehicles recovered were stolen; 16% the result of a burglary and 29% by fraud. Nearly one fifth were being exported whilst still on finance.

In four operations examined in this report, OCG were targeted and as a result **320** vehicles were recovered, with a total value of over **£12.5M**. The vast majority of these vehicles were late model, high valued cars. One operation conducted against older, lower value cars being exported to West Africa via Tilbury and Felixstowe led to a 75% reduction in thefts of a particular model.

It is clear that OCG use vehicles as crime enablers at all levels of NIM.



## 2.2 Recommendations

At a national level, detailed analysis of emerging trends is needed in order to identify institutional weaknesses and interception points. This can be achieved through improved working relations between nominated personnel in major UK and international ports, AVCIS, Europol and local police, as well as shippers, freight forwarders and other industry partners. As new cars are almost impossible to steal without the key, more work needs to be done to enhance awareness around key security, both in terms of possession by vehicle owners and the issue of replacement keys by manufacturers. More needs to be done to review processes by which shippers and freight forwarders guarantee that the goods in containers match those provided on manifests. Comparisons of declared shipping manifests with actual content consistently reveals mis-manifested property and current processes allow all too easily 'mistaken' declarations to be re-declared (if discovered) and re-routed. All declared vehicle exports should be accompanied with VIN and copy of V5C as standard practice. Consideration should be given to the introduction of a 'hotline' or Suspicious Activity Report system for industry to notify police of concerns. Industry must be encouraged to work closer with police to declare concerns and suspicions. At a local level, ports policing should be encouraged to incorporate inbound and outbound vehicle trafficking within control strategies. Local policing should be encouraged to look at vehicle loading sites periodically and support intelligence-led operational activity led by AVCIS. Industry should be encouraged to assist policing with regard to underwriting costs incurred in retrieving or turning around outbound containers and costs incurred in recovering stolen vehicles.

## 3 Background

### 3.1 Criminal Involvement

The HMIC review 'Closing the Gap'<sup>1</sup> points out that organised crime poses a substantial threat. According to the review, "when viewed in conjunction with conventional police data, recourse to information on drug use, counterfeiting and people trafficking from external agencies (...) suggests that it is widespread, vibrant and growing, with only nine forces being rated as having a relatively lower level of activity. But it is worrying that so many gaps exist in our knowledge of organised criminal enterprises and markets. Without detailed, sophisticated analysis of this tier of criminality, forces cannot target effectively those who pose the greatest risks to communities and the economy"(2005:4). The review continues that "there is good reason to believe that other risks, such as those posed by civil contingencies, terrorism and domestic extremism, are widespread rather than narrowly based" (ibid).

The Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) Threat Assessment 2006/07<sup>2</sup> argues that "organised criminal activity is directly or indirectly concerned with making money. Its division into sectors reflects the law and organisational responsibilities for its enforcement. Most serious organised criminals, especially the more established and successful ones, are involved in more than one sector" (p.7).

"Most successful serious organised criminals have an excellent and dynamic understanding of criminal markets, as is demonstrated by the speed with which they are able to switch commodities, routes, or methods, in order to respond defensively to improvements in controls and the latest law enforcement

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<sup>1</sup> Closing The Gap: A Review Of The .Fitness For Purpose Of The Current Structure Of Policing In England and Wales By HM Inspector Of Constabulary Denis O.Connor CBE QPM, 13 September 2005. (Prepared for hard copy publication, August 2006)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.soca.gov.uk/assessPublications/downloads/threat\\_assess\\_unclass\\_250706.pdf](http://www.soca.gov.uk/assessPublications/downloads/threat_assess_unclass_250706.pdf) (downloaded November, 2007)

measures, or proactively to exploit perceived vulnerabilities or changes in demand. They regularly identify new opportunities for making money” (p.13). “The majority of identified serious organised crime groups or ‘OCG’ are reported to be involved in the illegal importation or export of goods that are stolen, prohibited, controlled or liable for duty” (p.16).

