

DID YOU KNOW???

IIHS STUDY FINDS FEW DRIVERS USE THEIR HIGH BEAMS

While the headlights on most cars need improvement, there is one simple thing that drivers can do to improve visibility in any vehicle: use their high beams. A recent study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), however, shows that drivers rarely turn them on.

Researchers from IIHS and the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute observed high-beam use at night on roads around Ann Arbor, Mich. The observation sites included both rural roads and urban streets, and all but one had poor or nonexistent lighting. Some of the roads were straight, and some were winding.

The researchers deemed a vehicle isolated enough to use high beams if other vehicles were 10 seconds or more away. Of about 3,200 isolated vehicles observed, 18 percent had their high beams on. At one unlit urban location, use was less than 1 percent. Even on rural roads, drivers on average used their high beams less than half of the time they should have for maximum safety.

This study on use of high beams, the first that I have seen, confirms what I have perceived while driving on highways in Franklin County at night – far too many drivers fail to use high beams.

A while back, while riding with a friend on a rural road after dark, I asked him why he wasn't using high beams – his response was that he was afraid he would forget to dim them if he met another vehicle. What a dim (no pun intended) excuse! Traveling at 55 mph with only low beams is overdriving your headlights. By the time your low beams illuminate something ahead, it is impossible to stop in time should that be required. Drivers failing to use high beams on rural roads are prime candidates to hit a deer, and then blame the deer for running out in front of their vehicle. Had they been driving with high beams they just might have seen the deer in time to avoid a collision.

"It may be that drivers are being too polite and keeping their 'brights' off whenever there are other vehicles in sight — even if those vehicles are far enough away not to be bothered by the glare," IIHS Senior Research Scientist Ian Reagan says. "Another possibility is that they are simply forgetting to switch to high beams. In either case, high-beam assist, a feature that automatically switches between low beams and high beams, depending on whether other vehicles are present, could be a good solution." Consider this feature when selecting your next car.

To be an effective remedy, however, high-beam assist will need to be embraced by consumers. The survey showed that some people may be reluctant to drive a vehicle with the technology. Only 43 percent of survey respondents said they would like to own a vehicle equipped with high-beam assist, according to the IIHS. I'd love to know why!

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