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## NEWS

### String of vehicle thefts plague Fairmont

By Megan Feddersen — Sentinel Staff Writer



**SWIPED** — This truck was stolen last Friday in Fairmont. A report of a suspicious vehicle resulted in the arrest of John Jackson, who is accused of stealing the truck and then leading police in a chase that resulted in the truck colliding into the Caring Pregnancy Center building on Main Street.

FAIRMONT — Three vehicles stolen last week? In Fairmont?

“It’s weird, especially in Fairmont,” Tanner Bullock said. “It’s like, a small town. With the community we have, it’s hard to imagine.”

Bullock’s vehicle was taken Wednesday evening around 10 p.m. The 18-year-old Fairmont High School senior left his car running while he ran in to drop off some of his girlfriend’s belongings at her parents’ house, located across the street from the Opera House.

“I was talking with her dad. Maybe five minutes later, I looked out and my car wasn’t there,” he said.

“I actually heard two or three months ago on the radio that Buick Park Avenues are the least stolen car in the U.S.,” Bullock said, shaking his head.

The vehicle, a modest 1996 four-door Buick Park Avenue, was found in an alley early Saturday morning, full of garbage with a banged-up bumper.

“With the bulk of auto thefts, people are joyriding, or they just need a ride and take it from one place to another,” Police Chief Greg Brolsma said. “... Oftentimes the vehicle is driven hard if it was taken for a joy ride. There usually is some damage to the vehicle, and we’ve seen some wrecked fields.”

It’s less common for a car to be stolen and then sold, Brolsma added.

The second vehicle stolen last week was reported around 8 a.m. Thursday on Mar-Jo Lane. It was found later that same day on Ken Rue Lane. The third instance happened on Lincoln Avenue. Several attempted thefts were also reported during the

same time period, most in the area of Lincoln Avenue.

With all three car thefts, the owners left the keys in the vehicles.

Brolsma describes car theft as a "crime of opportunity"

Suspects often go through neighborhoods, looking for wallets, purses or other valuables in cars. If they don't see anything worth taking, or if the keys aren't readily available, nothing is likely to happen, Brolsma said.

"Especially in these days when vehicles have auto theft devices, it's difficult to steal a car unless you have the key," Brolsma said.

Brolsma wouldn't reveal if police believe the three incidents are connected, saying only that "they're all being investigated."

Brolsma encourages the public to call police if they see anything suspicious.

"It's important to call right away," he said. "Time is of the essence."

A timely call was what helped police catch a car thief Friday. Around 12:45 a.m., someone reported a truck driving around the 100 block of Lincoln Street. Some eggings had taken place in the neighborhood recently, so the resident was suspicious.

An officer followed up on the call immediately. He didn't see any trucks around, but he did notice fresh tracks in the snow, which led him to Prairie Avenue where he spotted the truck, which John Jackson, 19, of Fairmont is now charged with stealing. A pursuit with lights and siren pursued. Jackson ran stop signs, hit a parked trailer on Main Street and then at the intersection of Main and Second streets, he crashed into the Caring Pregnancy Center, totaling the truck.

If not for the phone call, police would probably be investigating a car theft, but instead the suspect is facing a number of criminal charges of auto theft, unauthorized use of a vehicle, fleeing police in a car, careless and reckless driving and several other traffic violations.

The three incidents are the first reports of stolen vehicles in 2007. In 2006, Fairmont police received 14 complaints of stolen vehicles – five of them were unfounded.

"It's not occurring each and every day," Brolsma said. "But we can see now the damage that can occur."

"A stolen auto can cost a lot of money," he added. "It's a huge financial loss."

The cost can be greater than simply replacing the car. Often in car thefts, wallets, purses and personal information are stolen as well, sometimes resulting in identity theft.

Bulock's wallet, which he left in the vehicle, was found last week on Homewood Drive — without his money or check card. Earlier in the day on Wednesday he gave his social security card to his dad for safekeeping. His new cell phone; \$150 in cash; CDs; an X-Box, four games and controllers were all taken, altogether about \$1,600 in valuables, Bulock estimated.

"Nooooo, I'm not rich," he said with a wry smile. "I work hard for what I've got."

Bulock works two jobs and helps coach junior high basketball. During the summer, he takes on three jobs.

Is there a moral to his story?

"Don't leave your car unattended while running?" he tentatively suggested.

Maybe it isn't deeply profound, but drivers should heed Bulock's suggestion, even

when freezing temperatures tempt them to do otherwise.

Section: News Posted: 2/4/2007

The logo for Sentinel Online, featuring the word "Sentinel" in a large, bold, blue serif font above the word "Online" in a smaller, blue sans-serif font. The text is centered within an orange rectangular box. Two horizontal orange lines extend from the left and right sides of the box, creating a banner effect.

## Sentinel Online

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