Motorcycle Theft in Perspective

June 2022

Table of Content

MAG
Motorcycle Action Group

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Introduction

The Motorcycle Action Group (MAG) has long campaigned for the need for a more robust response to motorcycle theft. The National Vehicle Crime Working Group has openly stated that it is prioritizing the theft of cars and vans.

Motorcyclists widely feel that there is insufficient attention paid to the issue of motorcycle theft.

This report sets out to demonstrate that motorcyclists are making a reasonable request when asking for an improved response to the issue.

Executive Summary

MAG has analysed reported motorcycle theft data on an annual basis for the last four years. Previous analysis has focused exclusively on motorcycle theft on a geographical basis using police force territories as the geographical framework.

For our analysis of thefts for the 2021 calendar year we have changed the format to consider relative levels of theft of motorcycles and cars.

Our analysis has demonstrated the level of uncertainty in all previously reported figures.

For the 2021 analysis we asked for theft figures broken down by the standard Department for Transport (DfT) vehicle type categories (namely Cars, Motorcycles, Light Goods Vehicles, Heavy Goods Vehicles, Buses and Coaches, and Other).

Of the 45 Police Forces contacted for Freedom of Information Act Responses, we received complete responses from 28 forces. Twelve forces gave partial responses covering only the total number of reported thefts. Their recording systems were unable to provide a breakdown by vehicle type within the legal confines for time and cost. Four forces refused the FOI requests entirely on the time and cost basis, and one force has failed to respond at time of this report.

Of the 28 forces that provided breakdown by vehicle type, 26 included a category of "unknown" where the vehicle type was not recorded. On average across the 28 forces 14% of recorded thefts were listed with the vehicle type as 'unknown'. There was a wide range of uncertainty by individual force from 0% to 76%.

For the purposes of our analysis, we assumed that the breakdown of unknown vehicles would be the same as for the known ones and adjusted the figures accordingly.

The final calculation carried out was for cars and motorcycles stolen per 1000 licenced cars and motorcycles in each force area. This then allowed calculation of any difference in the risk of theft between cars and motorcycles.

On average 1.9 cars were reported stolen for every 1000 licenced cars. The range of theft rate for cars was 0.3 to 6.3 per 1000. It should, however, be noted that only one force area returned a result over 2.2 thefts per 1000 registered cars.

By contrast 20.0 motorcycles were reported stolen for every 1000 licensed motorcycles.   The range of theft rate for motorcycles was 1.6 to 60.8 thefts per 1000 licenced motorcycles.

