

DID YOU KNOW???

HEADLIGHTS AND DRLs VITAL TO SAFE DRIVING

Does your car have Daytime Running Lights (DRLs)? Do you use your high beams on rural roads at night? Do you know the applicable driving laws relative to mandatory headlight use? If you answered no, maybe, or don't know to any of these questions, keep reading.

As I wrote in the "Did You Know" article "Headlights Getting More Attention from Safety Experts" in early April of this year, I stated statistics showing that only about 20 percent of drivers use high beams even when driving in rural areas. In previous articles I have also criticized federal lawmakers for not passing legislation requiring vehicles imported into and sold in the US to have DRLs, like Canada did in 1989.

As I drive along our streets, roads and highways, I always find some vehicles with DRLs and too many without any lights. So, on a recent trip to Watertown and back, I had my wife take a count of the vehicles with lights versus vehicles without lights. The day was sunny with no threat of bad weather; thus those with lights were either equipped with DRLs or the driver was safety-conscious enough to drive with full headlights. She counted only cars and pickup trucks with four wheels (as opposed to dual wheels in the rear). No distinction was made between vehicles with DRLs versus vehicles where drivers drove with full headlights that sunny day.

A sample of 611 vehicles was tallied, sufficient to show a correlation of vehicles with lights versus vehicles with no lights. The survey showed 355 vehicles (58 %) with lights and 256 (42 %) without.

I was actually surprised that there were more vehicles with lights than without. It appears that more and more car manufacturers are making vehicles with DRLs. Also, it is becoming evident that more drivers realize the benefits of having lights on during daytime driving and are driving with lights on if their vehicles don't have DRLs.

Car manufacturers are also beginning to realize the safety benefits of daytime lights and the requirement of many states, New York included, that require full headlights (not just DRLs) when wipers are on or in inclement weather. Headlights on many newer vehicles, including my 2016 Subaru Legacy, automatically go from DRLs to full headlights and tail lights whenever I turn on the wipers or whenever dusk arrives. Other features on vehicles may include steering responsive headlights, which respond when you turn the steering wheel to light where you are steering towards rather than straight ahead, and high beam assist, which automatically turns your headlights to high beams when needed and back to low beams when another vehicle approaches or you approach a vehicle from behind, or when street lighting is sufficient to drive with low beams only. This takes the thought process to switch back and forth from low to high beams away from the driver, performing this task automatically.

So, my strong advice for drivers purchasing new cars; make certain it has DRLs – this is a "must have"! Then, if you are a driver that doesn't use high beam for whatever reason, look for a vehicle that has "high beam assist" or equivalent. You'll be glad you did – it's worth any extra cost.