



# Chipping away at the car thieves

... And an eye that will track them down

**A** MICROCHIP no bigger than a pinhead is set to beat thieves by providing cars with a hidden logbook. Revolutionary security, it can identify any car and its owner in seconds without reference to a database.

Even if given false number plates and repainted, a microchip-protected stolen car can be identified immediately because police and dealers can 'read' a hidden chip containing its registration details.

The chip is to retail at about £12 and as many can be hidden in a car as a motorist chooses. Inexpensive instant identity is the aim, regardless of how thieves try to change a car's official vehicle ID.

A pocket 'reader', costing £45 and little larger than a cigarette packet, is useless to a thief — unless he wants to see which cars not to steal — because a chip cannot be erased. Yet it can be 'read' through metal and glass.

## Unique

A chip will store more than 60 letters and figures, sufficient for the identities of both a car and its owner to be permanently held.

Chips can be removed before resale, or a dealer can write in: 'See second owner.'

The tiny chip can be programmed on an assembly line with a car's unique 17-digit Vehicle Identity Number and have a buyer's personal details added by a dealer. Or all details of a car and buyer can be 'written in' by a dealer.

Only vehicle manufacturers and accredited dealers will be able to supply chips and purchase readers. Police may give readers free.

Named Selectatag, the microchip — launched today by Selectatag Security Systems, at Locksbottom, Kent — is coming in a variety of forms ranging from a pinhead dot to a chip hidden in a credit card.

by **MICHAEL KEMP**

The theft-defeating innovation, intended to be offered also to the cycle, motorcycle, boat and mobile phone industries, is making its first public appearance at the London Motor Show.

Pocket and mobile phones can be protected by programming a chip with half a phone's number. It is then impossible for a thief to insert another usable number electronically without destroying the chip, which will render a phone inoperable.

## Codings

At the London Motor Show, where visitors can see the chip in action, it is protecting the spectacular new British AC Ace roadster and Japan's sensational MG Midget-like Suzuki Cappuccino.

The chip can also contain nearly five-trillion different ID codings, in addition to logbook details.

Next year it will be possible for a similar chip embedded during the production process — to record a car's service and serious accident history.



Go anywhere estate: The Suzuki Vitara JX

## Rough road to a sales bonanza

FOR a quirky reason, which no expert can explain, fun-to-drive off-landers seem almost impervious to recession gloom. For the past three years, sales of four-wheel-drive cars have continued to rise — and are still soaring. Manufacturers displaying new and updated 1994 models at the show are confident of rip-roaring business. Japanese Suzuki is even preparing for a record number of its go-anywhere Samurai, the world's smallest multi-purpose off-roader, to be ordered as Christmas presents. Suzuki off-landers now start at £7,995. And the company is unveiling the four-wheel-drive Vitara JX 1.6-litre multi-valve, five-door estate. At £11,990, it is £1,510 less than the previous least expensive go-anywhere. Market

leader Land Rover, introducing auto-transmission in all Range Rover and Discovery models for 1994, is also brimming with success, and other big gainers are the Vauxhall Frontera, Mitsubishi Shogun, Chrysler Jeep, Ford Maverick and Nissan Terrano.

In Britain last year, sales of 4WD vehicles were 17 per cent higher than in 1991, and over the past five years the market has grown by an amazing 38.6 per cent.

And so far this year the number of motorists buying these fun machines is 32 per cent more than in the first nine months of last year. Their popularity is echoed elsewhere in Europe.

## Beating breakdown fears

NEW help is on the way to reduce many women drivers' greatest fear of being stranded at the wheel alone on a motorway.

Gill Hopkins, organiser of Women In The Driving Seat workshops, says she was 'shocked to discover just how frightened women are'.

'In spite of all advice, the women drivers' biggest worry is still of breaking down on a motorway when alone at the wheel or with young children, particularly on a winter night', she says.

As a special representative for Lombard Motor Finance, staging nationwide evening 'workshop' classes in garages for women drivers, Gill has now produced a Motorway Safety cassette.

The four-minute tape is designed 'to take fear out of your problem'. Calmly a female voice — not Gill's — tells the stranded driver what to do.

■ GET out of your car on the roadside, taking your children with you. Leave animals in the car.

