

## Cycle security

More than 100,000 bicycles are stolen every year in the UK. Hardly any are recovered. If you cannot park your bike behind a locked door whenever you leave it, you need a bike lock.

Some locks are truly awful, such as cable locks that can be cut with a pair of scissors. U-locks with cylindrical keys have famously been picked with a Biro pen top, forcing a mass recall by a manufacturer. While any lock is better than no lock, it helps to be aware of the level of protection you're buying.

In the UK locks can be – but aren't required to be – tested by Sold Secure, a not-for-profit company administered by the Master Locksmiths Association. They rate locks Bronze, Silver or Gold in ascending order of security. The locks should hold out for one, three and five minutes respectively against progressively more determined and tooled-up attacks.

It's not a bad guide to quality if you take the times listed with a pinch of salt. Even without power tools, a thief with big bolt croppers or a stubby bottle jack can break open Gold-rated locks in under a minute. That doesn't mean locks are useless. Most will stop an opportunist thief and good ones can make it hard enough work for a professional thief that he'll look for easier pickings.

### **How to use a lock**

The key, if you'll excuse the pun, is to use the lock wisely. First of all: always use it. If you turn your back on your bike even for a few seconds, lock it. Lots of cyclists have just nipped into a shop only to find their bike gone on coming out. Without a lock, anyone can steal your bike. If it's locked, only lock-breakers can attempt it.

Thieves don't like an audience, so lock your bike in a public place rather than down an alleyway. Lock it through the frame to a solid, immovable object such as a bike stand or iron railings. Make sure the object is a closed loop, so the thief can't lift the bike over the top, and don't use anything flimsy or the thief will cut that instead of the lock.

If you're using a U-lock, it's better to lock the bike low down around the bottom bracket or seat-tube rather than over the top-tube, where the thief can get at it easily. Fill the shackle of the lock with as much bike and street furniture as will fit, leaving as little daylight in the lock as possible. It makes the lock harder to attack. A shorter, narrower lock is harder to attack than a big one, though it is more awkward to attach in some situations.

If you're using a flexible lock such as a cable or a chain, wrap it in such a way to keep it fairly taut. Again, this makes it harder for the thief to attack it with cable cutters or bolt croppers.

If you've got a Gold-standard lock with a proper (not cylindrical) key from the likes of Abus, Squire, Kryptonite or Trelock, the lock itself will be fairly pick-proof and drill-proof. Nevertheless, if you can make the locking mechanism harder to get at it's worth doing so.

Don't forget to keep a spare key somewhere safe. All locks can be broken but that doesn't mean that lock-breaking is easy.

You'll need to oil the lock occasionally to prevent it seizing. Squirt a bit of oil into any holes and work it in by repeatedly opening and closing the lock. If your lock freezes solid in winter, pour hot water over it and oil it afterwards.

## **Types of lock**

Locks range from thin wires to thick chains that could be used to moor trawlers. The more security you want and the more you pay, the heavier the lock will be... and therefore, the harder it will be to haul around.

Thin cable locks are more properly called immobilisers, not locks. The lightest use retractable 2mm wire cables and a combination lock in a plastic body the size of a mobile phone. They're fine for café and loo stops where you're away from your bike for moments. They won't stop a thief, or anyone armed with cable cutters.

Thicker cable locks look like they offer lots more security than this. They don't. A 7mm cable is harder to cut than a 2mm cable, but not that much, and sometimes the thickness is extra plastic. As a lock to foil kids and to get your children into the security habit, you could do worse. Just don't expect great protection.

U-locks (or D-locks) are probably the best compromise between portability and security for town cyclists, as they're easily carried in brackets fixed to the frame. Opportunists won't even attempt to attack them, so any Gold or even Silver standard U-lock is usually sufficient. For high-risk areas or more expensive bikes, consider a U-lock with a narrower and/or shorter shackle. If you don't mind the weight, a motorcycle-style security chain offers the best protection. They're also great for home use, with a ground or wall anchor. Get a long one and loop it through three or four bikes.

A useful Continental-style lock you don't see so often in Britain is the frame- or wheel-lock, also known as a nurse's lock. It fits permanently to a bike's seat-stays. It works by means of a locking bar going between the spokes of the back wheel, preventing anyone riding off on the bike. Security isn't super high, but it's always there so you're never without a lock.

## **Bits and pieces**

Even if your bike is securely locked, thieves may half-inch parts from it. Anything with a quick release skewer can be removed in moments by anyone. A bike that's locked up in town needs more protection than this.

A quick-and-dirty solution is to bind the quick release levers to the frame using plumber's metal hose clamps. A better option is to use Allen bolts instead of quick releases. Better still is a set of security skewers. These have specific, individual bolt heads that require a dedicated tool to undo.

## **Stolen property**

If, despite your precautions, your bike does get stolen, report the theft to the police. It's unlikely anything will happen, but it's a requirement of insurance policies that you do this. Your bikes are insured, right?

Some household policies include bike insurance. Check the small print. Often the maximum bike value is £300 or so, or else it doesn't cover the bike when you're out and about. Cycle-specific insurance does exist – such as CTC Cyclecover (<http://www.cyclecover.co.uk>).

Some locks come with a several hundred pound guarantee should your bike be stolen. Again, check the small print. The requirement may be that you send the broken lock. Thieves seldom leave broken locks.

***And finally...***

Theft does happen but it isn't inevitable. Most bikes that are stolen are either locked with cheap and nasty locks or else not locked at all. With a reasonable lock and a sensible attitude you're almost certain to keep your bike safe and secure.

Impress this on your children, especially teenagers whose mountain bikes are prime targets. Give your teen a lock and make sure – if the bike will be unattended at any point – that they doesn't leave home without it.