

 [The Straits Times Interactive - Print](#)

FEB 10, 2004

Seized: 400 vehicles put to illegal use forfeited in last 3 years

By [Christopher Tan](#)

SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

BE CAREFUL whom you lend your car to because, if it is used to commit an offence, you may not see it again.


In the last three years, about 400 vehicles were impounded for offences ranging from drug-running to human-trafficking to racing.

About half - 183 vehicles - were seized by Customs officials. These were mostly used to smuggle dutiable goods such as tobacco, alcohol and even petrol.

Even cars which flout the three-quarter-tank rule can be seized, though only one such case has been recorded.

A Singapore Customs spokesman said that 'the forfeiture of a vehicle under the Customs Act is mandatory if the court is satisfied that the vehicle is used in commission of an offence'.

After Customs, the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority has seized the most vehicles - 116 in the last three years. These were used for human trafficking, and ranged from cars to a tanker.

 The Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) and the police rounded up a relatively smaller number of vehicles.

The CNB seized 56 vehicles in the last three years; the police, 43.

The CNB said the law provides for the mandatory seizure of vehicles 'used in any manner' of a drug abuse offence.

The police seized mainly those vehicles used to commit traffic offences such as illegal racing and those being driven by disqualified drivers.

All forfeited vehicles are disposed of through public auctions. They must be scrapped or re-exported, and cannot be used here.

While drivers of seized vehicles face legal consequences, the rightful owners - including rental companies, banks and finance companies - are affected in a different way.

The tax rebates of vehicles that are auctioned off and scrapped are not automatically granted to them.

The Straits Times understands that several banks have incurred losses in such cases, though none wished to be named.

The banks or finance companies will try to get their money back from the vehicle's registered

owner.

The spokesman for one foreign bank said that if his bank was affected, it would 'seek legal means to recover the sum owed to us by the borrower'.

But Mr Vijai Parwani, a lawyer who has acted for finance companies in such cases, said such moves hardly amount to much, because 'very often, you just end up making the guy bankrupt'.

He said the offenders should bear the consequences of their actions, and not the finance companies or banks.

'There is no deterrent effect on the finance companies as they will continue to finance cars as long as the hirer is able to meet the requirements,' he said.

'If the prospect of a jail term and possible caning does not deter the offender, then the threat of bankruptcy surely will not have any effect either.'

In the meantime, the CNB has this advice for those planning to lend out their cars: 'Owners should exercise prudence and care in lending, hiring or renting out their vehicles.'

---

Copyright @ 2003 Singapore Press Holdings. All rights reserved.