



Rod Underhill, District Attorney

1021 SW Fourth Avenue, Room 600
Portland, OR 97204-1193
Phone: 503-988-3162 Fax: 503-988-3643
www.mcda.us

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Prolific car thief receives a four year prison sentence

Today, Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill announced that 42-year-old James Steven Pasley received a four year prison sentence following a two-day jury trial.

On January 23, 2019, a jury returned a unanimous guilty verdict on one count of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle and one count of possession of a stolen vehicle. The same jury found that Pasley was persistently involved with similar acts.

According to court records, Pasley has 21 prior felony convictions and 11 prior misdemeanor convictions. Eight of the prior felony convictions are for stealing a motor vehicle.

This investigation started on April 29, 2018 when a woman reported her 1996 Nissan Sentra had been stolen. The woman testified during trial that she had parked her vehicle on April 27, 2018 in the 4800 block of Northeast Flanders Street in Portland, Oregon. The victim explained she did not realize her vehicle had been unlawfully taken until April 29. She testified to the certainty of her vehicle being locked and that she had not given anyone a set of keys or permission to use her vehicle.

On May 1, 2018, an officer assigned to the Portland Police Bureau was on routine patrol in the area of Southeast 112th Avenue and Southeast Clinton Street when Pasley ran a stop sign, which nearly caused the officer to T-bone the vehicle the defendant was operating.

The officer testified that he ran the license plate on the vehicle involved in the near collision and learned that it was reported stolen. The officer turned his patrol vehicle around in an attempt to stop the vehicle. The officer eventually located Pasley on foot leaving an apartment complex parking lot in the 2500 block of Southeast 115th Avenue.

When the defendant was taken into custody, police recovered a flathead screwdriver and a set of four jiggle keys in his pocket. The jiggle keys the defendant was in possession of were all for different car models.

"Car thieves like James Pasley are notorious for using screwdrivers or jiggle keys to unlock doors and trick ignitions into starting," said Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney Michael Lee, who prosecuted this case. "All four jiggle keys in this case had varying degrees of spiral twists to them. This is an indication that the keys were being used in keyholes that they were not designed for, and that a considerable amount of force was being applied in order to defeat the lock."

Officers were successful in starting the victim's vehicle with the screwdriver recovered from the defendant at the time of his arrest.

"The victim testified that her vehicle's ignition was not damaged prior to the theft, and that after police recovered her car she could not get her original key inside the ignition," DDA Lee said. "This case highlights the struggles victims of stolen cars can experience. In many cases, once a car is stolen, the thief will cause significant damage to the vehicle's ignition in an attempt to get it started. Getting the parts replaced is extremely costly and in some cases cost prohibitive for the victim. In this case, the car's owner had to drive her car using a separate screwdriver because of the damage caused by the defendant."

The Multnomah County District Attorney's Office continues to prioritize the prosecution of stolen vehicles despite recent change in Oregon case law. The District Attorney's Office regularly meets with law enforcement to conduct ongoing training surrounding stolen vehicle investigations and current case law.

While in custody, Pasley will receive drug treatment. Upon his release, he will be on one year of post-prison supervision. The District Attorney's Office encourages the use of vehicle immobilizers and steering wheel locks.

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Contact: Brent Weisberg, Communications Director
Phone: 503.988.6567
Email: Brent.Weisberg@mca.us