

Bicycle Thieves

The murder of a 36-year-old magazine illustrator last week while testing his new bicycle in Central Park is the most shocking of a mounting wave this year of bicycle robberies in the city's parks and streets.

Thefts of unwatched bikes, even when chained and locked, are regrettably a familiar story. Nearly 10,000 were stolen here last year. But until the past year or two, few cases were reported of assaults or other forms of forcible seizure of bicycles when the rider was actually present. In the first four months of this year in Central Park alone there were thirty such robberies, more than double the total for all of 1973; and the peak cycling season had not even begun.

Last week's brutal beating and the death of the victim* three days later brought a particularly intensive police search for the killers; six teen-agers already have been arrested as suspects. There are also announcements of strengthened police patrols, plus organization of special units of police auxiliaries to monitor the parks. But the increasing boldness of the bicycle thieves indicates the need for a reassessment of patrol techniques on a permanent basis, not just as a short-term response to a particular outrage.

Police cars seem of little utility in the parks, especially on the days when roads are reserved exclusively for cyclists. More scooters would clearly be more helpful than more patrol cars.

Bicycling in the parks and bicycling to work or shop are both among the city's great pleasures. They ought to remain that, not become new sources of anxiety.

* Roger Hane. Clippings filed Watergate, 18, 21 Jun 74.