According to the Europol ‘2005 EU Organised Crime Report’<sup>3</sup> “approximately 1.3 million vehicles are currently stolen each year in the EU. Around 60 to 70 per cent of these vehicles are recovered”. (p.22)

However, the report also notes that “the percentage of missing vehicles of the total has increased in several Member States. The latter development is of concern, since non-recovery is generally regarded as a strong indicator of OC involvement. This data is supported by Member State contributions according to which perpetrators are becoming increasingly organised and international. Some areas of vehicle theft such as overriding the electronic anti-theft devices installed in vehicles by the manufacturer require such expertise and resources that OC involvement becomes a necessity. Currently, (in Europe) most OC groups involved in vehicle theft originate in Poland or Lithuania. To a certain extent their position seems to be challenged by Dutch and Moroccan OC groups and groups originating in former Yugoslavia. In addition to these established groups, Russian, Estonian, Bulgarian and ethnic Albanian OC groups are increasingly expanding their criminal activities into this crime area” (p.22-23).

The report comments that “vehicles are stolen for various purposes. They can be exported to be sold in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North and West Africa; sold for parts or re-introduced into the black market of the country where the vehicle was originally stolen by using false or forged vehicle identities. Vehicle theft is also committed in order to finance other criminal activities of an OC group, to obtain get-away cars to be used in robberies and burglaries, and to facilitate smuggling of commodities.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/Organised\\_Crime\\_Reports-in\\_2006\\_replaced\\_by\\_OCTA/EU\\_OrganisedCrimeReport\\_2005.pdf](http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/Organised_Crime_Reports-in_2006_replaced_by_OCTA/EU_OrganisedCrimeReport_2005.pdf) (downloaded November 2007)

Trafficking in stolen vehicles remains one of the most common forms of property crime (...). One consequence of improved anti-theft technology in new cars has been a rise in offences aimed at stealing car keys as well as fraud and robbery by car-jacking. There are increasing instances of burglaries taking place with the sole motive of obtaining car keys. If confronted, these criminals show an increasing propensity for violence. Fraud in this context includes hiring or test driving cars with the intention of stealing them, and insurance claims on cars that have been transported abroad to be sold (...)”(p.23).

The report identifies North and West Africa as becoming more popular destinations for the re-sale of stolen vehicles “(...). Vehicles are either shipped by criminals directly to Africa or via EU countries (that) have significant container and bulk cargo handling ports (...)” (ibid).

According to Europol, within Europe there are four principal routes for vehicles stolen for export<sup>4</sup>:

- From the EU to Eastern and Central Europe;
- From the EU to the South East of Europe;
- From the EU to the Middle East and Far East;
- From the EU to the African Continent.

Previous analysis of vehicles stolen for export was carried out in 2001 in the UK<sup>5</sup>. By comparing this report to the analysis carried out in 2007, it is evident that over the last six years **there does not appear to have been any significant impact on criminals who export stolen vehicles**. The report provided information about models stolen for export and their destinations, sought by interviewing 17 individuals with direct knowledge of the export trade in stolen vehicles including police, customs officers, specialist recovery investigators and private sector car check companies. Nine ports were included in the study.

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<sup>4</sup> . An Overview Of Motor Vehicle Crime From A European Perspective January 2006, Europol.

<sup>5</sup> “Estimating the Numbers of Cars Stolen For Export – A Feasibility study Elaine Hardy and Ronald V Clarke, August, 2001 Home Office Policing and Reducing Crime Unit” (Unpublished report)

The majority of the respondents identified Africa - specifically West Africa - as the most common destination point for luxury and 4 x 4 cars, with later model luxury, sports and 4x4 vehicles popular for export theft. Some 40% were left hand drive cars stolen for export, suggesting that the ports in this country may only be points of transit for cars stolen elsewhere within the EU.

## 3.2 Ports and traffic

There are more than 650 ports in the UK for which statutory harbour authority powers have been granted<sup>6</sup>, of which around 120 are commercially active. Each year around 50 million international and domestic passenger journeys are made through UK ports. In 2004 there were 27 million international ferry and cruise passenger journeys to and from the UK, a further four million domestic passengers on sea crossings and 19 million on inter-island services such as the Isle of Wight and Scottish Islands. Many passengers passing through UK ports travel in their own cars or by coach. In 2004, 6.8 million accompanied passenger vehicles and 0.2 million coaches travelled through UK ports.

Around 95 per cent by volume and 75 per cent by value of the UK's international trade is transported by sea. In 2004 total UK imports across all transport modes were valued at £249 billion and exports at £191 billion, which indicates that approximately £330 billion of the UK's international trade was moved through its seaports. The UK ports industry is the largest in Europe in terms of freight tonnage, handling a total of 573 million tonnes of foreign and domestic traffic in 2004.

