

Gone, Gone, Gone in Guadalajara

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The one time they didn't follow the golden rule of road tripping, Karen Catchpole and Eric Mohl paid the price and got an unwanted glimpse of the chop-shop underbelly of Guadalajara, Mexico.



STORY BY:

KAREN CATCHPOLE AND ERIC MOHL OF THE TRANS-AMERICAS JOURNEY

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Everything was fine when we walked past our truck, parked on a residential street outside the house where we were staying, on our way to Spanish school in Guadalajara, Mexico. But when we returned in the afternoon, our truck didn't look right. As we got closer, we could see why.

The glass from both side mirrors was gone. Thieves had popped the mirrors right out of their plastic housings, which they'd (thankfully) left mounted on the truck. Our first reaction was rage, then shock, then confusion, then self-loathing. We knew better.

At the time of the theft, we'd been on the road full-time for more than three years, including nearly 12 months of driving throughout Mexico, and all without any thefts. All we had to do was follow one golden rule: always park the truck in a secure parking lot. Never leave it on the street. Put off by the high price of parking in Guadalajara and seduced by the niceness of the neighborhood we were living in, we'd decided that parking the truck on the street "just this once" would be okay. Yeah, they call it common sense for a reason.



We had no time for self-flagellation, however.

We have a massive custom-built cargo-carrying system installed in the bed of our truck that renders the interior rearview mirror useless. Without our side mirrors, we couldn't see behind us at all, making our truck unsafe to drive.

Luckily, the wonderful people we were living with (the parents of dear friends) knew exactly what to do. First, a stiff drink. Then a trip to Calle Cinco de Febrero in their car.

Most Tapatios (as people in Guadalajara calls themselves), including our hosts, have made at least one purchase on Calle Cinco de Febrero—a multi-block-long clearinghouse for every imaginable car part, most of them stolen. There was even a chance we'd end up buying back our very own mirrors, a thought that was both comforting and creepy.

The moment we turned onto Cinco de Febrero, guys began flagging us down, trying to entice us to pull over at their "stores." We ultimately followed a man to a store stacked to the rafters with headlights, rims, bumpers, hub caps, emblems—you name it for every make and model under the sun.

It felt like dealing with the devil (was this the very same guy who had stolen our mirrors in the first place?). But he had mirrors that fit (not ours), so we began haggling over the price. A motorcycle cop cruised by in the midst of this "transaction" but no one—not even the guys rolling joints on the sidewalk in front of the store—batted an eyelid.



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We ultimately settled on 1,500 pesos (about \$110) for both mirrors plus glue-on plastic “security” rims to put around each mirror, which, theoretically, would make it harder for someone to pop them out again. A kid who said his name was Juan Carlos even travelled with us back to our truck to install the mirrors and make sure they worked properly.

We could tell “Juan” was also taking an inventory of our truck, which has some pretty nice aftermarket gear on it, including a Mile Marker winch and heavy duty bumper and fancy PIAA lights. Then he started pointing out all the ways our truck is vulnerable to even more quick stripping.

Horrifyingly, he demonstrated how our headlights could be easily removed and how our tailgate could slide right off. We were tempted to give “Juan” a few hundred pesos to tell us what we needed to do to prevent future pilfering, but we’d had enough of the underworld for one day.

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KAREN CATCHPOLE AND ERIC MOHL OF THE TRANS-AMERICAS JOURNEY



In April of 2006, journalist Karen Catchpole and photographer Eric Mohl left their jobs and apartment in New York City and embarked on the [Trans-Americas Journey](#), a 200,000-mile working road trip through all 23 countries in North, Central and South America. After many years on the road they are still nowhere near their goal of Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America where the road literally ends. Until then, their slow and steady overland exploration of The Americas continues.

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