

TECHNOLOGY

# Amazon Tries a New Delivery Spot: Your Car

By NICK WINGFIELD   APRIL 24, 2018

SAN FRANCISCO — Amazon packages get delivered to all sorts of places.

Front porches? Naturally. Cubicles? Of course. Inside locked homes? Yes, that, too.

Now add a new one: the trunk of your car.

Starting Tuesday, people in dozens of cities across the United States can start getting their Amazon orders delivered to a parked car, provided their vehicle has the proper technology. With a few taps on a smartphone screen, the courier can unlock the car and drop the box inside the trunk or on the back seat.

The new service is aimed at anyone who doesn't want to risk having their package swiped from their front porch or who can't receive an Amazon order at work, perhaps because an employer doesn't allow it or because the company mailroom is not secure.

On Monday, the company showed how it worked: An Amazon driver fetched a box from the back of a van and headed toward her delivery destination — the trunk of an empty, gleaming Volvo S90 sedan in a parking lot. After she hit a couple of buttons on an app, the trunk was unlocked and the package went inside, then was locked in the car, where — had this not been a staged demonstration — it would have waited for its owner.

Amazon has dived into delivery convenience and security with gusto. To reduce package theft, it has installed lockers outside physical stores where customers can pick up orders. And last year, it introduced Amazon Key, which lets its couriers unlock customers' front doors and drop packages inside.

The new in-car delivery service, which will be available in 37 cities and surrounding areas, is a variation of Amazon Key.

For in-car delivery to work, customers must have a 2015 or later Chevrolet, Buick, GMC or Cadillac vehicle with an active account with OnStar, the roadside assistance and navigation service from General Motors. Car owners with 2015 or newer Volvos with a similar service, On Call, can also receive in-car deliveries from Amazon.

Couriers can use those assistance services to find the cars through satellite location-tracking and unlock the trunk.

Amazon said the service will be expanded to other carmakers over time. The company conducted a small pilot test of in-car delivery in Germany in partnership with Audi and DHL several years ago.

The company says its systems will allow couriers to unlock vehicles only once for each scheduled delivery, to prevent unauthorized access. Still, the service will require a hefty amount of trust that a courier won't swipe any valuables. The in-car service requires fewer protections than Amazon's in-home delivery service, which requires customers to have an internet-connected front door lock and security camera to deter any shenanigans by couriers once they're inside.

"We believe in offering customers choices," said Rohit Shrivastava, general manager of Amazon Key. "This product may not be for everyone."

Although statistics on the prevalence of package theft are elusive, police departments across the country say it has become commonplace, especially as internet shopping has become mainstream behavior. Package thieves have even earned a snappy moniker, "porch pirates."

James McQuivey, an analyst at Forrester Research, said Amazon has for years been ferociously tackling every obstacle it can identify to customers buying more goods online. “This goes back to one-click ordering,” he said. “The company knows that the less friction you have, the better.”

Customers won’t be able to get in-car deliveries if they park inside gated and underground parking garages where satellite signals often can’t penetrate. The service seems aimed especially at people who leave their vehicles in the lots of large, easily accessible suburban office parks.

Car owners, who are frequently discouraged from leaving valuables in their vehicles, may rightly be concerned receiving an Amazon package to their cars when they’re not present could make them a target. Amazon said customers shouldn’t worry — it will take care of a broken window or lock that happens as a result of a delivery to a car.

“If the damage is caused by a delivery and a customer calls, we will make sure it’s right,” Mr. Shrivastava said.

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