In the same year, around 10 per cent of UK port tonnage was transported in containers. Almost a third of UK tonnage and three quarters of container units go through South East ports.

### **Felixstowe – Suffolk**

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<sup>6</sup> Focus on Ports - 2006 edition; Department for Transport

Felixstowe is one of the busiest container ports in the UK and a worldwide distribution point. In 2005 1.73 million containers were handled carrying 23.1 million tonnes of goods.

### **Harwich- Essex**

Harwich has passenger RO-RO traffic to Holland and Scandinavia. It also has a small amount of container traffic to North Africa, along with unaccompanied freight.

### **Tilbury- Essex**

The Port of Tilbury serves the African Continents, Eastern European, South American and the Far East.

### **Thamesport – Kent**

This is a large port that handles container traffic and is a worldwide distribution point. In 2004, the combined port of Medway handled 15 million tonnes of cargo.

### **Sheerness – Kent**

This is a medium sized port. It has unaccompanied freight traffic to Africa. The African traffic consists of broken down /salvaged vehicles and parts.

### **Ramsgate – Kent**

Ramsgate has a dedicated team of 8 officers at Port of Ramsgate (also covering Kent International Airport and East Kent small harbours, wharfs, jetties and slip ways). Freight ferries operate each day to Ostend, Belgium (both accompanied and un-accompanied consignments). In 2004, Ramsgate handled 1.7 million tonnes of mainly RO-RO traffic.

### **Dover – Kent**

Dover is the UK's principal ferry port. In 2005, it handled 21 million tonnes of which 95 per cent was RO-RO traffic. During 2004, 2.6 million tourist cars and 1.9 million road haulage vehicles passed through Dover, mainly to and from Calais in France.

**Channel Tunnel – Kent<sup>7</sup>**

In 2006, almost 1.3 million road haulage vehicles carrying 17 million tonnes of goods and more than 2 million passenger vehicles (cars, motorcycles, caravans and camper vans) were transported on the Channel tunnel shuttles.

**Portsmouth – Hampshire**

Is a medium sized passenger RO-RO port with traffic from France and Spain.

**Southampton – Hampshire**

Southampton is one of the biggest container ports in the UK and in 2005 handled 840,000 containers and 28.4 million tonnes of goods serving worldwide destinations. 80% of container traffic goes to the Far East.

## 4 Initiatives

The operations highlighted here are examples of past and ongoing initiatives by police forces and the ports. There is evidence that vehicles stolen for export are overwhelmingly luxury, high valued cars and are linked to organised criminal groups. These operations also demonstrate the benefit of cross border collaboration between national and international police forces.

### 4.1 Operation Stairway/Plinian

Operation STAIRWAY, run by the NCIS Project VERDUN team<sup>8</sup>, brought together law enforcement, shippers and freight forwarders in order to collate, review and disseminate intelligence and data on stolen and suspect vehicles destined for export and/or recovered at UK ports. Initially encompassing Dover, Felixstowe and Tilbury ports, it gradually expanded to include almost every port in the UK as well as Rotterdam, Antwerp, Brest and Marseille.

<sup>7</sup> Although the Channel tunnel is not a shipping port, it is a major route out of South Eastern England to the continent of Europe. Almost 1.3 million trucks and more than 2 million passenger vehicles transported on the Channel tunnel Shuttles. 1,296,269 trucks, representing more than 17 million tonnes of goods, were carried on the Channel tunnel Truck Shuttles in 2006.

<sup>8</sup> The NCIS OVCS Project Verdun was carried out in 2001 – 2002 and dealt with the export of stolen vehicles. It was divided into three areas 1) to tackle criminals involved in the export of stolen vehicles; 2) to research and disrupt markets to the most popular destinations for stolen vehicles; 3) to improve the relationship with shippers and freight-forwarders.

Operation STAIRWAY was extremely successful in profiling international vehicle trafficking and methodology and was in effect the primary means of development of intelligence which drove pro-active enforcement activity under Operation PLINIAN. Using a combination of resources provided by ports police units, HMRC and local force vehicle specialists/examiners, suitable targets were intercepted using cargo profiles. In addition, ANPR was deployed at point of entry to track non-UK vehicles, and particularly those hired in Europe, stolen and driven to the UK for containerization and export. A number of recoveries triggered successful operations elsewhere.

