

## Drivers may have to drive all day with lights on

Drivers in the UK may be forced to drive all day with their lights on, even in the summer, if a road safety proposal the European Commission is considering becomes law in 2010. However, driving with dipped headlights during the day will fuel petrol consumption and increase exhaust emissions, warns The AA Motoring Trust.

An alternative, Light-Emitting Diode (LED) lights, fitted to new cars will produce a negligible increase in pollution while increasing the visibility of road vehicles and reducing accidents. But, making older cars retro-fit costly LED lights or use dipped headlights is not an option, says the AA Trust.

According to Germany's Federal Highway Research Institute (BAST), using dipped headlights increases fuel consumption by three per cent, while LED lights reduces that to 0.3 per cent.

Austria is the first west European country outside Scandinavia to make it compulsory for all vehicles to drive with dipped headlights during the day, on road safety grounds. From 15 April 2006, this will be enforced with a 15 fine. The European Commission is considering a similar law across the union.

Other considerations include:

- the current law of turning on dipped headlights in poor visibility is followed by most drivers in the UK;
- some vulnerable road users, such as motorcyclists, currently make use of their lights to stand out on the road but may lose the benefit if daytime dipped headlights are made compulsory.

Andrew Howard, head of road safety for The AA Motoring Trust says: "The AA Motoring Trust would support moves to make daytime running lights a mandatory fitting on new cars. These lights should be less bright than dipped headlamps, but brighter than side lamps, and should be LED-style lights with low energy consumption. These lights would be likely to make the roads safer by allowing road users to distinguish easily cars that are on the move.

"However, the AA Trust would not support a requirement that cars not fitted with daytime running lights should be required to drive with dipped headlamps on at all times. This would increase fuel consumption and mean that lamp bulbs had to be replaced much more frequently. It would also produce complaints about dazzle from many road users, while many motorcyclists and cyclists would feel that they would become less conspicuous as a result.

"Although this second requirement is looked upon as an interim measure until all cars have special daytime running lights, there is a risk that many drivers of new cars will feel that the mandated LED lights are less conspicuous than dipped headlamps and choose to use them as well. If this happens the whole idea of energy efficient, safety optimised daytime running lights will fail."