■ CARRY motoring organisation membership details plus pen and paper.

■ LOOK along the inside of the hard shoulder for a white marker post with an arrow pointing to



Gill Hopkins: Strong advice

the nearest emergency telephone, which cannot be more than half a mile away.

■ TAKE the children with you to make the call, noting any instructions on the inside of the phone box door.

■ TELL the police, who will answer, if you are a lone woman driver, and then do as instructed.

If another driver stops to offer help — decline. Never accept help from a stranger and note the vehicle number of anyone who stops to offer assistance.

Return to your car and sit on the bank nearby, so that you can quickly lock yourself back inside if a stranger approaches.

Do not be afraid to ask a recovery man or police officer for identity. Ask if they know your name — they will, if you have telephoned for help and they are genuine.

'A woman was chosen to produce the tape because a feminine voice is more reassuring to a woman in distress', says Gill. 'It is important in a motorway breakdown to stay calm and do the right things rationally.' Women In The Driving Seat workshops, started by Gill as an experiment nearly six years ago, have been a runaway success. This year '75 are being staged and in 1994 more than 100 are planned.

Garage mechanics explain how a woman can most easily change a wheel and perform basic car service functions, police offer safety and driving advice, experts answer questions on car finance, and women attending each workshop can ask for an answer to 'any worrying motoring matter'. If experts do not know, Gill finds out.

Her Motorway Safety cassette is obtainable from Women In The Driving Seat Workshops, free. Gill Hopkins, at Lombard North Central, 3 Princess Way, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 1NP, will supply a list of planned workshops on request.

WALKING round the exhibits, you can see cars being stolen in the streets outside. And one could even be yours. But no thief will get very far because visitors will be viewing the computer screens of an electronic eye in action, trapping car crooks in the act.

This will be the first public showing of TrakBak, the system developed to protect cash in transit which has now been extended to give cars the same security.

A TrakBak control room has been built on Stand 151 to demonstrate the service for motorists.

Secular TrakBak is a hidden 'guard box' fixed inside a car without any outward trace that a thief can spot. So there is little risk of it being put out of action.

When a car is parked its guard box, packed with protective electronics and a transmitter, is instantly activated. Any movement is radioed to a control centre manned 24 hours a day. If a protected car moves in any way — even if it is jacked-up or lifted by a tow truck — its guard box sends-out an alert. A warning beep sounds and red danger arrow appears on a controller's screen, with time and navigational co-ordinates.

At the touch of a button controllers can see the danger arrow positioned and moving on an Ordnance Survey map, on a TV style screen. The map can be enlarged to precisely position the stolen car — to tell police where to apprehend its thief.

The electronic maps cover the whole of Britain, and even the English Channel.

## Hijacking

A year ago cash-carrying armoured vehicles were being 'lost' at the rate of eight a year in Britain. But since being protected by TrakBak not one has been lost through hijacking.

This nationwide £20million anti-theft security system will cost drivers £640 for in-car equipment plus £240 a year, which can be partly offset by lower insurance premiums. Already several insurers are designing premiums around TrakBak.

One man's premium for a £405,000 21mph Jaguar XJ220 supercar was quoted at £48,000 a year until TrakBak was fitted. His insurance bill has dropped to £32,000.

Mercedes-Benz is fitting TrakBak to 150 of its top limousines and Rover is starting trials of the system. It may become the first volume car-maker offering TrakBak as works-approved protection.

Securicor Datatrak Network, which operates the new service, is aiming to have 10,000 TrakBak clients by the end of 1994.

With the system a motorist can carry a pocket panic button, which, when pressed, will alert the control room of attack via his car's guard box.

■ EIGHT new Peugeot models are making their UK debut and the highlight is the 306 Cabriolet, set to arrive here in the spring. With optional 1.8-litre engine and manual gearbox, which at a touch alerts the control room of attack via his car's guard box.

■ RENAULT is revealing its sporting 134mph Clio Williams, which goes on sale in December at £13,275. Designed to provide class-leading handling, roadholding and enjoyment without sacrificing comfort and refinement, its two-litre engine gives 25-44.1mpg. One thing is sure — that one of 2,500 limited edition buyers will feel let down.

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