## 4.2 Operation Brighton

Operation Brighton is managed by AVCIS. The objectives of Operation Brighton are to inform ACPO of the nature and extent of organised crime groups using the South East Ports to import and export stolen vehicles by facilitating the effective exchange of intelligence between stakeholders.

This will help identify intelligence requirements and provide a joint approach to the identified problem profile.

The main goals of this operation are:

- to assist and support policing in combating and identifying OCG activity involving stolen motor vehicles within the ports environment
- to assist current and future intelligence requirements in maintaining a national overview in respect of organised vehicle enabled crime.

A series of checks were carried out under the auspices of Operation Brighton between the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2007 at the ports of Tilbury, Southampton and Thamesport. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> October at Thamesport, three high value vehicles were recovered which were stolen from Birmingham, Derbyshire and Lancashire. Two of the vehicles were bound for Pakistan and one for Dubai.



On 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> October at Tilbury docks, one high value vehicle and a stolen motorcycle were recovered in containers bound for Africa. In the compound awaiting export, nine vehicles which had been purchased on finance were recovered before they could be exported to Africa.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> November at the port of Southampton, an investigation was carried out in the RO-RO compound for vehicles awaiting export to Cyprus. Four vehicles were seized, all of which were subject to finance fraud.

Overall 18 vehicles valued at £180,000 were recovered from this one week operation. Further details are provided in Appendix 1 below.

### 4.3 Operation Movement

Operation Movement was initiated by Hertfordshire Constabulary in November 2005 to investigate of the exportation of high value stolen motor vehicles from Felixstowe.

The Operation Movement investigation began in late January 2006, with the counties of Kent, Essex and Hertfordshire working together in an effort to target those responsible for the exportation of what ended up as 92 high-value stolen vehicles from the United Kingdom to East Africa.

The stolen cars physically recovered by Operation Movement had a collective value of **£3,633,000**. The vast majority of the cars were aged three years and under and the makes recovered included 33 Mercedes, 17 BMWs, 16 Range Rovers, 4 Volvos, 4 Lexus, 4 Porsche and other makes such as Audi, BMW Mini, Jaguar and Volkswagen.

The average value of the cars was **£40,000**. The majority of the cars (54) were stolen from the London Metropolitan area. Twelve persons were convicted of Conspiracy to Handle Stolen Motor Vehicles and financial investigation and asset confiscation proceedings are ongoing as at November 2007.

## 4.4 Operation Packet

In August 2005 Kent Police initiated Operation Packet which identified a shipment of two high value stolen and cloned vehicles by container to Uganda via Mombasa, Kenya. One of the vehicles, valued at **£47,000** had been stolen during a burglary in Kent. The second car, valued at **£37,000 had been** stolen during a burglary in Hertfordshire.

Operation PACKET led officers to a number of freight forwarding businesses and a container loader and ultimately led to the recovery of a total of 56 high-value stolen vehicles with a collective value of approximately **£2,084,000** from 52 shipping containers.

## 4.5 Operation Barton

Operation BARTON was led by Greater Manchester Police Vehicle Fraud Unit in 2002/03 and was supported by Kent, Essex and the MPS, resulting in a number of people being charged with conspiracy to steal high value cars. One offender received eight years imprisonment and a £1 million confiscation order and another was sentenced to four years imprisonment. Over 140 luxury cars had been stolen to order, mostly by means of 'letter box'<sup>9</sup> burglary. The stolen cars were then given false identities before being exported to the United Arab Emirates and Singapore.

It is estimated that the value of all cars stolen was approximately **£6 million**, with the gang making up to £10,000 profit per car.

## Operation Aboard

This operation carried out between June 2006 and June 2007 resulted in the

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<sup>9</sup> Also known as 'creeper' burglary, 'hook and cane' burglary or 'vamoose' burglary, where keys are stolen from a house by means of a cane with a hook at the end, inserted through the letter box or open window

recovery of 33 high valued cars stolen by a Lithuanian OCG based in and around north east London and Essex.

All vehicles were purchased with forged banker's drafts and driven out of the country to Lithuania within a very short time, invariably before a fraud could be detected by the banks.

The total value of the vehicles recovered was **£961,045** while the average value of these vehicles was **£31,000**. The locations of the offences cover the entire country, from Scotland to Cornwall.

