

Information sheet No. 7



Known tactics of horse thieves

Your daily routine

1. Your daily routine will be watched and logged over a period of 2 to 4 weeks. Your time of arrival and departure, etc.
2. The thief will go onto your yard or into your field to see how far he will get before being challenged or before triggering alarms.
3. Your response time will be monitored.
4. Movement of vehicles on the premises will be monitored from a safe distance.
5. You will be watched to see if any dogs are left on the premises.
6. Security alarms, lights, sensors will be monitored.
7. Tack rooms will be cased for vulnerability.
8. Neighbours will be watched for their routine.
9. Thieves are systematic - they will strike day or night.
10. You will be watched to see if you locked your car.
11. Do you take your handbag with you? (You cannot ride with a handbag.)

Awareness

Change your routine regularly and be aware if there are strangers on your yard or in your fields. You will need to remember the description of the stranger so write it down as soon as possible. Never leave lorries or cars parked for long lengths of time.

Always move them around the car park regularly. Never leave valuables in your car whilst riding. Either leave them at home or lock them in the car boot. Always tell someone of your encounter and report to the police, Neighbourhood watch liaison officer or your Horsewatch co-ordinator. Be aware of any changes in your yard dog's behaviour, ie, it is unusually dopey!

Fields and fencing

1. The fencing will be cut and rejoined to give the appearance that all is well. Hedgerows will be cut through and restuffed.
2. The exits will be planned days in advance - the fewer tools to carry on the night the better.
3. The exits will be freed over one or two fields to avoid neighbours and noisy dogs.
4. Gates will be loosened, check hinges and bolts.
5. Markers may be placed around the perimeter of your land, ie, plastic bags tied to the fence, road markings similar to those sprayed on the road by the highway repair authorities. These will indicate that an item waits on the other side of the fence for collection.

Awareness

Check your fencing daily at close range, as it may appear intact. Check your gates to ensure they cannot be opened whilst locked. Ensure the gate cannot be taken off its

hinges by turning the bottom hinge upside down and/or weld the tops over.

The approach

1. The horse will be approached in the field to see how easily it can be caught. This may be done over a few days.
2. More often than not titbits will be laced with sedative type drugs.
3. Women and children may do this job to avoid suspicion.
4. One or two horses are easier to catch than a herd of horses.
5. Exit surfaces will be studied for noise, ie gravel, tarmac, mud, stones, so attention is not drawn to the theft.

Awareness

Monitor your horses behaviour and check for usual spooky behaviour. They may appear dopey and may be drinking excessive amounts of water. Be on guard with potential livery enquiries and unusual interest in your stock. They may be casing your property. Check the approach to your horses, field or yard for unusual tyre marks, etc.

The theft

1. An unfreezemarked horse is a better catch than one with visual identification.
2. Walkie talkies are used - coded messages will be used to alert the thief that the coast is clear.
3. Planned exits will be freed.
4. The horse will be drugged to stop the animal making too much fuss.
5. If a horse is reluctant to load it will be set free.
6. Mares and stallion are good stock for breeding

7. Small Shetland type ponies are easy to hide.

Awareness

Freezemark your horse as it is the only visual deterrent. Any person can read a number whether or not they are involved with horses. Mark your rugs to indicate the horse is marked. Never leave headcollars on - if you cannot catch it they thief cannot either. Make sure you have good quality photographs of your horses to assist the police in the event of a theft.

The vehicle

1. Horseboxes can be anything from a vegetable lorry to a furniture removal lorry. In appearance these lorries are ideal for night transportation as they are unlikely to be challenged.
2. Hinged and shutter doors can conceal a ramp.
3. Trailers will be padded with foam to reduce the noise of shod horses.
4. Freezer type container lorries will be used.
5. Transit type vans are used to transport small ponies and Shetlands. Even Escort type vans have been used in the past.
6. Old wooden type trailers are a favourite as they are less noisy.

Awareness

Get into the habit of taking vehicle registration numbers. Always keep a pen and paper in your vehicle. Note the make, model and colour. Always report suspicious vehicles to the police, your Horsecatch coordinator and alert your friends and neighbours. It may be the contents of your tackroom they are after.

The connection

1. Roads and routes are planned to avoid the milkman, postman, etc.
2. M25 is a ring road to everywhere.
3. Ferry connections and paperwork is planned in advance.
4. Large consignments of horses travelling abroad will conceal a stolen horse or pony with ease.
5. There are known meeting places on the outside perimeter of horse auctions, lay-bys and carparks, etc.
6. Horses can be on the continent within 12 to 24 hours.
7. Horses do not need a passport to travel abroad.

Awareness

Take vehicle registration numbers of towing vehicles or trailers moving around late at night as the trailer may be stolen. If you are suspicious, report it immediately to the police. Be aware of trailers and horse type lorries parked in unusual circumstances. Keep a camera in your car. If you visit an auction and see a horse tied to a lorry that is not destined for the ring, record the lorry or trailer details. Do not compromise yourself. Alert the auctioneer if you are suspicious of any horse presented for sale. Take note of freezemarked horses. Always keep the auction programme if you are concerned about a horse and make a record of the lot number. Check the Stolen Horse Register before you go to purchase a horse.

The sale

1. Stolen horses will only generate a small percentage of their true value, a quality pony will sell on the black market for a maximum of £600.

2. Stolen horses can be hidden in a herd of horses with ease.
3. Advertisements will be scanned for a potential theft.
4. Quick bargains, no questions asked are always sort after.
5. Stolen horses generally do not go through the ring unless stolen by beginners.
6. Horses will be sold outside the ring and possibly may be tied, unmarked, to an unaccompanied lorry.
7. There is a growing trade in horses being sold whilst on loan. Check out 'Operation Gorran'.

Awareness

Never trust the word of a person who has a horse for sale unless you can authenticate the horse's history. Always beware of a cheap horse and have it vetted. If it is freezemarked, check its identity before purchase. Know the route to your yard; make yourself familiar with the fields and the stock in them. Report to your Horsecatch co-ordinator any suspicious animals that appear. Always report any animal you consider to be neglected to the IPLH, RSPCA or HAPPF - never turn a blind eye. Always report a seemingly dumped horse which may suddenly appear on waste type land or similar. Always write a contract when entering into a loan agreement, even with friends.