

Car Crime (Crime and Society Series)

by Claire Corbett

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Reviewed by Pat Ward

This is a well written and comprehensive examination of the whole area of car crime, which draws together many recent pieces of research to form a coherent summary of the state of knowledge in the area. A major theme developed throughout is that car crime, hitherto defined narrowly as theft of and from motor vehicles, should be defined more widely to include driver behaviour and other organisational factors in society.

The author asserts that accident discourse (characterising accidents as random events that could happen to anyone) *does* seem to automatically infer blamelessness. She also points out that car crime is accorded less status/attention than other forms of crime, both by the people who commit it and those charged with upholding the law. Criminological perspectives more normally applied to ‘mainstream’ crime are well integrated with this examination of car crime eg the ‘rational choice’ perspective of crime as part of individual causation, and also Hirschi and Gottfredun’s (1990) ‘self-control’ social theory. The author highlights the fact that vehicle-related offending can become ‘normalised’ in certain areas/communities, as occurs with ‘mainstream’ crime.

In Chapter 2, the historical context given enables the author to examine why motoring offences, in the perception of society, might originally have been regarded as not ‘real’ crimes. In later chapters she shows how in the present time, maximum sentences for motoring offences are very rarely used, and that there are sometimes discrepancies in how the law seems to value human life, such that on occasion the value of a car seems greater than that of a person.

Chapter 5 provides a very useful review of the whole area of impaired driving, and is notable for concentrating some welcome attention on the area of impairment by legal drugs and medicines.

Chapter 6 gives a good, detailed summary of the role of speeding, a crime which the majority of motorists will admit to committing. Chapter 7, on dangerous and careless bad driving, also details the often ignored element of information overload by other in-car distractions, such as entertainment and navigational systems, not just mobile phones. There is also a very welcome examination of the perspectives of victims, and those left bereaved by car crime.

Chapter 8 contains a comprehensive overview of unlicensed/disqualified driving, its links with other ‘document’ offences, and wider criminality. More examination of uninsured driving in particular might be welcomed as it is now a widespread and major problem, though the author correctly points that detection is often problematic. The analysis of unlicensed/disqualified driving fits well with the ‘rational choice’ perspective, given that fines are typically much less than the cost of complying with the law.

In conclusion, this is a valuable and interesting piece of work that should be of interest to a wide audience of professionals in any field where car crime is a problem. As the author somewhat bleakly points out, these areas are legion, due to the dominance of 'car culture' and the seemingly inexorable rise in car use.

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