



Stand and Deliver

Beating the Hi-Viz Highwayman

When Dick Turpin set off to work on a Monday morning with his wife and kids waving at the front door, he probably only needed to take with him his pistol, neckerchief and a decent sized saddle bag. He wasn't hard to recognise. It was pretty obvious that a man on a horse called Black Bess, blocking the road and pointing a gun at you was not offering a deal on 18th century Breakdown Recovery.

These days "highway robbery" is not so obvious. To follow a career in 21st century cargo crime your wardrobe will require a number of different disguises, knowledge of the cargo business combined with a vivid imagination and a lot of bottle! A good start for your kit bag is the hi-viz vest or jacket. Considering the purpose of these garments is to make the wearer more conspicuous, it can also be used as an accessory to help you blend in as the following true story illustrates:

The Round the Corner Game

A consignment arrives by truck to a planned destination at the approximate docking time. As the driver turns into the road on the industrial estate, he is flagged down by a man in a hi-viz jacket carrying a clip board of papers. He asks if this is the load expected at 10.00am from Felixstowe. He asks to see the shipping documents and confirms the load. Apparently, the customer needs the consignment forwarding immediately to a warehouse fifty miles away and wonders if the driver is able to deliver to another warehouse close by so that it can be immediately cross docked and sent on its way within the hour. The driver is tired, reaching the end of his hours and is looking forward to dropping the load and parking up in the nearby truck

stop for rest and a cup of tea. He agrees. The man clearly knows what he is talking about. Whilst the load is being transferred, the man in the hi-viz buys him a bacon sandwich and a cuppa from the nearby burger van. Twenty minutes later the load is transferred and the driver is back in his truck and looking forward to getting home!

Of course, the load never reached the intended recipient. It wasn't until a sharp eyed policeman noticed an unusually high number of people from the same asylum centre were all wearing the same designer track suits and trainers that a market trader was arrested and part of the consignment recovered.

Cops and Robbers

With a bigger budget, the modern day highwayman might invest in a Police uniform. He will also need a car and a blue light to complete the act. With many Police forces operating unmarked Police cars, practically any two litre "reps" type car will do. A magnetic rotating blue beacon light will cost approximately £35 on the internet. Once a target vehicle and load is identified, it is then simply a matter of following the vehicle to a suitable point on the route, pulling it over and threatening the driver before taking the truck and leaving the driver by the side of the road!

Both the above and variations of the same theme are becoming common place on Europe's roads. According to information gathered by Eurowatch, there were 82 hijacks reported to Police in the UK alone during 2007. A worrying trend is that increasingly many of these crimes involved the use of firearms and physical violence against drivers.

Theft by deception is often further complicated by criminals who deliberately target foreign drivers. Not only are they unlikely to be able to easily recognise the real from the bogus official, but language difficulties can make any investigation more difficult and protracted. The longer it takes to get the correct and accurate information, the less likely it is that the stolen goods can be recovered and arrests made.

The next example is remarkable if only for its simplicity:

Strip off and Rip off

The life of the long distance lorry driver is often lonely and monotonous. The idea of laying up at a lorry park with facilities that offer the driver the opportunity to swap stories, experiences, and moan about the cost of diesel is an attractive proposition. Add to this some exotic dancers, it is unlikely that anything is going to distract any red blooded driver for a couple of hours. Enough time for a focussed criminal to slash a few curtains and make his escape with a choice of commodities! There is nothing new about this diversionary tactic or the predictable outcome. Reports from continental Europe indicate that drivers are often targeted and lured away from their vehicles by organised gangs engaging prostitutes as bait.

Whilst not as devious in its execution, there are other similar methods that the criminal will deploy to separate the driver from his truck as the next story demonstrates:

The Open Door Scam

The driver of a truck stops at traffic lights at a busy junction. A passenger in an adjacent car signals to the driver that there is a problem with the trailer. The driver winds his window down to speak to the car passenger and is told that the nearside trailer door is swinging open and has knocked a cyclist over. Instinctively, the driver gets out of the cab and runs to the back of the trailer leaving the engine running. Whilst the driver is checking the rear doors, the passenger in the car jumps into the cab and drives the truck away. Within a few minutes the truck is out of sight in a nearby empty warehouse and

the load is transferred to other vehicles and distributed to handlers. Variations on this modus operandi (MO) involve the staging of fake accidents or confrontations that tempt the driver out of his cab when he is vulnerable to attack.

Walls have Ears...

It is estimated that 10% of cargo theft is in some way connected to "organised crime". Of this type of crime, up to 80% involves employee collusion or information being unknowingly supplied by employees. Predictable delivery patterns and access to paperwork increase the possibility of loads being targeted. Information regarding shipments, values and commodities should not be left on fax machines or computer monitors. Employees should be warned about discussing business outside work and drivers must be especially careful about careless talk regarding assignments, routes and commodities. Employers must be sure about the honesty of people they hire. Background checks must be carried out and references taken up before taking on new staff.

Conclusion

The document is written to raise awareness of the variety of methods that cargo criminals will use and the lengths that they will go to in planning and executing a theft or robbery. Being aware is only part of the solution to reducing cargo crime on the roads of Europe. Drivers and staff connected with the transport industry must be armed with procedures and training to help them from falling victim to the modern day highwayman.

NMU believes in working with their policy holders and brokers to help in building a secure supply chain and reducing the risk to drivers and their cargo. For further information on what NMU can do for you and your business please contact:
Jon Cross, Risk Control Manager,
jon.cross@nmu.co.uk, tel: 0121 237 2017 or
Robbie Owen, Risk Control Coordinator,
robbie.owen@nmu.co.uk, tel: 0121 237 2018