

A family effort to catch a thief

By Brett Bernstein

I am one in 207, and I lost my car for it. It was stolen on July 6. My iPhone and wallet were trapped in the center console. What followed was a real-life jaunt through a contemporary action flick, complete with a police chopper, GPS surveillance and a civilian adventure. I'm writing this article to express my praise for human ingenuity, morality and determination. But more important, to voice my concerns for human ingenuity, morality and determination.

Five years back, my parents moved my hand-me-down car and replaced it with my childhood dream, complete with bow. Nicknamed Mac, it escorted my dates, soared through the Pismo dunes and accompanied my buddies on a midnight trek to Vegas. It pains me to envision the gruesome robbery, yet you may be surprised to learn I'm not angry with the thieves. They were just doing their job. I wish I could say the same for the Traffic Division of the San Diego Police Department.

AT&T required a simple phone call from a detective to authorize the use of the GPS system in my stolen phone. Foolishly, the SDPD Traffic Division assigns just one

detective to handle automobile crimes in the Carmel Valley area. This man was on vacation. The receptionist who informed me of this was among the most inconsiderate and rude human beings I've ever encountered. We're talking with the City Council about her behavior as this is written. A precious hour, and three phone calls to her later, she reluctantly agreed to transfer me to her lieutenant. Nope, never mind. She lied. I reached the voicemail of that same out-of-office detective.

Fortunately, my father realized a loophole with AT&T, what's called

however, the California Highway Patrol changed its hypothesis. They weren't running. They were working. Unlikely to be used as a people mover, my Jeep was probably smuggling drugs in from a spot near the border.

I hopped in my rental and joined the pursuit. My mom stayed home, hot on his digital tail, while I borrowed her cell phone. She fed directions to my friend sitting shotgun. The determined CHP sent four unmarked officers, and my dad left work to join the search. Nothing came of it.

The next morning began at six.

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Family Map, an online device intended for parents to keep a watchful eye on their children, and he utilized it to track my phone. Cellular towers presented a 700-yard diameter for which my phone, and presumed car, was in. My family and I hovered around the computer screen to watch this circle move effortlessly toward the border. Four black and whites entered the chase, a chopper scoured the streets from its high perch, and news traveled to the border. Even the Mexican officials were cooperating with the efforts.

When the Jeep turned around

The car was a mile from my home. My dad was out the door before I threw on my sandals, and in minutes, my sister and I were treading pavement. Each car was equipped with a cell phone linked to our informant in the office, Mom. By Day 2, we had to act fast. When my phone dies, so does the trace. The criminals took us through Encinitas and as high as Carlsbad. Conveniently, Encinitas has a speed trap on every corner. I approached the deputy sheriff. A few buttons on his computer, whispers in his mouthpiece, and an APB hit every nook and

cranny in North County. I stepped aside to answer the phone. It was home base. My phone had died.

This is where the civilian adventure ends. It brought excitement and energy to my home, but the criminals put away a win. I'm reminded of the stubborn behavior and callous attitude I received from the San Diego Police Department. They discarded the most precious moments of this investigation. The ethics behind their actions are as irreprehensible as their criminal counterparts'.

However, I'd like to thank the El

Cajon Police Department, the CHP Vehicle Theft Division, the San Diego County Sheriffs Department and AT&T for pursuing this ordeal with zeal. Also, a thanks goes out to the moral Samaritan who mailed back my wallet with a note saying, "maybe one day you can help someone."

According to the FBI, a car is stolen every 26.4 seconds, that's a one in 207 chance of finding yourself a stranded victim. You paid for, but more importantly, deserve, a fleet of crafty, moral and determined officers to get your property back. I hope you'll win.

Bernstein grew up in San Diego, graduated from Torrey Pines High School in 2005 and will earn his finance and communications degree from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in December. He can be reached at www.brettbernstein.com.