

Car thief fined \$2,000

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A 26-year-old Edmonton man was fined \$2,000 and put on probation for a year Tuesday for his part in the "burgeoning business" of car theft.

Robert Stowell pleaded guilty Tuesday to possessing a stolen car, and to obstructing a peace officer by giving police a fake name.

Prosecutor Gwena Ozem called on provincial court Judge W.M. Mustard to fine him \$5,000 because of the seriousness of the offence.

"What were looking at is quite frankly a burgeoning business in car theft," Ozem said.

Nearly 18,000 of the 137,000 cars stolen in Canada in 1992 were from Alberta, she said.

"Car thefts are costing the taxpayers literally millions," she said.

"There is no doubt that car thefts are a very serious problem in Canada," Mustard said as he ordered Stowell to pay a \$300 fine for obstruction of the peace officer, and \$1,700 for possession charge.

Ozem said in the past six months, Stowell has kicked a crack cocaine habit, and seems to be getting his life in order, so that deterring him might not be an issue.

"The accused's ability to quit on his own is certainly a feather in his cap."

She said Stowell admitted to being part of a car theft ring, and told police: "Nobody forced me. Somebody snowed me. I should have known better."

He had no prior criminal record.

The 1989 Toyota Camry was stolen on February 12, 1993.

The next day Stowell registered it under the fake name of Jeffrey Paul Sharmann, using a B.C. birth certificate and health care card with that name.

On Feb. 16, the car's owner returned from a holiday and called police.

The following day, Stowell tried to sell the car.

A computer check of its vehicle identification number revealed it was stolen.

Stowell's lawyer Shirish Chotalia said that he is in no position to pay a \$5,000 fine since he earns \$500 to \$700 a month, and has a \$2,000 debt.

She said ordering a fine that is beyond an accused person's ability to pay could entice him back into criminal activity.