

BMW forced to respond to BBC report showing its cars at easy risk of being stolen

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(Phys.org)—In response to a BBC [report](#) that proved that BMW cars built between 2006 and 2011 can be easily stolen by thieves using a device that takes advantage of the cars' computer system, BMW has announced that all owners of such vehicles can bring them in for a free fix.

At issue is the process [BMW](#) put in place for its cars during the period in question. Owners who lost their keys could bring the car into a dealer who would then connect a computer to the car's computer, along with a new blank key, and a new electronic key would be produced. Because of the simplicity of the procedure and the high value of BMW cars, clever engineers began creating the same type of computer the dealer's used

and selling them on the Internet. That allowed thieves to purchase them which made stealing a BMW as easy as breaking a window to gain entry, attaching the computer to the port inside the vehicle, along with a blank, and creating a new key that when inserted into the dash port, allowed the car to be started and driven away. While certainly very high tech, the result is a vehicle being stolen just as easily as cars made back before all the fancy electronics were introduced.

Putting computers in cars started with the engines, taking out carburetors and putting in [small computers](#) that more efficiently metered air and gas. After that came computers that controlled the door locks allowing people to use small [handheld devices](#) with buttons to lock and unlock their cars from a distance, making such mundane tasks a little easier and less messy in bad weather. This was followed by adding computers that allowed for automatically starting the engine of the car, allowing owners to warm things up before getting in, and eventually, for some brands, the disappearance of a metal key altogether. In such cars, programmed plastic keys are inserted into the dash, and the computer takes care of getting the car started, presumably saving wear and tear on the starter mechanism under the hood. That's what BMW did and that's where it ran into trouble. By including code in the [cars computer](#) to not only start the engine when a proper key was identified, but to zap a blank key to create a new one upon command by a special computer, the car company opened the door to thieves. And that, British police say has led to a rash of car thefts in that country.

BMW owners who purchased cars during the period noted can call their local dealer to have the problem fixed with their vehicle, or as some have noted, can simply move the computer port inside their car to a new location using a simple screw driver so that [thieves](#) can't find it.

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