

Automobiles...

Computerized locking system disables car, locks doors, raises windows to prevent theft

United Press International
DETROIT — A small Detroit firm has come up with a device it says disproves the belief there is no sure-fire way to protect a car from a professional thief.

Officials of Keycon Corp. say their new computerized device locks and disables a car so effectively it renders other anti-theft devices virtually obsolete.

"We even consulted with some car thieves, and they said the system would delay a thief so long he probably would give up and go find another target," company president Donald D. Richardson said at a recent demonstration of the device.

The Keycon system consists of a small electronic computer fitted behind the instrument panel which automatically locks the doors, hood

and trunk, disables the engine, raises all windows and closes the sunroof when the driver emerges from the car.

The system is activated when the driver removes the ignition key, gets out of the car and closes the door. If the keys are left in the ignition, the device sets off the horn and prevents the doors from locking.

The car becomes operable again only when the driver unlocks the door with the regular key and slips a specially coded plastic card into a slot on the dashboard.

Richardson said Keycon improves upon the "limited features" of anti-theft devices offered by auto manufacturers and could go a long way toward reducing car thefts which total more than a million a year.

Richardson said other systems

which lock the hood and disable the engine can be defeated by a "zealous, skilled thief who can crawl beneath the car and attempt to disconnect it."

The Keycon system, he said, disables the engine from the top and can be tampered with only by opening the hood — which is locked.

The system, which the company said took 10 years to develop, is designed primarily for luxury cars — the most frequent targets of professional thieves — equipped with automatic windows and central locking systems.

Cars with manual windows and locks still could be equipped with a scaled-down system that would disable the engine.

Richardson said production of the

device is getting under way and will be sold through franchised automobile dealers and independent Keycon dealers.

(The suggested retail price of \$359 includes installation.)

The company is trying to convince automobile manufacturers to purchase the device for use as original equipment in some models. It said the device meets or exceeds specifications in a proposed federal regulation that would require anti-theft devices in all automobiles manufactured after Sept. 1, 1980.

Richardson said, "However, we anticipate a tremendous demand for our products even without this regulation, particularly among owners of the more expensive luxury cars, sports cars and foreign cars."

Cost of auto repairs shows vast variance

United Press International
AUSTIN, — An insurance industry official Wednesday said a survey showed vast differences in what some body shops charge for repairing damaged automobiles.

Jerry Johns, president of Southwestern Insurance Information Service, said estimates to repair a damaged 1977 automobile taken from eight body shops in Dallas and seven in Houston ranged from a low of \$391.76 to a high of \$1,032.31 in Houston.

"It is difficult to understand why

the cost to repair the same automobile would vary so drastically from one city to another or even within the same city," he said.

"Facing repair costs such as these, it is almost not worth repairing a car with moderate damage particularly if it is three or four years old."

Johns said a state consumer agency cited auto repairs as the No. 1 consumer complaint. He said a federal agency estimates that 40 percent of all auto maintenance and repairs are unnecessary.

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