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## Summary of Operational Initiatives

The following table identifies the ports (and Channel Tunnel) where vehicles stolen for export were recovered between 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2007 and 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007.

The total number of vehicles recovered during this period was 219. Tilbury had the highest proportion of recoveries with 23.7% (n = 52) followed by Southampton with 21.9% (n = 48); Dover East with 20.5% (n = 45); Felixstowe with 15.5% (n = 34). The remaining ports recovered 18.2% (n = 40) of the total.

**Table One**

<b>Location of Recovery</b>	<b>Number of vehicles recovered</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Channel Tunnel	15	6.8
Dover East	45	20.5
Felixstowe	34	15.5
Harwich	13	5.9
Portsmouth	4	1.8
Ramsgate	1	.5
Sheerness	2	.9
Southampton	48	21.9
Thamesport	5	2.3
Tilbury	52	23.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The total value of the vehicles recovered (n = 215)<sup>10</sup> was slightly less than £5 million: **£4,963,647** and the average value was £23,087. The highest value recorded was £98,150 (Ferrari Spider) and the lowest recorded was £200 (Honda Accord).

<sup>10</sup> The value of four of the 219 vehicles recovered is not known.

Table two lists the make of vehicles stolen for export and recovered between 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2007 and 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007 in the above ports. The highest proportion of the make of vehicle recovered was Mercedes with 24.7% (n = 54), followed by BMW with 14.2% (n = 31); Volkswagen (VW) with 7.8% (n = 17) then Audi with 6.8% (n = 15). Six of these vehicles were motorcycles (Honda (n = 1); Kawasaki (n = 1); Suzuki (n = 2) and Yamaha (n = 2), two were Heavy Goods Vehicles (Scania).

Of the vehicles recovered, 54.8% (n = 120) were identified as right hand drive and 41.6% (n = 91) were left hand drive. Six were motorcycles (2.7%) and two unknown (0.9%).

With the exception of two cars, all right hand drive vehicles were identified as originating from the UK of which 26% (n=33) originated from London (for further details of the origin of the vehicles recovered, see Appendix Three).

**Table Two**

<b>Makes</b>	<b>No. Recovered</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Mercedes	54	24.7
BMW	31	14.2
VW	17	7.8
Audi	15	6.8
Toyota	13	5.9
RangeRover	11	5.0
LandRover	7	3.2
Nissan	6	2.7
Volvo	6	2.7
Honda	5	2.3
Porsche	5	2.3
Chrysler	4	2.1
Ford	4	1.8
Peugeot	4	1.8
Other <sup>11</sup>	37	16.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>11</sup> The remaining makes represent three or less recoveries and respectively were Renault, Seat, Suzuki (n=3 each); Cadillac, Hyundai, Mazda, MGF, Mitsubishi, Opel, Scania (HGVs), Vauxhall, Yamaha (motorcycles), (n=2 each); Aston Martin, Citroen, Daihatsu, Ferrari, Fiat, Jaguar, Kawasaki (motorcycle), Kubota (Digger), Lexus, Trailer (n=1 each).

Of the left hand drive vehicles, 39.6% (n = 36) were identified as originating from France and of those, 18 were taken as the result of a false/stolen cheque or bank draft; 9 due to theft and 5 due to fraud. Other left hand drive vehicles either stolen or obtained by fraudulent means came from Germany (n = 13); Sweden (n = 11); Spain (n = 9); Denmark (n = 6); Netherlands (n = 4); Switzerland (n = 2). Seven other left hand drive vehicles originated in Europe (no specific country identified).

As table three below highlights, of the known destinations, the majority of the vehicles went predominantly towards Africa, with 22.8% going to West Africa (8.2% Nigeria); 15.1% to North Africa and 8.7% to East Africa – specifically to Kenya. Further details are highlighted in Appendix Three.

**Table Three**

<b>Region/country</b>	<b>No. of vehicles</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not known	76	34.7
Cyprus	9	4.1
Dubai	4	1.8
East Africa	19	8.7
Eastern Europe	10	4.6
Germany	1	.5
Japan	4	1.8
North Africa	33	15.1
Pakistan	8	3.7
Singapore	2	.9
South Africa	1	.5
Spain	2	.9
West Africa	50	22.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The modus operandi of the offenders is listed in table four. Fraud represents the highest proportion at 29.2% (n = 64) followed by theft of vehicle at 20.1% (n = 44) then by Finance at 19.6% (n = 43), in this case the vehicle is under a finance contract and is leaving the country without the consent of the finance house. Fourth is burglary at 16.4% (n = 36). Vehicles obtained through false or stolen cheques or Bankers' draft represent 9.6% of the total (n = 21).

