

SPECIALIST SQUADS: THEY'RE BACK

Car theft victims give up on police

By EVELYN YAMINE

THE police force's new car theft squad will be confronted by an angry public, many members of which have resorted to hiring private investigators and offering rewards to find stolen vehicles.

Owners who have hired private eyes have told *The Daily Telegraph* they have lost faith in the police system of recovering cars.

The number of motor vehicle thefts in NSW has increased in the past few years — since the motor vehicle theft squad was disbanded in the mid-1990s.

A car is stolen every four minutes in NSW and according to latest statistics, 52,382 vehicles were stolen in the state last year.

Warren Mallard, managing director of Lyonswood Investigation and Security in Drummoyne, said people enlisted their services when other avenues had failed.

"Police don't go out there actively looking for stolen cars, they don't have time. It is reported and only if they come across it or a member of the public calls it in, do they find the car," Mr Mallard said.

"People become passionate about their cars, particularly if they're a certain type of car, either prestige cars or old cars people have restored."

Mr Mallard's operatives check "hot spots" where cars are usually dumped, stripped, repainted, modified or rebirthed.

He said although the chances of finding a stolen car were "very slim", people were willing to pay private investigators to search.

"When somebody loves a vehicle that much, they don't want it replaced, they're not interested in the money," Mr Mallard said.

"I think society has come to believe that stolen cars are not important compared with

other crimes but there are serious consequences of losing a vehicle."

Some owners are offering rewards of up to \$15,000 in the hope of recovering their vehicles, including:

● A CAR dealer in Gordon who offered a \$5000 reward for a stolen Audi TT Quattro Cabriolet;

● THE owner of a Harley-Davidson Fatboy who offered a reward when his motorcycle was stolen from Kingsford; and

● A MAN offered a \$2000 reward for his 5m Savage boat, which was stolen in Londonderry.

One Bronte resident was watching television inside his unit when his scooter was stolen from his front yard.

Schalk Meliezer, 22, said he had locked the steering mechanism which he hoped would deter theft, but the thieves still managed to steal the \$6500 Vespa Piaggio, which was his only form of transport.

Mr Meliezer started his own personal campaign to find the scooter, including offering a reward.

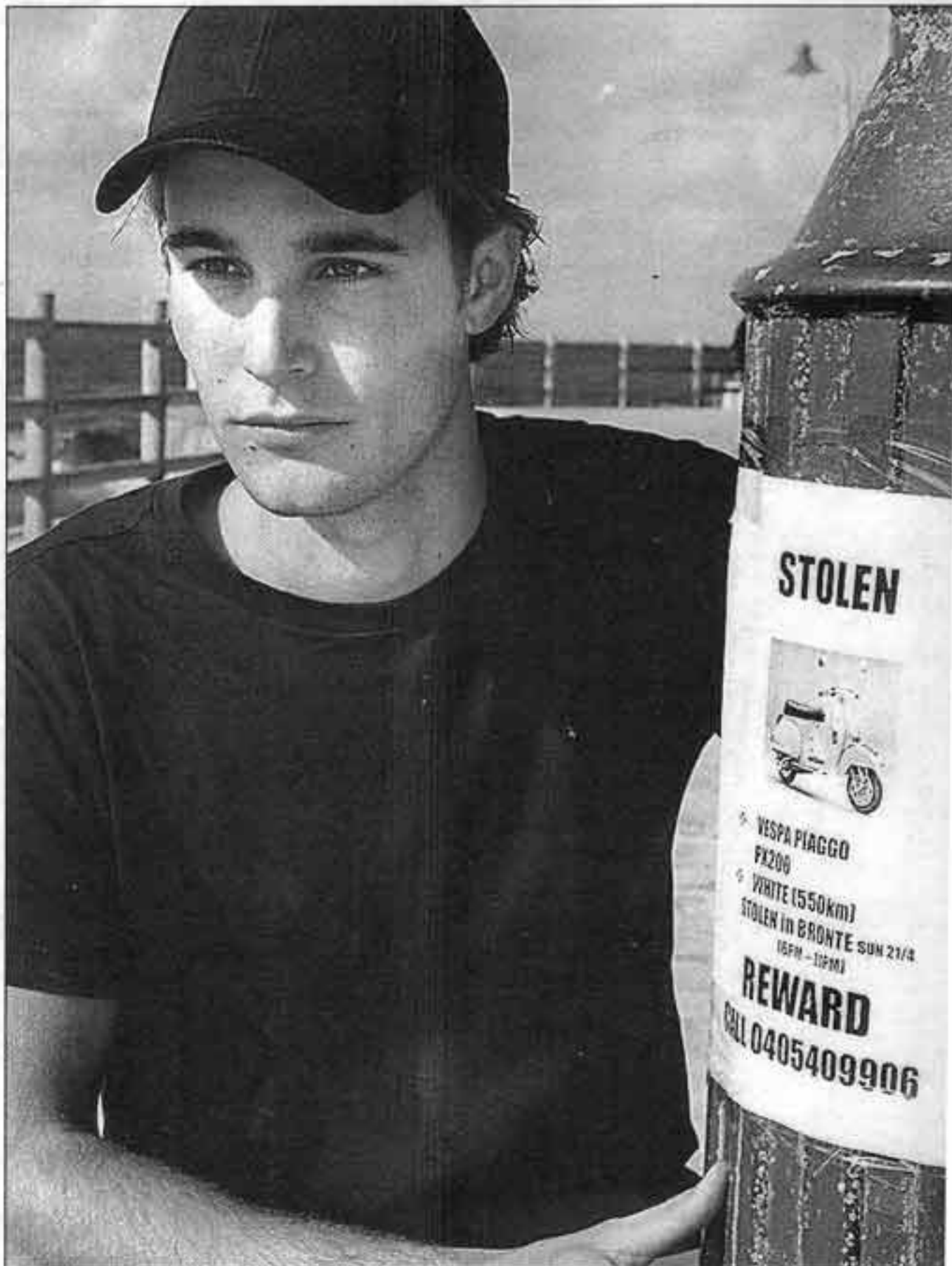
"The police don't have the time to go out and look for it specifically. They have more important things to do or it's too hard to find it," he said.

"Once I reported it stolen, it is placed in the police computer system with all the other stolen goods and if the police come across it, that's fantastic but if not, then it's lost forever."

Mr Meliezer photocopied hundreds of posters, to appeal for information about the theft or the whereabouts of his new scooter.

He placed the posters around the eastern suburbs, Sydney's CBD, Coogee, North Sydney and Newtown.

Mr Meliezer told *The Daily Telegraph* he feared his scooter would not be recovered. He said he would welcome the introduction of a specialist squad for motor vehicle theft reduction.



Scooter search . . . Schalk Meliezer putting up posters yesterday.

Picture: MICK TSIKA