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Drivers who suffer glare from headlights say the problem is getting worse

Half of regular drivers say they are suffering more from the effect of dazzling headlights than they were just 12 months ago, research conducted by the RAC has found.*

The problem of glare – caused a headlight’s beam having a dazzling effect for oncoming traffic – is experienced by an estimated 16.1m UK drivers, based on 91% of drivers responding saying ‘some’ or ‘most’ car headlights are too bright and 54% of these saying they are dazzled more regularly now than a year ago.

When asked how they are affected by glare, six-in-10 of those affected said they regularly get dazzled by oncoming headlights even though they are dipped, with a similar proportion (60%) being unable to tell if headlights are either dipped or on full beam. Forty-five per cent complained they get dazzled by headlights in their rear-view mirror, while a huge 70% believe some lights are so bright they represent an accident risk. In fact [official government data](#) shows there are around 300 collisions every year where dazzling headlights are a factor.

Drivers were less clear on the likely causes of glare however. Half (51%) blamed vehicles that sit higher on the road, such as increasingly popular sports utility vehicles (SUVs), for dazzling them although 41% said the problem was not caused by any particular type of vehicle.

Similarly, when it comes to lighting technologies, 55% believe ‘bluer’ xenon or the most modern LED headlights are to blame, but a similar number (51%) are not sure or can’t tell the difference between the types of lights.

The research also found that in some cases drivers themselves might be inadvertently causing glare – either by not adjusting their lights correctly, or by having badly-aligned lights. Forty-seven per cent of drivers either never adjust their car headlights up or down when carrying different loads, or don't do it regularly enough – something that is important in avoiding causing other people to suffer from glare as the aim of the headlight beam is affected by the load in the vehicle.

A quarter of drivers (26%) meanwhile have suspected problems with a misaligned headlight, with 9% of this group either trying to sort the problem out themselves or ignoring it altogether – all of these scenarios are likely to lead to a dazzling effect that could cause other road users discomfort.

Headlamp aim [forms part of a vehicle's MOT](#), and the requirements on garages to conduct this part of the test thoroughly were strengthened in 2016. Nonetheless, figures obtained by the RAC from the Driving and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) show that of the 26.5m MOT tests completed in 2018 for Class 4 vehicles (which includes cars) over three years of age, 6% still failed as result of problems with headlamp aim, the equivalent of nearly 1.6m vehicles.** In 2016, [the agency also stated](#) that 'headlamp aim consistently tops the MOT compliance survey as one of the most likely items to be assessed incorrectly by testers.'

RAC spokesperson Rod Dennis said:

“The dazzling effect of another driver's headlights isn't just uncomfortable – in some cases it can be nothing short of dangerous, making us lose sight of the road for a short time. So it's concerning to see that a greater proportion of drivers have reported problems with glare this year than last year.

“Among some drivers there is a perception that newer headlights cause more glare. But while a sizeable proportion claim it is the xenon headlights more often found in higher-end vehicles that are primarily to blame, a greater proportion either don't know the difference between lights or aren't sure.

“In reality, the issue of glare is a complex one and it's not as straightforward as saying one type of lightbulb causes more of a dazzling effect than another – there are a range of reasons why a driver might be dazzled, from a slight misalignment of a headlight, the difference in ride height of different vehicles and even individual people's vision. That explains why not every car

headlight appears to be dazzling, with eight-in-10 drivers saying only some cause glare.

“Nonetheless, all headlights have to meet specific international standards, which motorists might be surprised to discover haven’t been updated since the 1960s and so do not take specific account of newer technologies like xenon and LED. And an overwhelmingly proportion of drivers – 84% – now want the UK Government to act to ensure the regulations are updated to remove the possibility of glare being a result of modern technology.”

I find I get dazzled regularly – what can I do?

- **Talk to your optician.** If you wear glasses, a coating can be added that can go some way towards making it easier to see when you are faced with car headlights - effectively giving you night driving glasses capabilities. A quarter (25%) of respondents to the RAC survey wear such glasses
- **Adjust your rear-view mirror more often.** Unless your car has a self-dimming rear-view mirror, you can reduce glare from vehicles behind you by doing this – more than half (56%) of drivers who responded to the survey say they do this
- When changing your car, look for one with a **self-dimming rear-view mirror and even darkened glass** (sometimes called ‘sunset glass’) when you next change your car. Both can be effective at reducing the bright light that reaches you

Am I actually causing glare myself?

- Check to see if your car automatically levels its headlights depending on the load you are carrying –the vast majority of cars on the road don’t
- If you don’t have automatically levelling headlights, always manually adjust them depending on the load you are carrying and according to the car’s manual. A single person driving with an empty boot needs a different setting compared to a single person plus a boot-load of luggage, or all five seats occupied and a fully-loaded boot
- Ask to have the angle of your car’s headlights checked next time

you have it serviced to ensure the beam is being directed properly

Notes to Editors

* Survey of people who drive at least once a month and who are members of the RAC Driver Opinion Panel, sample size 1,215

** Freedom of Information request made to DVSA in April 2019

About the RAC

First formed in 1897, the RAC has been looking after the needs of its members for more than 120 years.

Today it has approximately 10m members and is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's [roadside assistance](#), [insurance](#), [buying a used car](#), [vehicle inspections and checks](#), [legal services](#) or up-to-the-minute [traffic and travel information](#) – the RAC offers a solution for all motoring needs. The RAC is committed to making motoring easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for drivers and road users.

The RAC supports the interests of its members and UK drivers at a national level. This includes voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring, particularly the price of fuel and the high level of tax levied on it, advancing levels of road safety, and supporting the needs of all drivers, from young to old.

The RAC's annual [Report on Motoring](#) – first published in 1989 – is one of a kind and provides a clear insight into the concerns and issues facing today's motorists.

For the very latest news on UK fuel prices, check [RAC Fuel Watch](#). It provides a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump - and tracks these prices daily to help drivers check if the price they pay to fill up is a fair one.

For more information about the RAC, visit the [RAC website](#).

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