The average relative risk of theft across the 28 force territories was thus found to be 11 times higher for motorcycles than for cars. Once again there was a wide range of relative risk for motorcycles across the 28 territories from 3 to 35 times more likely.
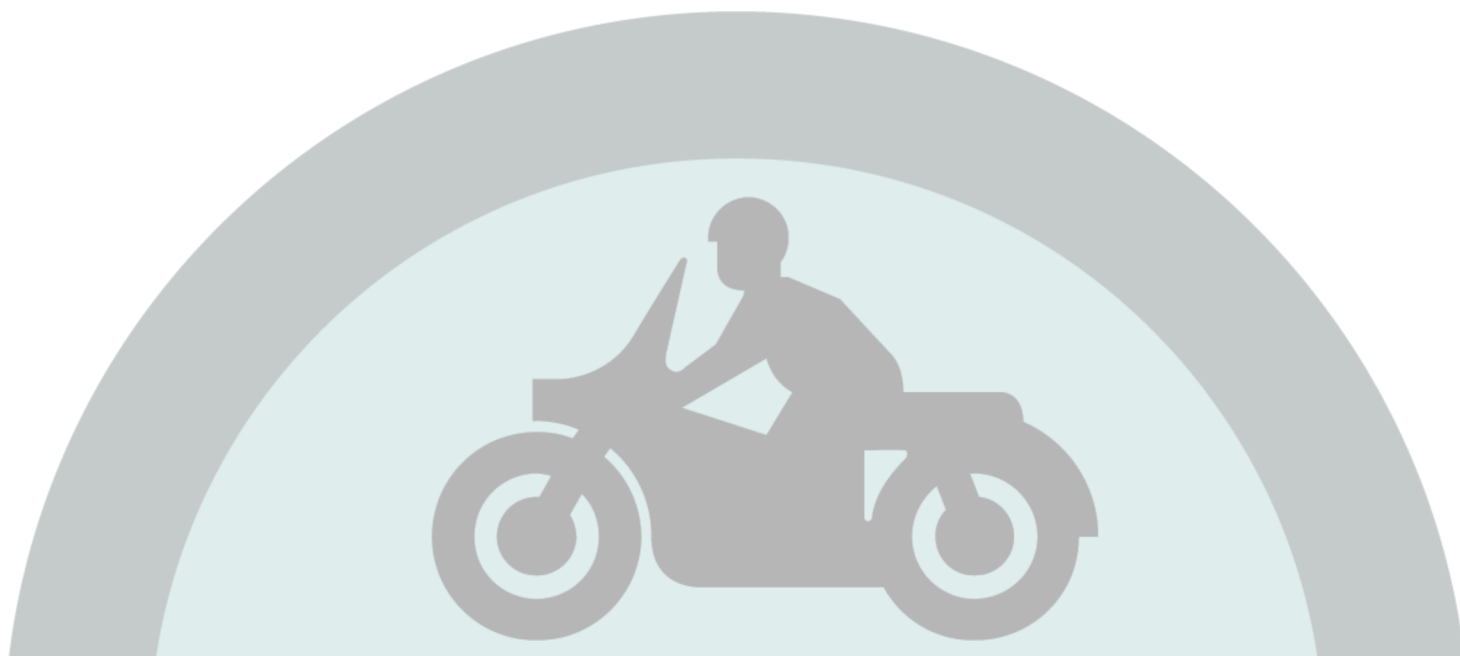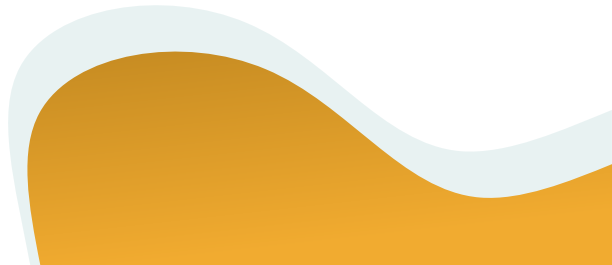
Data

Vehicles by force territory

We extracted data from DfT table VEH0105 for licenced vehicles at the end of Q4 2021.