**Table Four**

<b>Modus Operandi</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Unknown	10	4.6
Burglary	36	16.4
False/Stolen Cheque Bankers' Draft	21	9.6
Finance	43	19.6
Fraud	64	29.2
Robbery	1	.5
Theft	44	20.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table five highlights the method of export for the vehicles recovered. Almost half (48.4%) of the vehicles were found in containers, while 26.9% were seized from Passenger RO-RO ferries. However, in terms of the choice of transport compared to Modus Operandi, there does not appear to be a specific preference. Of the 106 vehicles recovered in containers, 37.4% were from thefts, burglaries or robberies. Conversely 58.5% of the vehicles recovered in the containers were due to fraud, on finance or as a result of the offender using false Bankers' drafts or cheques.

Of the 59 vehicles recovered in RO-RO ferries, 42.6% were due to thefts or burglaries, while 47.4% were due to fraud, on finance or as a result of the offender using false Bankers' drafts or cheques. Finally, the vehicles recovered at the Channel Tunnel were divided: 53.3% due to fraud and 46.6% due to either theft or burglaries.

**Table Five**

<b>Movement</b>	<b>N/a</b>	<b>Burglary</b>	<b>False Bankers Draft/Cheque</b>	<b>Finance</b>	<b>Fraud</b>	<b>Robbery</b>	<b>Theft</b>	<b>Total</b>
Not Known				24	6		6	36
Container	4	26	11	16	35	1	13	106
Dock							3	3
RO-RO	6	8	10	3	15		17	59
Train		2			8		5	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>219</b>

## 5 Vehicle Enabled Crime

Activities involving the movement of stolen vehicles are not restricted to exporting stolen cars from UK but also include inbound vehicles stolen from elsewhere within Europe.

In January 2007, AVCIS identified hire cars stolen from Germany, using false identity and supporting documents and payment being made with a fraudulent UK credit card. A number of vehicles were flagged and shortly afterwards two men were arrested attempting to enter the UK in two stolen Mercedes cars.

Two days later another flagged Mercedes was stopped at Coquelle and the driver arrested. A fourth vehicle hired using the same false identity as the above has since been identified as being shipped to Algiers, Algeria from the Port of Harwich, Essex, shortly after entering the UK via Dover.

The same month, a French Algerian national was stopped entering the UK at Dover. It was found to be stolen from Denmark by way of hire using a false Italian identity and fraudulent UK credit card. An Audi A6, which had been hired fraudulently in Denmark using the same false identity, was identified as entering the UK via Coquelle the next day.

In February 2007, two Polish nationals were stopped entering the UK via Coquelle in a VW and a BMW. Both vehicles were stolen by way of fraudulent hire in Sweden using false Italian identities. Additional vehicles were flagged and two subsequently identified in the process of being exported to Libya and Algeria. Three other vehicles had already been exported.

In March 2007, a stolen JCB telehandler Orpington, Kent, was identified being exported from Dover. Two articulated Large Goods Vehicles (LGVs) being driven by Turkish Cypriot nationals were found to contain other construction equipment including the stolen item. Further investigation identified that the Scania tractor units were also stolen.



One of the tractor units was attached to a refrigerated trailer which was found to contain:

- A ground boring device stolen from Lower Rd Belvedere, value £4000
- A JCB stolen from Plumstead, value £20,000.
- A Ifor Williams cattle transport trailer stolen from Sussex. Value £4000
- A Ride-on Countax mower stolen from Sussex in 2006. Value £1500

It is clear that this is part of a long established and organised group involved in the export of stolen plant and vehicles from the UK.

## 6 Conclusions

The theft of vehicles stolen for export has also had an impact beyond measure on the victims and their families, whether they be private individuals whose homes have been burgled in order to obtain the keys for their vehicles or companies defrauded of significant amounts of money and vehicles each year. Insurance companies face costs in meeting claims with little chance of recovering vehicles. Even when they may be located, costs involved in repatriating vehicles are often prohibitive.

