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GETTING A BIKE THIEF ARRESTED AND CONVICTED IS JUSTICE THAT MOST CYCLISTS CAN ONLY DREAM ABOUT. CYCLING UK MEMBER **TOM McDONOUGH** GAVE IT A GO...

When I saw the masked man checking out a second row of bikes I knew something was up. A theft was imminent, I thought, and it was my duty to do something about it. I'd noticed the same man a little earlier that evening while I'd been running laps around a local park. He'd been leaning against a bench, staring at the bicycles locked up outside a swimming pool. On each of my first three circuits, he'd been standing in the same place, his gaze unwavering.

In the gloom of the February evening, I'd just about been able to make out his eyes and some locks of long, black hair jutting out from under his American-lorry-driver-style baseball cap. His apparent interest in the bikes and his donning of a face mask outdoors – at a time when Covid rules only required us to wear them in confined spaces – had made me suspicious of his intentions.

When I'd completed my fourth and final lap and seen he was no longer outside the pool, relief had washed over me. I'd been telling myself I'd have to take action if he was still there. His

departure meant I could remain safely within my insular Londoner's bubble.

But now I was on my way home and here he was again, hovering around a bike rack in an alleyway behind a pub, about 800 metres away from where I'd first spotted him. My chest tightened and my head began swimming. I didn't know what to do. I could talk to him, but what would I say? And what if it led to a fight? I could dial 999 but there was no emergency and no crime being committed yet either. Dialling 101 also felt wrong; it usually just refers you to a reporting website.

CAUGHT RED-HANDED

In the end, I shadowed the man for some time, walking in repeated loops up the alleyway and around the surrounding streets until, finally, I spotted him working at someone's wheel with a silver spanner. Now that a crime was actually taking place, a 999 call felt more justified. Less than two minutes after I'd dialled the number a police van came screaming past me.

Concerned they might arrest the wrong person, I doubled back again and saw my man in handcuffs. Satisfied, I ambled home, only to be called straight back to the scene by the police. If I gave a statement and showed up in court, they said, we'd have a watertight case. I'd witnessed the man starting to take the wheel off, they'd caught him with the removed wheel in his hand and, to top and tail it, the owner had shown up shortly after the arrest and confirmed he hadn't asked anyone to dismantle his bike.

While giving my statement, I asked the police some questions that had been on my mind. Did the man have a knife on him? Should I have confronted him? Was 999 the right number to call? Might he hunt me down? No, they said, he hadn't had a knife on him and nor was he the type who'd attack me later either; he was just looking for his next fix. And I'd done