

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *The Automobile Theft Investigator*

REFERENCE: Cook, C. W., *The Automobile Theft Investigator: A Learning and Reference Text for the Automobile Theft Investigator, The Police Supervisor, and the Student*, Charles C Thomas, 2600 South First, Springfield, IL, 1987, 282 pp., \$38.25.

The author has directed this book, “. . . to those just starting out in the field of automobile theft investigation and/or those who are contemplating entering this field.” He has made an attempt to cover the areas of major concern based on his own experiences. The content of each of the chapters is very basic, but the author has attempted to make it clear that there is much more to learn than could be covered in a book of this size. He repeats this caveat at the end of most of the 17 chapters. However, a major failing of the book is that no bibliography is given which would enable the neophyte to follow up and learn more from the original sources. The author has suggested that the student call on the proper agencies and associations to obtain additional information.

Various types of motors, starters, and other components of a motor vehicle are explained in one chapter. A chapter devoted to Motor Vehicle Identification Numbers (VINs) contains good information for the student. All sensitive and/or any information which must be periodically updated is omitted for obvious reasons. The reference manuals of the National Automobile Theft Bureau (NATB) contain most of this information. The author urges the student or neophyte investigator, having a legitimate need, to obtain these manuals directly from the NATB.

The restoration of obliterated serial numbers is treated in another chapter. Good information is presented concerning theory, methods, “formulas” (recipes) for etching solutions, and “experiments” to assist the student in becoming somewhat proficient in this area. Information is also given to assist the student to learn to detect VIN plate switching.

The stated intent to give the student enough insight to enable him to converse with mechanics is the subject of another chapter on repair and upkeep of vehicles. A list of a few common problems might have some value. Photographs of the exterior and interior of typical automobile repair facilities were neither clear nor informative.

The chapter entitled “Forensic Laboratory Assistance” starts off with a very brief description of proper procedures for documenting and processing a crime scene (vehicle). The reader is advised to look to other *unnamed* sources for additional information and to study them thoroughly. A cursory overall view of the various sections and typical functions found in a crime laboratory is also given. A few of the common physical evidence types which could assist in an automobile theft investigation are superficially described.

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The author writes in a very “breezy” style which can be distracting. There is no new material or research presented. Most of the chapters are so sketchy as to leave the reader with any background wondering why the author did not take the information a step or two further. The book may have some value for students and beginning investigators. It is doubtful that it will have much value for a police supervisor, and almost none for the forensic laboratory scientist.