- **Licenced Vehicle by Police Force Territory**

Force	Cars	Motorclyes	All Vehicles	% Cars	%Motorcycles
Avon and Somerset	972,375	46,748	1,233,571	78.83%	3.79%
Bedfordshire	365,993	14,078	430,872	84.94%	3.27%
Cambridgeshire	529,540	20,620	656,746	80.63%	3.14%
Cheshire	586,502	24,702	707,097	82.95%	3.49%
Cleveland	256,453	8,610	296,478	86.50%	2.90%
Cumbria	260,618	13,553	343,074	75.97%	3.95%
Derbyshire	549,211	27,362	739,858	74.23%	3.70%
Devon and Cornwall	941,550	56,982	1,240,007	75.93%	4.60%
Dorset	422,061	23,697	531,076	79.47%	4.46%
Durham	300,861	12,068	414,463	72.59%	2.91%
Dyfed-Powys	286,330	13,904	396,803	72.16%	3.50%
Essex	971,911	41,710	1,178,451	82.47%	3.54%
Gloucestershire	359,873	17,839	445,929	80.70%	4.00%
Greater Manchester	1,379,256	33,856	1,633,667	84.43%	2.07%
Gwent	301,564	12,028	362,656	83.15%	3.32%
Hampshire	1,133,470	57,107	1,438,764	78.78%	3.97%
Hertfordshire	613,941	21,455	722,342	84.99%	2.97%
Humberside	444,780	24,654	556,446	79.93%	4.43%
Kent	945,065	45,437	1,143,525	82.64%	3.97%
Lancashire	718,768	32,488	875,052	82.14%	3.71%
Leicestershire	573,888	22,944	699,905	82.00%	3.28%
Lincolnshire	409,297	22,734	522,387	78.35%	4.35%
Merseyside	580,541	17,867	684,535	84.81%	2.61%
Metropolitan/City of London	2,610,242	121,099	3,004,055	86.89%	4.03%
Norfolk	487,824	28,327	620,073	78.67%	4.57%
North Wales	367,844	16,588	469,964	78.27%	3.53%
North Yorkshire	422,773	22,408	547,086	77.28%	4.10%
Northamptonshire	417,032	18,264	511,344	81.56%	3.57%
Northern Ireland	996,775	26,138	1,225,016	81.37%	2.13%
Northumbria	610,969	21,178	719,859	84.87%	2.94%
Nottinghamshire	518,944	22,406	623,929	83.17%	3.59%
Scotland	2,518,174	76,210	3,063,554	82.20%	2.49%
South Wales	631,947	22,399	761,589	82.98%	2.94%
South Yorkshire	618,731	23,185	736,673	83.99%	3.15%
Staffordshire	580,791	26,690	721,488	80.50%	3.70%
Suffolk	424,251	22,990	539,002	78.71%	4.27%
Surrey	676,274	30,386	794,787	85.09%	3.82%
Sussex	858,281	43,491	1,040,075	82.52%	4.18%
Thames Valley	1,624,096	53,228	1,985,606	81.79%	2.68%
Warwickshire	333,175	14,375	418,477	79.62%	3.44%
West Mercia	731,842	33,358	919,273	79.61%	3.63%
West Midlands	1,225,288	33,633	1,478,310	82.88%	2.28%
West Yorkshire	1,083,316	34,895	1,294,463	83.69%	2.70%
Wiltshire	581,301	21,442	758,686	76.62%	2.83%
Total UK	**32,223,718**	**1,325,133**	**39,487,013**	**81.61%**	**3.36%**

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Reported thefts

This data was requested from each of the 45 territorial police forces in the UK. The requests were worded as follows:

Please supply the number of reported offence code 48 offences (Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle) for the period 1st January 2021 - 31st December 2021 (inclusive) in your force area.

Please break the total figure down by vehicle body type as defined in DfT transport statistics: i.e. Cars, Motorcycles, Light Goods Vehicles, Heavy Goods Vehicles, Buses and coaches, Other vehicles (Includes rear diggers, lift trucks, rollers, ambulances, Hackney Carriages, three wheelers and agricultural vehicles). Ref DfT statistics: Table VEH0101: Licensed vehicles by body type (quarterly): Great Britain and United Kingdom)

Of the 28 forces that supplied a breakdown by vehicle type, the breakdown did not match the requested categories. Thus, cars were often variously listed as saloons, coupes, sports etc, motorcycles as scooters and mopeds. There was therefore some recategorization carried out by MAG to reassign reports into the requested nationally recognised vehicle body types.

The cleaned data received from the 28 forces that supplied full details is set out below:

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Force	Cars	Motorcycles	Light Goods Vehicles	Heavy Goods Vehicles	Buses and coaches	Other	Unknown	Total motor vehicles
Avon & Somerset	715	794	173	36	4	42	502	2266
Bedfordshire	126	40	32	7	0	4	673	882
Cambridgeshire	385	135	165	4	0	8	187	884
Cheshire	301	179	104	12	4	40	238	878
City of London	8	34	0	0	0	0	0	42
Cleveland	554	81	25	0	1	5	1	667
Derbyshire	588	364	224	17	4	37	160	1394
Devon & Cornwall	123	55	24	0	0	25	265	492
Dorset	376	144	90	2	0	5	25	642
Dyfed Powys	147	20	10	1	1	13	16	208
Hertfordshire	1038	261	226	8	0	4	165	1702
Humberside	89	173	42	6	0	14	598	922
Kent	719	335	197	39	0	21	395	1706
Lancashire	458	224	171	3	5	32	735	1628
Leicestershire	805	368	257	3	2	18	98	1551
Lincolnshire	343	101	164	13	3	44	84	752
Metropolitan	15930	7104	3226	216	40	254	834	27604
North Wales	176	64	29	26	2	8	118	423
North Yorkshire	140	139	35	12	1	26	122	475
Northamptonshire	417	138	119	0	0	20	58	752
Northern Ireland	496	89	48	9	0	32	358	1032
Northumbria	848	539	189	0	0	34	9	1619
Nottinghamshire	872	412	394	53	3	34	274	2042
South Wales	1013	274	213	10	8	54	148	1720
South Yorkshire	568	312	507	54	16	90	2177	3724
Surrey	725	259	183	4	5	16	366	1558
Sussex	587	359	151	39	3	453	0	1592
West Yorkshire	1726	866	878	136	22	122	397	4147
Totals	30273	13863	7876	710	124	1455	9003	63304

Adjustments

The 'unknowns' were distributed amongst the defined categories equal to the proportion of known vehicle types on a force-by-force basis. The adjusted data is shown below:

Force	Cars	Motorcycles	Light Goods Vehicles	Heavy Goods Vehicles	Buses and coaches	Other	Total motor vehicles
Avon & Somerset	918	1020	222	46	5	54	2266
Bedfordshire	532	169	135	30	0	17	882
Cambridgeshire	488	171	209	5	0	10	884
Cheshire	413	246	143	16	5	55	878
City of London	8	34	0	0	0	0	42
Cleveland	555	81	25	0	1	5	667
Derbyshire	664	411	253	19	5	42	1394
Devon & Cornwall	267	119	52	0	0	54	492
Dorset	391	150	94	2	0	5	642
Dyfed Powys	159	22	11	1	1	14	208
Hertfordshire	1149	289	250	9	0	4	1702
Humberside	253	492	120	17	0	40	922
Kent	936	436	256	51	0	27	1706
Lancashire	835	408	312	5	9	58	1628
Leicestershire	859	393	274	3	2	19	1551
Lincolnshire	386	114	185	15	3	50	752
Metropolitan	16426	7325	3327	223	41	262	27604
North Wales	244	89	40	36	3	11	423
North Yorkshire	188	187	47	16	1	35	475
Northamptonshire	452	150	129	0	0	22	752
Northern Ireland	759	136	73	14	0	49	1032
Northumbria	853	542	190	0	0	34	1619
Nottinghamshire	1007	476	455	61	3	39	2042
South Wales	1108	300	233	11	9	59	1720
South Yorkshire	1367	751	1220	130	39	217	3724
Surrey	948	339	239	5	7	21	1558
Sussex	587	359	151	39	3	453	1592
West Yorkshire	1909	958	971	150	24	135	4147
TOTALS	**34663** **54.76%**	**16166** **25.54%**	**9617** **15.19%**	**905** **1.43%**	**162** **0.26%**	**1791** **2.83%**	**63304** **100.00%**

