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Jan 10, 2024 00:01 GMT

A glaring problem: RAC calls for action on headlight glare as eight-in-10 drivers affected say problem is getting worse

The RAC is calling on the Government to commission an independent study into the issue of headlight glare after new research found 85% of those affected believe the problem is getting worse.*

An RAC survey of 2,000 drivers found a huge nine-in-10 (89%) think at least some headlights on cars on the road today are too bright, of which three-in-10 (28%) – a higher proportion than ever – think most are. Of the all these drivers who complain about the brightness of car headlights, some 91% say they get dazzled when driving with three-quarters (74%) saying this happens

regularly.

When it comes to the effects of glare on drivers, two-in-three (67%) who suffer say they have to slow down considerably until they can see clearly again, while a similar proportion (64%) believe some headlights are so bright they risk causing accidents. In fact, five per cent of these drivers state they have nearly been involved in a collision themselves.

Alarming, nearly one-in-10 (7%) say they find headlight glare so bad that they avoid driving at night altogether, a figure that rises to 14% for drivers aged 65 and over.

While the RAC has been surveying drivers on dazzling headlights since 2018, these new findings show more drivers than ever appear to be suffering from them, with 85% of those affected stating they believe the problem is getting worse.

As part of its study, the RAC asked drivers to estimate how long it takes them to see clearly again after getting dazzled by other drivers' lights. While 68% say it takes between one and five seconds, one-in-10 (11%) say it takes six or more – which, staggeringly, is enough for a driver travelling at 60mph to cover 160 metres, the equivalent of 40 car lengths.

The reasons drivers perceive headlight glare to be such an issue are less clear, although an overwhelming 87% of dazzled drivers think it is mainly due to the fact some lights just appear much brighter. This could be as a result of the increasing prevalence of cars fitted with LED headlights, leading to a much more intense and focused beam that the human eye reacts differently to, compared to a conventional 'yellower' halogen bulb. While LED headlights are great for improving a driver's view of the road ahead, this can be to the detriment of other road users who encounter them.

However, more than four-in-10 (44%) think the dazzling is caused by badly aligned headlights. A Freedom of Information request submitted to the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) in November 2023 shows that since 2019, an average of 1.6m, or 5%, of Class 4 vehicles – which includes passenger cars – failed their MOTs as a result of poor headlight aim.** What's more, with the DVSA stating in 2016 that 'headlamp aim consistently tops the MOT compliance survey as one of the most likely items to be assessed incorrectly by testers', the actual figure could be much higher.***

The increasing popularity of cars that sit higher on the road, especially SUVs, may also be a factor with those in conventional cars such as hatchbacks, saloons or estates suffering the most. Six-in-10 drivers (62%) of conventional cars blame the dazzling on higher vehicles, whereas only 35% of those in higher vehicles point the finger at similarly sized vehicles.

But whatever the cause or causes of headlight glare, it is clear how strongly drivers feel about the issue with 81% saying more should be done to tackle it – a figure that rises to 87% among drivers aged 45 to 54.

Government collision statistics shows that since 2013, there has been an average of 280 collisions a year where dazzling headlights were a contributory factor. Of these, six a year involved someone losing their life. The actual number may be higher if an investigation was unable to determine whether or not a collision was directly or indirectly caused by the glare from another vehicle's headlights.

As a result of the sentiment among drivers, the RAC has raised the issue of headlight glare with the Department for Transport and has been working with a member of the House of Lords, Baroness Hayter, to make drivers' concerns known among Government officials. The RAC provided details of its research to go into [a report published last week](#) and will be meeting with the Government this month to discuss it.

RAC spokesman Rod Dennis said:

“Our figures suggest drivers are more concerned than ever about headlight glare, with a huge proportion wanting to see something done about it. We urgently need the Government to take a closer look at the issue, ideally by commissioning an independent study to understand what's causing an increase in reports of dazzling and, most importantly, what can do be done to keep drivers safe.

“With spring still a long way off, there's a good chance many people will do most of their driving in darkness over the next few months and, according to our research, that means an awful lot of drivers will experience the discomfort and even danger that comes from being dazzled by headlights.

“On the one hand, brighter headlights can be a good thing as they give

drivers a clearer and safer view of the road view of the road, but that appears to come at a cost for those on the receiving end of excessively bright lights.

“The numbers of reported road casualties where headlight glare was listed as a contributing factor might be small when compared to something like speeding, but that only tells part of the story. Is it right we have such a high proportion of drivers who feel unsafe when they’re driving at night, with some having even given up night-time trips altogether?”

Mike Bowen, Director of Knowledge and Research at the College of Optometrists, said:

“The results from this research by the RAC are helpful to inform our understanding of how changes in vehicle headlight technologies may be affecting both the functional vision of young and older drivers, and their visual comfort, when driving at night. Older drivers are likely to be disproportionately affected by headlight glare, so may be more likely to experience difficulties or to decide not to drive at night at all.

“We urge the Government to commission more technical and clinical research to have a better understanding of this issue and what should be done to ease the effects of dazzling headlights.”

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town said:

“The RAC has demonstrated that some car headlights can dazzle, causing a danger for oncoming drivers. We know drivers in other countries share this concern. So, government should take action now to be on the side of road safety and ensure everyone keeps to the Highway Code, which states drivers ‘must not use any lights in a way which would dazzle other road users’.”

IAM RoadSmart Director of Policy and Standards Nicholas Lyes said:

“Drivers are increasingly telling us they are concerned by modern headlights and some are now even limiting the amount of time they spend driving during darkness to avoid glare. Being dazzled by a headlight has a worrying impact on road safety and we need policymakers to take this matter seriously.”

Dealing with glare – what to do if you find you’re getting dazzled

- **Always use your rear-view mirror properly at night.** Some newer cars have self-dimming rear-view mirrors that can reduce dazzle from vehicles behind – if you’re changing your car soon, look for one that has such a mirror fitted. But most drivers still need to manually adjust their mirrors in the dark to reduce glare. About half the drivers surveyed by the RAC who reported getting dazzled said they do so at night (54%).
- **Speak to your optometrist.** Just 6% of drivers told the RAC they’d talked to their optician about glare. For those who wear glasses, a glare-minimising coating can help – something a quarter (25%) of affected drivers said they are benefitting from.

* Research conducted on RAC’s behalf by Online95 in December 2023 among 2,000 UK motorists, all of whom drive at least once a month. RAC first reported results of research into the issue in 2018

** RAC FOI to DVSA, November 2023

*** <https://mattersoftesting.blog.gov.uk/the-mot-headlamp-aim-test-is-changing/>

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About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to more than 13 million private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As

well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. The RAC is also at the forefront in helping drivers make the switch to electric vehicles and leads in the development of new solutions for businesses and OEMs, partnering with the best in the motoring and mobility space.

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