

\$5,000 PACKARD CAR GANG'S LATEST LOOT

Automobile Thieves Have a
Thorough Organization,
Dealers Say.

EIGHT CARS GO IN WEEK

Owners Warned and Police Criti-
cised by Managers of the Big
Broadway Agencies.

Automobile dealers whose places of business are in Broadway, between Fiftieth and Sixty-fifth Streets, sent out a general warning yesterday to owners to beware of holiday season automobile thieves.

The thieves, according to information gathered by A. C. Harrington, general manager of the Packard Company, who lost a \$5,000 1914 model automobile on Wednesday afternoon, have just completed a thorough organization. So far eight cars, worth \$20,000, have been reported stolen from Broadway shopping centres since the holiday rush of traffic began.

In every case in which witnesses were found who saw the automobiles driven off, there were three men involved. One of the men, the best dressed of the three, would step into the chauffeur's seat, and, with all the air of a seasoned driver and owner, would start the car up. The other two, who had no doubt acted as "spotters" to make sure that the real owner was busy shopping, would not get into the car, but would disappear in the crowd after making sure that it had departed on its way all right.

The big Packard car stolen Wednesday afternoon was of a type that has not yet reached the general market in any number. For that reason Mr. Harrington is somewhat confident that he will get some trace of it the first time it is taken to a repair shop to be overhauled.

"The total mileage run by the new car before it was stolen," said Mr. Harrington, "wouldn't amount to ten miles. I had a salesman drive me to my home at 620 West 122d Street on Christmas Eve at 6 o'clock. He told me that he had a couple of packages to mail on his way back to the office in Broadway. He drove to the branch Post Office in Fifty-first Street, between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, and went inside with his packages. He was not in the Post Office for more than three minutes, according to the message I had from him a little later, but when he came out the car was gone. We have advertised for it in all the newspapers and the police were notified at 8 P. M. to begin a search. I don't understand this theft, as thieves have heretofore preferred old and somewhat service-marked cars to new ones."

Another automobile stolen on Christmas Eve was a Hudson car which was left standing in front of the Hotel Astor while its owner was at dinner. No trace has so far been found, although insurance companies have taken up the hunt.

Two cars were stolen from women owners who left them in front of Thirty-fourth Street department stores while they did some belated Christmas shopping. At the office of E. P. Hopwood, an insurance adjuster, at 55 John Street, it was said yesterday that the women objected to the notoriety of having their names in print, so that the hunt for these cars will be conducted without giving publicity to the owners.

The conclusion of the Broadway automobile dealers that a gang has been well organized to deal in stolen cars is based partly on reports brought in by detectives employed to find out why there has been a sudden increase in the num-

ber of cars stolen and partly on the desire shown by the thieves for the latest and newest cars.

There is some disposition among automobile dealers to blame the police for the lack of a really efficient group of detectives specially trained in the business of tracing stolen automobiles. It was pointed out that when the police were notified that the Packard car was stolen at 8 P. M. Police Headquarters failed to do anything until 10 P. M., when the shifts changed and when it was possible to send out a description of the car with the new force of policemen leaving the station houses.

In the meantime the thief had been given an opportunity to pass over any of the ferries with the automobile or to get forty or fifty miles away from New York over the main automobile boulevards. Dealers who felt that the police need a new method of handling the problem of automobile thefts said that if the police at the ferries had received a special notice about the stolen car—different in design and color from the usual cars on the streets—and the police along the Boston Road and other main highways had been notified at once the car probably would have been recovered.

It is the belief of the Packard Company officials that the car was driven away from New York for the reason that it would be too easy to detect a new car, such as this one, in New York garages or repair shops.

An automobile of another make stolen here in April was found, it was said, in a garage in Detroit seven months later. This car had been "treated" by having its color scheme completely changed, and had been converted from a 1913 model to a 1911 model by the removal of the newer accessory parts, such as lamps and self-starting system, and the substitution of accessories that had formerly been in use. In this case the car was detected merely because the maker's numbers had not been removed from the tires.

The description of two men seen in the company of a well-dressed man who drove cars away from Thirty-fourth Street has been furnished to detectives, who went out yesterday in the hope that they would find them still working on Broadway as "spotters" for thieves in search of desirable cars to steal.

One car, stolen early last week, was found by insurance company detectives last night. They received information in response to offers of a reward that the automobile had been taken to pieces in an uptown garage and would be shipped to Springfield, Mass., in packing boxes last night. They found the packing boxes with three-fourths of the completed car in them, the missing parts no doubt having been removed for use in some other car to make identification difficult.