The fact is that methods adopted by criminals have had to adjust. It is no longer an option to break into a car and “hotwire” the ignition. Improvements in vehicle security have dictated that the only way to steal the prestigious cars at the centre of this investigation is to get access to the keys themselves. This obtaining of keys by criminals has come in the form of the burglary, robbery, fraud and distraction offences committed, which greatly escalates the potential exposure of the victim to the criminals, who are intent on taking their car.

Once the car has been stolen by professional thieves, it is then often passed to another person or group with the capability of organising its disposal.

Cars stolen from elsewhere in the EU are imported into the UK and used by criminals for short periods, including the sub-leasing to others, predominantly within the same ethnic group. It is unclear whether this is merely for financial gain or to negate the effectiveness of ANPR and exploit a general policing reluctance to stop vehicles displaying non-UK registration plates are on the whole ignored by police.

While there is compelling evidence that organised criminals are using ports as the means of disposing of vehicles stolen from the UK and other countries, they are dealt with not at all or in isolation which inhibits effective disruption and investigation at level 2/3 and hinders an effective response to a crime business which spans other areas of criminality. The association between organised vehicle crime and the role vehicles play in other forms of criminality, whether it be transportation, to commit or facilitate another crime or to fund such activity is self evident.

During 2007, nearly 50% of the vehicles recovered were found in containers. It appears that systemic weaknesses in shipping processes including the loading, transport and manifestation of container contents are being exploited, together with a reluctance to expose police authorities to the cost of recovering containers believed to contain stolen property. Where stolen property is identified, it is difficult for police authorities to invest in terms of staff and costs investigating crimes which invariably do not affect residents of that area.

As highlighted in this report, the value of the vehicles recovered in the four operations cited was significant. The overall value of the **320** vehicles recovered was **£12,678,045**, because the vast majority of these vehicles were late model, high valued cars which is the preferred choice of organised criminal groups.

Ports such as Dover and the Channel Tunnel together handle over 4 million passenger vehicles in a year. Millions of containers are shipped in and out of these ports; Southampton alone handles c.840,000 containers annually and is expanding. In a six-day AVCIS operation from Tilbury, Southampton and Thamesport, eighteen vehicles worth £180,000 were recovered.

## Appendix One

### Origin of vehicles recovered from the analysis of data from South East ports and the Channel Tunnel

Country/Region	No. of vehicles	Percent
Austria	1	.5
Belgium	2	.9
Birmingham	2	.9
Bromley	1	.5
Cheshire	1	.5
Denmark	6	2.7
Derby	1	.5
Devon and Cornwall	1	.5
Essex	2	.9
Europe	7	3.2
France	38	17.4
Germany	13	5.9
Greater Manchester	1	.5
Hamptonshire	1	.5
Hertfordshire	2	.9
Kent	3	1.4
Lancashire	3	1.4
Leicestershire	2	.9
Liverpool	2	.9
London	33	15.1
Middlesex	1	.5
Netherlands	4	1.8
Norfolk	1	.5
Scotland	1	.5
Spain	8	3.7
Staffordshire	1	.5
Surrey	3	1.4
Sussex	1	.5
Sweden	11	5.0
Switzerland	2	.9
Thames Valley	3	1.4
UK (n/a)	33	15.1
UK Finance Houses	23	10.5
USA	1	.5
Wales	1	.5
Warwickshire	1	.5
West Mercia	1	.5
West Midlands	1	.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**UK Origin**

	<b>No. of vehicles</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Birmingham	2	1.6
Bromley	1	.8
Cheshire	1	.8
Derby	1	.8
Devon and Cornwall	1	.8
Essex	2	1.6
Greater Manchester	1	.8
Hamptonshire	1	.8
Hertfordshire	2	1.6
Kent	3	2.4
Lancashire	3	2.4
Leicestershire	2	1.6
Liverpool	2	1.6
London	33	26.0
Middlesex	1	.8
Norfolk	1	.8
Scotland	1	.8
Spain	1	.8
Staffordshire	1	.8
Surrey	3	2.4
Sussex	1	.8
Thames Valley	3	2.4
UK (n/a)	33	26.0
UK Finance Houses	23	18.1
Wales	1	.8
Warwickshire	1	.8
West Mercia	1	.8
West Midlands	1	.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>100.0</b>