



PAUL KINGSTON / NNP

Golden oldie Durham Cathedral, framed by autumn foliage, forms a backdrop to the locomotive Union of South Africa as it steams towards Newcastle. Weather, page 17

Insurance companies run for cover as thieves target new Range Rovers

Deirdre Hipwell, Robert Lea

High-end motor insurers are refusing to insure new Range Rovers in London after a series of thefts. In what could be a serious blow to Jaguar Land Rover, which makes the cars, underwriters are understood to be declining to insure Range Rovers unless the owners have underground or secure parking.

The problem has grown so rapidly in the past three months that insurers and insurance brokers have asked to meet Jaguar Land Rover to discuss the issue.

Thieves are targeting vehicles with “keyless” ignition systems as they have found a way to bypass the security using a hand-held electronic device that can be bought on eBay.

Thatcham Research, the motor insurers’ automotive research centre, said that between January and July this year, 294 Range Rover Evoque and Sport vehicles were stolen in London. During the same period, 63 BMW X5s, a rival to the Range Rover, were taken. Keith Dowley, a commercial property

adviser, who bought a Range Rover this month after his previous one was stolen from outside his house in southwest London, said that he was refused cover from AIG because he did not have underground parking. Mr Dowley said: “How many people living in London have that type of parking?”

He said that when he contacted Range Rover, he was told it was an issue he had to resolve. “I had to tell them, ‘No, this is your problem, I have just bought a £100,000 car from you, if I can’t get insurance, I can’t drive it, and if I can’t drive it, I don’t want it.’” He secured cover from another insurer, after agreeing to transfer all his business to them, including his house insurance.

James Wasdell, co-founder of Quantum Underwriting, said: “If you are an owner of a ‘street parked’ Range Rover [in London], even with the most sophisticated tracker, nine out of ten insurers will now say no. However, we have been able to find a solution by combining the use of physical protection [for the car] and advising clients to insure all their



How to keep it safer

- Fit a category 5 tracker
- Fit a security block over the diagnostic port to prevent thieves using a laptop to start the engine
- Keep the key fob separate from the car when you are not using it
- Park your car in a brightly-lit area if there is no secure parking
- Use a steering wheel crook lock – anything that slows down a thief could stop your car being targeted

assets with one insurer.” Ashley Cole, of Aqua Underwriting, said it had recently paid out on four stolen Range Rovers. “With new business, unless there is underground parking or some form of secure parking and a category 5 tracker installed we will not insure Range Rovers,” he said.

A spokesman for AIG said that it may request additional security measures such as private garaging or the installation of mechanically movable bollards.

A spokesman for Jaguar Land Rover said the criminal re-programming of remote-entry keys was an industry-wide problem, adding: “Our line-up continues to meet the insurance industry requirements as tested and agreed with relevant insurance bodies. Nevertheless we are taking this issue very seriously and our engineering teams are actively working in collaboration with insurance bodies and police forces to solve this continuously evolving problem. This has already resulted in a number of prosecutions.”

Leading article, page 20

Get your knotweed under control or face £2,500 fine

Valentine Low

Homeowners who fail to control Japanese knotweed in their gardens could be fined up to £2,500 under new rules.

The plant, which can grow almost 12ins in a week, has been listed by the Home Office in anti-social guidance alongside Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed.

People who ignore orders to control Japanese knotweed, which is described

as a source of “serious problems”, will be deemed to have committed a criminal offence for which they can be fined up to £2,500.

Environmental legislation has for years threatened fines and even jail for people who plant it in the wild, but this is the first time such plants have been named in anti-social behaviour guidance, which normally targets intimidation and heavy drinking.

The new guidance targets the prob-

lem in residential areas, allowing people to report neighbours to the police if the plant threatens to invade their garden.

The Home Office document states: “These plants threaten our native biodiversity by crowding out native species and destabilising river banks. They can also cause damage to forestry, agriculture and infrastructure.”

It explains how council officers or police can use community protection

notices to “stop or prevent” people growing Japanese knotweed if it poses a problem.

“Breach of any requirement of a community protection notice, without reasonable excuse, would be a criminal offence,” it states.

The cost of trying to remove the plant in Britain has been estimated at more than £1.25 billion. Clearing it from 10 acres of the London Olympics site alone cost more than £70 million.

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Pilots urge drone rules

Strict rules on operating drones need to be introduced say pilots, who predict some will be as big as a Boeing 737 within a decade. The British Airline Pilots Association wants larger unmanned machines to meet the same safety standards as piloted craft. This includes being controlled by operators with pilot training and measures to safeguard the guidance system being taken over by hackers.

Parents’ holiday guide

Parents will not be allowed to take their children out of school so that they can go on a cheap holiday, according to the leader of the headteachers’ union. Acceptable excuses will include a funeral, wedding, religious event or to welcome home parents returning from military service, Russell Hobby, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said.

Isis hostages ‘punished’

The Islamic State (Isis) hostage John Cantlie tells how prisoners have been waterboarded for trying to escape in the latest video released by the group. The British photojournalist, who has been held captive for more than two years, is seen in a video entitled Lend Me Your Ears. It was released days after his father Paul, 80, died from complications following pneumonia.

GPs on child alert

Family doctors should be on the lookout for signs of radicalisation, trafficking or cyber-bullying in child patients, according to the Royal College of GPs, which has joined with the children’s charity the NSPCC to provide advice for doctors to help them to identify issues. The RCGP said the advice would ensure that doctors were better informed about what to do if they had concerns for a child.

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