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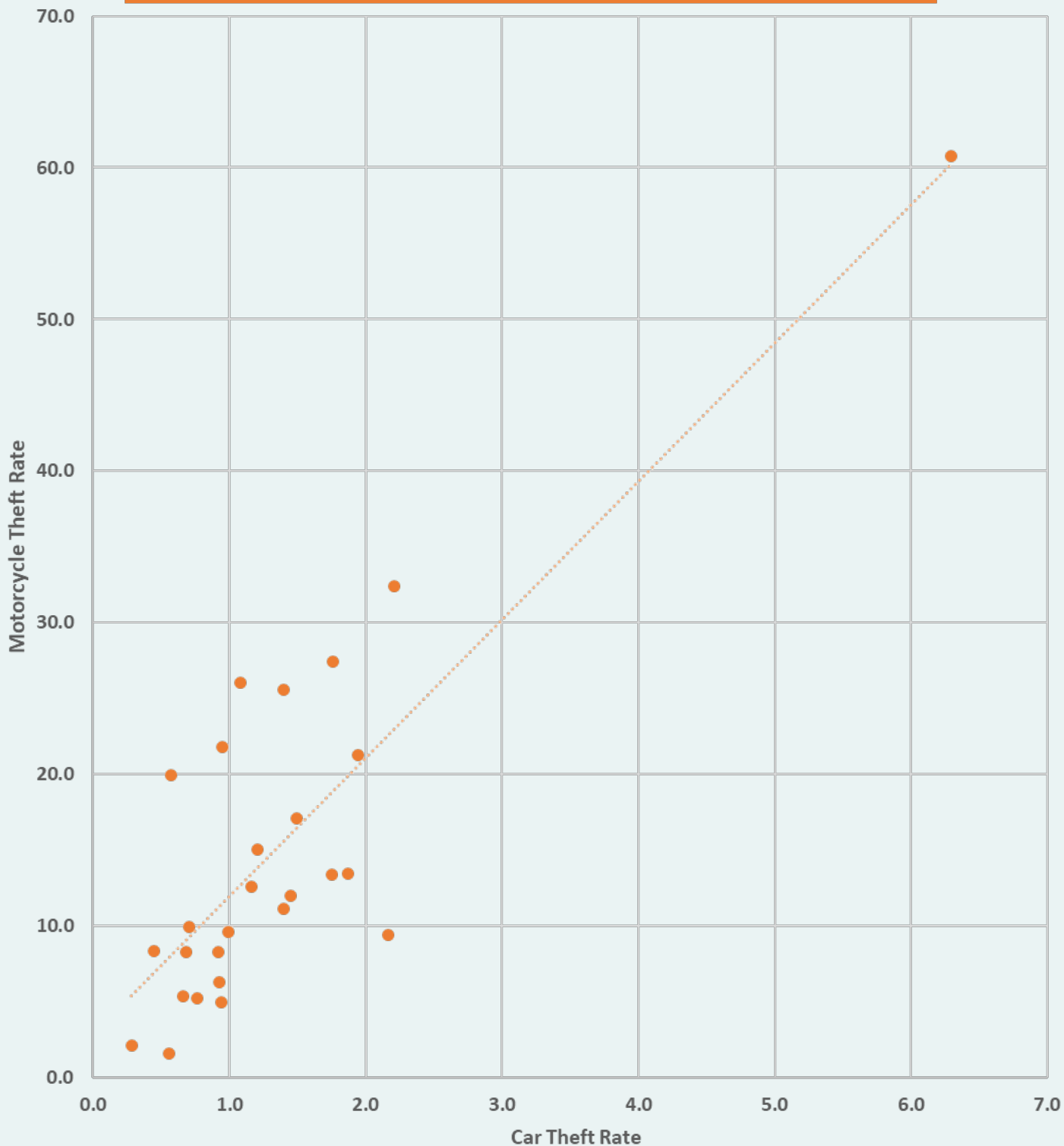Motorcycle Action Group

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Risk calculation

The risk of a theft for cars and motorcycles was determined by dividing number of vehicles reported stolen by the number of licenced vehicles (in 1000s) of that type in each force area. The results are shown below.

Note the figures for the Metropolitan Police Force and City of London Police are combined to a single result for London.

Force	Cars stolen per 1000 licenced cars	Motorcycles stolen per 1000 licenced motorcycles	Motorcycle vs Car Risk
Avon & Somerset	0.9	21.8	23
Bedfordshire	1.5	12.0	8
Cambridgeshire	0.9	8.3	9
Cheshire	0.7	9.9	14
Cleveland	2.2	9.4	4
Derbyshire	1.2	15.0	12
Devon & Cornwall	0.3	2.1	7
Dorset	0.9	6.3	7
Dyfed Powys	0.6	1.6	3
Hertfordshire	1.9	13.5	7
Humberside	0.6	20.0	35
Kent	1.0	9.6	10
Lancashire	1.2	12.6	11
Leicestershire	1.5	17.1	11
Lincolnshire	0.9	5.0	5
Metropolitan/CoL	6.3	60.8	10
North Wales	0.7	5.4	8
North Yorkshire	0.4	8.3	19
Northamptonshire	1.1	26.1	24
Northern Ireland	0.8	5.2	7
Northumbria	1.4	25.6	18
Nottinghamshire	1.9	21.2	11
South Wales	1.8	13.4	8
South Yorkshire	2.2	32.4	15
Surrey	1.4	11.1	8
Sussex	0.7	8.3	12
West Yorkshire	1.8	27.4	16
TOTALS	**1.9**	**20.0**	**11**

