



Right: Robert Sparring. Left: Alamy



JUSTICE DONE – FOR ONCE

In one way my story is an exception to the rule, but in another it merely proves how difficult it is to obtain a guilty verdict in cycle theft cases. But having heard stories about victims locating their stolen bikes online or in secondhand shops, I wondered if the police could do more to identify culprits and reunite people with their lost possessions.

Keir Gallagher believes there is certainly scope for improvement. “It is entirely possible to identify and charge bike thieves,” he said, “and although we acknowledge the limitations on police resources, with more than half of stolen bikes being sold online, there is clearly scope for improved targeting of online marketplaces to identify and prosecute serial offenders and organised criminals.”

For the police, however, a key part of the solution rests with individual cyclists. Pete Davey told me: “Anyone who owns a bicycle is urged to get it registered at BikeRegister. This helps officers return stolen property to its rightful owner, and it also helps to bring prosecutions.” (Cycling UK members get 15% off BikeRegister kits – see cyclinguk.org/member-benefits.)

Meanwhile, James Brown, managing director of BikeRegister, said: “Only 5-10% of bikes in the UK are registered

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and therefore thieves know they will probably get away with it if they’re caught in possession of a stolen bike.” He added that bikes labelled with a BikeRegister marking kit are 83% less likely to be stolen than unmarked bikes.

As I write this article now, I am sitting in the British Library wondering if my touring bike, which is security marked, will still be where I left it when I finish here. This is an anxiety I feel every time I leave my bike outdoors, even though I use three locks to secure it and its Brooks saddle.

By catching a bike thief in the act and reporting him, I felt I was exacting a measure of revenge on behalf of myself and all other cyclists for the angst many of us endure on a regular basis, not to mention the practical and financial problems we face when our bikes are stolen.

In court, though, I once felt a twinge of regret about my actions. It happened when an exhausted and defeated-looking middle-aged woman, who was the only person in the visitors’ gallery, looked at me with hangdog eyes for a long 20 seconds as I strode towards the exit. Guessing the woman might be the offender’s mother, I mused that I’d just inflicted a wound on a family that may not have enjoyed huge amounts of good fortune.

Still, if the truth be told, it was only the briefest of twinges. I soon returned to feeling satisfied at having seen justice done. ●

Ensure you’re insured

Sadly, most stolen bikes are not recovered. As well as securing your bike with the best lock available to you, it makes sense to take out insurance. Yellow Jersey cycle insurance covers theft and accidental damage, and Cycling UK members, like Bill Clegg, save £50 on an annual policy. When Bill suffered a buckled front wheel in a minor accident, he was advised by Yellow Jersey customer service to have the fork checked too. It turned out to be damaged and was replaced the following day at his local bike shop, who were also able to rebuild his wheel. Bill was delighted to be back pedalling so quickly: “Fantastic service! Thank you to Cycling UK for securing a discount on the policy and thanks to Yellow Jersey for getting me back on the road so speedily and safely.”

For more on insurance, visit cyclinguk.org/insurance.



Right: Alamy. Far right: iStockphoto.com

