

Lock it Up!

Written by Scott Hammer

Wednesday, 31 August 2011 12:09 - Last Updated Thursday, 08 September 2011 12:38



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August 31, 2011

I am not a paranoid person by nature. I am the trusting type, but after reading or hearing about fishermen getting equipment stolen at tournaments, hotels, boat ramps and even out of their own garages, driveways, storage sheds and homes, I can't help but wonder if I shouldn't be a bit more worried. Even pros at the top tour levels of the sport are not immune!

Face it; we spend a lot of cash participating in this sport. I have friends "lucky" enough to live on lakes who have the convenience of putting their boats on lifts at their docks. They share their horror stories about getting their boat houses broken into and their boats ransacked. I have heard stories of rods and reels being swiped at gas stations, restaurants and various other parking lots while the unlucky angler is in paying for gas, buying snacks or picking up some tackle. I've even heard of tackle being taken while the boat was tied to a public boat ramp as the guy hiked up the hill to get his truck and trailer.

These are all crimes made possible by opportunity and most could have been avoided by simply locking up tackle in rod boxes, leaving fishing partners with the boat while you run into a store and by taking some simple precautions. But the more I thought about it the more paranoid

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I became and I started to list of all the ways we could lock our fishing possessions up. The list got quite lengthy. But not thinking about this stuff can quickly make you a victim.

If a thief wants your gear bad enough they will more than likely get it. So while there are things we can do to protect our investments, it's a good idea to make sure your insurance is up to date, that it covers your gear as well as your boat and that it is adequate to replace anything stolen. Keep a log of your fishing gear with pictures and receipts if possible so you'll know what the replacement value will be. My tackle lists keep track of the date the item was purchased, purchase price, make, model and serial number of all my electronics or anything else that has that information. This includes my Power Poles and my trolling motors.

Wanna check out my list? Let's start with where we store our boat and tackle when not in use. Most of us use a garage or storage shed. It goes without saying that these buildings should be kept locked. If they are detached from your house, extra precautions like motion sensing lights and door/window alarms tied into your home security system will be an added bonus. Carports or other types of open storage are obviously particularly vulnerable. I know a few guys who set up trail cameras and have gotten pictures that have led to arrests.

Sure, it's a hassle, but an insanely effective way of preventing theft is to remove all your gear and electronics at the end of the day, especially if you are away from home. A Hotel/Motel parking lot full of bass boats has got to look like King Tut's tomb full of gold to those who might want to pilfer some gear. I take everything into my room every night at a tournament. I have known some who even take their trolling motors off. Some trolling motors come with a quick-disconnect system that allows them to be removed. And if you think a boat cover is going to be any kind of deterrent whatsoever, think again.

Let's look at our boat more closely if you do plan on leaving stuff in the compartments. Most boats come with compartment locks. These are your first line of defense but seriously, they only keep an honest man honest as the saying goes. An aftermarket product such as a locker bar is a steel bar that covers your compartment lids at the central areas. These products require drilling and mounting hardware. Some boat manufacturers and aftermarket companies now offer an alarm system that is hard wired to the compartment lids. At some tournaments, I have seen anglers use baby monitors placed under the boat cover.

One of the most expensive items on your boat are your sonar units. I prefer to remove them but there are products that lock them to their mounts. Moving back to the motor, one of the most

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stolen items is the prop. Any stainless steel prop, let alone one that has been re-worked and customized for your boat, is a very expensive item. Fortunately, there are prop locks to deter easy removal. If you're locking stuff up with a padlock, purchase the ones with built in alarms that sound off if anyone tries to cut them.

In addition to our boats and gear, let's not forget our tow vehicles. I spent a lot of money on my truck and I for sure want to see it in the lot when I come back from fishing. Simple tip here, lock it up. Most have factory alarms and you can add a few extras safety features like locking lug nuts and a locking gas cap. Never leave anything of value in plain sight like your GPS, extra gear or tackle. My truck is equipped with a locking tailgate and locking solid bedcover. I keep my motor toter and some extra gear in the bed but not much else. Normally it contains things like some tools in case of a breakdown while trailering, spare hub, spindle and bearings for the trailer and some 2-cycle oil. Newer trucks come equipped with locator services like On-Star or you can add a GPS locator like Lo-jack.

Moving on to the boat trailer. Yep, folks'll swipe that, too. Most trailers attach with a ball to the receiver hitch and a coupler on the trailer. Your receiver is attached to the truck hitch normally with a pin and a large cotter key. That is not good enough. You need to purchase a locking pin to replace the cotter pin. The ball is bolted to the receiver, but again, this is not good enough. There are a couple of ways to secure the ball. You can use a chisel to damage the threads behind the nut, or do what I do: have the ball tack welded to the receiver or the nut tacked to the shaft of the ball. Either way the ball would need to be cut from the receiver.

There are a couple of ways to make sure the trailer cannot be uncoupled from the ball. One is a locking mechanism that is part of the ball and locks over the coupler once the trailer is in place on the ball. The second way is a pin that locks the coupler in the down position once it is closed on the ball. There is nothing else much you can do for the trailer except for wheel locks on the rims and don't forget the spare tire/rim as well. Some guys lock the safety chains/cables to the truck hitch and remove the wiring adapter for the trailer lights if used.

Now that we have everything locked up as humanly possible. So we might be walking around with a key ring the size of a school janitor's, but at least we can sleep well at night!

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