Correlation between car and motorcycle theft rates

(Scatter plot with x-axis "Car Theft Rate" ranging from 0.0 to 7.0 and y-axis "Motorcycle Theft Rate" ranging from 0.0 to 70.0)

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Key Findings
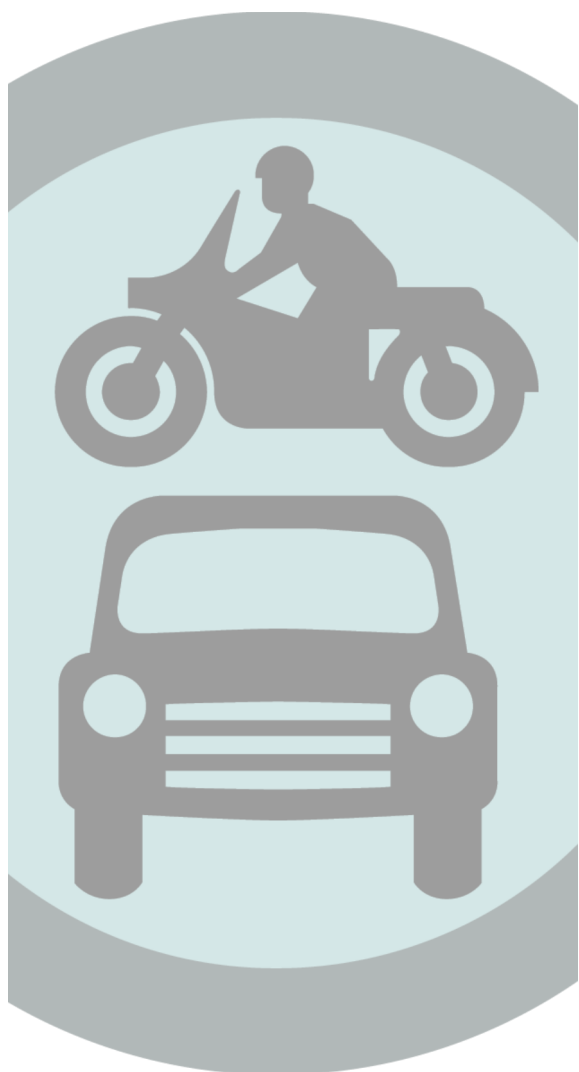
Motorcycle Theft

20 motorcycle thefts were reported per 1000 licenced motorcycles in the UK in 2021

Car Theft

1.9 car thefts were reported per 1000 licenced cars in the UK in 2021

Relative Risk

Motorcycles were 11 times more likely to be stolen than cars in the UK in 2021

Motorcyclists were the victims of over 25% of all motor vehicle thefts in the UK in 2021

Recommendations

Better Reporting

The lack of a consistent reporting procedure making vehicle theft analysis viable at a national level needs to be addressed as a priority.

Adjusting priorities

Motorcycle theft must be prioritised as a specific focus for the National Vehicle Crime Working Group and all its partners.

Whilst it is clear that there is a good deal of variation from territory to territory it is evident that motorcyclists are disproportionately affected by vehicle theft. As a minority group, riders feel that their interests are neglected. In light of the difference in exposure to this crime, a greater focus must be placed on this particular aspect of vehicle crime. Motorcycle thefts comprised over 25% of all the vehicle thefts in our sample data. Motorcycle theft cannot continue to be treated as a minor issue.

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