

SCAMMING THE SCAMMERS

It's a fact of life that there is a temptation to write a first report (i.e. an original initial report written by the patrol deputy) on a complicated whodunit and then move on to try for an easier, flashier arrest. Who wouldn't rather nab a rolling stolen than try to sort out a messy, complex, hard-to-prosecute scam? We normally think of detectives as the follow-up specialists.

Nevertheless, sometimes patrol deputies "adopt a crime" anyway. Sometimes it's sympathy for a victim; sometimes it's the arrogance of the crook that leads a deputy to stay involved beyond the point that is expected. More and more patrol deputies are writing warrant affidavits or doing Code 5's (stakeouts) in between calls. Sometimes you just want to be in on the solution yourself.

Santa Clarita Valley Station Deputy Julie Darby (Schlegel) "adopted" a complicated, sophisticated auto theft scam with some surprising twists - which she turned to her advantage.

The first call seemed routine - "See the sales manager at Power Dodge." Even the story seemed pretty simple. A suspect bought a \$26,000 BMW *with no down payment* using a stolen CDL (California Driver's License) and social security card as identification. Julie took the information for the report, then tracked down and called the real CDL owner, who had a conniption fit when he learned that "he'd" just bought a BMW! He also told Julie that *he still had his CDL and social security card in his possession*, meaning that the crook scammed Power Dodge with a darned good forgery.

Julie's intuition and perseverance caused her to give Power Dodge her cell phone number and say, "Call me if anything similar happens again." Sure enough, she got a phone call two days later from the sales manager about a similar caper. She promptly notified the SCV dispatch center that she'd take the handle and rolled.

According to the sales manager..."We think that the scam" purchase might have been an "inside" job. We have a new salesman who seems pretty shady....."

Julie learned that the new sales "whiz," Rocky, had sold a car the day before, to a "friend of his named Michael" from San Bernardino—pretty far out of town for a guy to come just to buy a car in Santa Clarita. She ran the CDL number provided by this second buyer, and sure enough, as before, it returned to someone other than the guy who presented it as "his" ID.

The finance manager told Julie that their new man Rocky had asked him to "Give my friend Michael a good deal - we're drinking buddies." Therefore, Michael, like the first suspect, drove off in a *100% financed* Honda!

So...time to talk to Rocky!

Julie started with a proven suspect interview technique - ask a question you already know the answer to - and hit pay dirt.

“So Rocky, do you know any of the buyers you’ve sold vehicles to the past week?”

“Why, no, why do you ask?”

Snared.

“Did you know they had fraudulent ID?”

“Why,...no,” as he gave out with the deer-in-the-headlights look.

Bagged.

Within a few minutes, Julie was searching the Pathfinder parked out back, which Rocky had been seen driving to work in, but was now denying was his ride! That made it hard for him to explain why it contained his planner and Verizon bill, on which appeared the first “buyer’s” cell phone number. And, it was really hard on Rocky trying to explain the cold plates on the car, and the meth and the pipes she found inside.

Cooked

As Julie went 10-15 with Rocky, she told the sales manager, “Hey, let’s try something. See if you can call the bogus “buyers” and con them back to the dealership.” So...the dealership left a phone message for the buyers to take a service survey in exchange for free maintenance!

A person not in the business of police work might think, “Oh, that’ll never work,” but greed is an amazing thing. The very next day, Julie’s cell phone was ringing with the sales manager’s call that they had just heard from Michael. He had called about the survey and mentioned that he also didn’t get a Navigation CD that was supposed to be in the car! In fact, he was coming into the dealership to pick up his missing navigation system any minute!!! Julie and several assisting units swooped on Power Dodge and grabbed Michael, who was conveniently in possession of over 20 credit cards, check books, and pieces of identification in other people’s names. As her third report on this larceny cartel understatedly declared, “I formed the opinion that the suspect was deeply involved in identity theft.”

So, check your wallet or purse. If you find your CDL, don’t be reassured. Just be glad there are patrol deputies like Julie, who can, and will, detect and “deep six” identity theft.