

Feature

Lock it or lose it!

NGO firearm adviser, George Wallace, says keep your guns secure when they're not in the cabinet.

I'M SURE WE ARE ALL AWARE OF CONDITION 4(a) on our Shotgun and Firearm Certificates which makes it a legal obligation, "at all times, (except in the circumstances set out in paragraph (b) below,) to store guns, rifles and rifle ammunition, "securely so as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, access....by an unauthorised person". For most of us that means a steel cabinet bolted securely to a solid wall.

Paragraph (b) (Condition 4(b) on your certificate allows for slightly different levels of security when guns, rifles or rifle ammunition are in use or the holder

of the certificate has them with him for some purpose in connection with their use or when they are in transit. Under these circumstances, "reasonable precautions must be taken for the safe custody of the firearm or ammunition".

The same applies to shotguns but not to shotgun cartridges other than those that have to be held on a Firearm Certificate.

Following one or two incidents where guns were stolen from parked cars, NGO members in Suffolk have been reminded of this duty of safekeeping by letters from Richard Kennett, the Firearms Licensing

Manager and from Jacqui Cheer, the Deputy Chief Constable. That being so, this may be a good time also to remind ourselves – and the guns on shoot days – of how we might take the required "reasonable precautions" under such circumstances.

My own view is that asking the police to administer firearms licensing is about as sensible as putting an animal activist in charge of your beating line and I know that several NGO members thought the letters from Suffolk Police a bit robust; even threatening. However, I have read both with great care and although I understand that the certificate holders' first reactions are usually to assume that the police are trying to make their lives impossible, that is not so in this case; and it has never, in my 20 years' experience, ever been so in Suffolk. I have known Richard Kennett, Suffolk's firearms licensing manager, in the line of work for many years and have always found him professional, friendly and at all times fair and even-handed in his application of complex and badly-written legislation.

We should also appreciate that an unarmed copper confronted by a criminal with a shotgun might not feel quite the same as we do about the private ownership of firearms. And if the gun in question turns out to have been nicked from a car in a pub car park following a shoot day... Well, you get my drift.

So what is to be done? The only legal requirement is contained in the words "reasonable precautions must be taken", but what is *reasonable* at the time is a very subjective judgement that can only be determined finally by a Court. And none of us want it to go that far.

A simple basic principle is never, never, never leave a complete firearm in an unattended vehicle. I believe the latest cars are pretty thief proof, but windows are easily broken and the sort of vehicles you and I drive (not Malcolm Fieldsend, of course; he's got a posh one) are much

Wording from the Firearms Certificate (below) and Shotgun Certificate (bottom), explaining what is required of the certificate holder.

ALL ILLUSTRATIONS: GEORGE WALLACE

4 (a) The firearms and ammunition to which the certificate relates must at all times (except in the circumstances set out in paragraph (b) below) be stored securely so as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, access to the firearms or ammunition by an unauthorised person.

(b) Where a firearm or ammunition to which the certificate relates is in use or the holder of the certificate has the firearm with him for the purpose of cleaning, repairing or testing it or for some other purpose connected with its use, transfer or sale, or the firearm or ammunition is in transit to or from a place in connection with its use or any such purpose, reasonable precautions must be taken for the safe custody of the firearm or the ammunition.

4 (a) The shot guns to which the certificate relates must at all times (except in the circumstances set out in paragraph (b) below) be stored securely so as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, access to the shot guns by an unauthorised person.

(b) Where a shot gun to which the certificate relates is in use or the holder of the certificate has the shot gun with him for the purpose of cleaning, repairing or testing it or for some other purpose connected with its use, transfer or sale, or the shot gun is in transit to or from a place in connection with its use or any such purpose, reasonable precautions must be taken for the safe custody of the shot gun.

less secure and it seems that the average 14-year-old could break in and drive it away quicker than I can with the key. The things they teach them at school these days!

So put the stock of a shotgun in a holdall and take it with you; remove rifle bolt, magazine and ammunition and take them with you; and/or buy one of those handy gunslips with a button hole – I think Napier make them – so that a security cord can be put through both slip and trigger guard and secured to a strongpoint in the vehicle.

None of this will prevent your car being stolen or broken into, but at least you have done your best and the criminal is not in possession of a complete firearm. You have taken reasonable precautions. And that is all that the Law asks of you.

Never leave a complete firearm in an unattended vehicle, even if you cover it up. Always remove the stock of a shotgun and bolt, magazine and ammo of a rifle and take them with you.



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