

Consumer Corner

Car Cloning: The Stolen Car Makeover

(NAPSA)—If you're shopping for a used car, experts say it's worth remembering the old adage: "If a deal is too good to be true, it probably is."

A growing number of these "deals" turn out to be part of a con involving stolen vehicles and thousands of dollars. This scam—known as "VIN cloning" or "car cloning"—uses a vehicle identification number (VIN) from a legally registered car to mask the identity of a stolen one. Unfortunately, these stolen vehicles often end up in the hands of unsuspecting consumers.

The FBI recently broke up one of the largest car theft rings in the country with the help of CARFAX. Car thieves in Florida, Illinois and Mexico cloned more than 1,000 vehicles worth \$25 million.

"Scam artists can make off with as much as \$30,000 of your hard-earned money and leave you paying off a loan for a car you no longer own," said Larry Gamache, communications director at CARFAX. "What's worse, you may become part of a criminal investigation as well."

Car thieves obtain VINs by simply swiping the plate or the number from vehicles sitting at dealerships or in parking lots. They then use the counterfeit numbers to alter existing ownership documents using the stolen vehicle identity. Or, they just forge new documents.

The best way to make sure your car is legitimate is with thorough research. A vehicle history report, such as those offered by



A vehicle history report could help used-car buyers avoid a scam known as "car cloning."

CARFAX, can be part of the solution to help car buyers avoid becoming victims.

Consumers are also advised to follow these steps to help identify a potential clone:

- Ask the seller to provide the title, service receipts and any other documents for the vehicle. Closely examine each document to make sure the VIN and names all match.
- Tell the seller to show you a CARFAX Vehicle History Report. Pay close attention to where and when the vehicle was registered. Registrations in multiple states over a short time should raise a red flag.
- Check if the mileage readings on all documents are consistent with the current odometer display.
- Have the vehicle inspected by a trusted, professional mechanic prior to purchase.

You can learn more at www.carfax.com.