

To Help Fight Crime

One of the slim clues in the Jerry Bayles murder case was part of the license number of the car in which the boy was allegedly taken. Another slim clue was the shape of the tail lights of the car.

Efforts have been made by police working with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to run down the kidnap car through use of the bureau's computers. The problem has been that the computer cards which carry information about individual vehicles do not have sufficient data to produce results from fragmentary clues.

One difficulty arises out of Indiana's license plates. In the 49K series, for example, there are 10,000 possible number combinations. But under a system for license plates such as The Star has proposed before, a three-letter and three number combination, there would be only 1,000 possible number combinations with each three-letter prefix.

Had the witness to the Jerry Bayles kidnaping been able to ascertain the entire license number it is much more likely the kidnaper-killer by now would have been brought to justice. Had a three-letter, three-number license plate system been in use at the time it is possible that at least the prefix would have been determined. The present system of two numbers, a small letter and one to four more numbers does not lend itself to fleeting identification.

In addition, present Bureau of Motor Vehicles data do not include the color of the vehicle at time of registry. Admittedly a car can be repainted, but this takes some time and, unless a considerable amount of time passes after commission of a crime, knowing what color the suspect vehicle is could be a valuable tool in tracing cars used in a crime. The addition of this information to data cards might serve well in some future case where it might provide the conclusive clue to fragmentary ones.

Automobiles are widely used by criminals. To counteract this, a license system that provides for easier identification and more complete data punched on the computer cards of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles would be a valuable tool in the fight against crime.

We hope that when the Indiana legislature convenes some thought will be given to a better system so that even fragmentary clues can be better used in the apprehension of criminals.