

TOWING: HOOK BY CROOK

Trap

Mary met friends in Boca Raton for a night out. After dinner they all walked back to her car. When she got in and turned the ignition key, the car wouldn't start. A tow truck soon appeared, and the driver asked if she needed help. She told the driver her car was under warranty and to take it to her dealer as they had a 24-hour drop-off service. The driver charged Mary \$250 and would only accept cash. She was concerned about paying cash, but was sure she could get it back from the dealer. It was getting late, so Mary paid the driver, got a receipt, and gave him the name and address of her dealer. Mary rode home with her friends. When she called her dealership the next morning, she was told her car had not been dropped off! She called the tow truck company only to find that the number had been disconnected. Mary's next call was to the police department to report that her vehicle was stolen.

Tips

Be aware of roving "bandit" tow truck operators, and remember these tips:

- "Bandit" tow truck operators can appear out of nowhere to offer assistance when vehicles break down or are involved in accidents.
- If your car breaks down, contact local law enforcement for assistance, or ask your mechanic to recommend a tow truck company. Keep the company's information in your wallet or glove compartment.
- Many insurance companies and independent providers of service contracts offer affordable 24-hour emergency roadside assistance plans.
- When possible, pay by debit or credit card, and avoid paying with cash.
- South Florida weather is rough on car batteries. Have your mechanic check your battery regularly.
- Palm Beach County has established towing regulations that protect consumers. They can be found on the Consumer Affairs Web site along with a list of licensed tow truck companies that meet Palm Beach County requirements.