

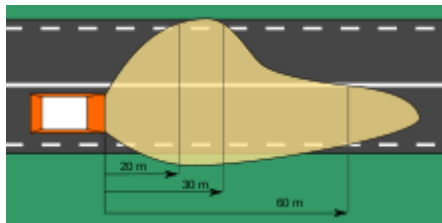
Shedding light

With the crisis forcing many authorities to switch off street lights as a cost cutting exercise, vehicle lighting has become much more important. However many cars in Spain have non-working lights; paradoxically this is because an ITV inspector would not normally fail a vehicle with one defective light but merely advise the driver to change the bulb! Of course the driver leaves the station and promptly forgets

The majority of the vehicles that I re-register are British or Irish and our headlights are designed to spread light to the left kerb whereas here of course the light should shine to the right. For many drivers this is an additional expense, so it is important to look at the options

Headlight adjustment

Certain headlights can be switched to make them conform to continental standards via a lever or switch on the assembly which moves the lens; others have the option of twisting the bulb. Such information is provided in the vehicle manual. For the anoraks European lights are referred to as asymmetrical as the beam is not-er- symmetric but has a distinct pattern, see photo



Most headlights have a reflector which forms the pattern of light, but a number of cars now have “projector” headlights where the bulb cannot be seen as it is hidden behind an opaque dome of glass. The beam pattern is formed by a plate between the bulb and lens which can often be modified by a skilled technician.

Inside each car is a thumbwheel marked from 0-3 or 4. This is designed to lower the light in the event that a trailer is being towed or there is a large weight in the boot such as building blocks or the mother-in-law. This adjustment has no effect on the left or right alignment. Likewise each headlight has adjusting screws designed to align the lights correctly and we have all seen the effect of maladjusted lights coming towards us. Again, this adjustment does not alter the beam pattern

Cars in the USA have no right side bias but just direct the light ahead. These are called “flat line” or symmetrical and are generally accepted in Spain despite the fact that they throw more light towards oncoming drivers

To make headlights appear more attractive they come in different shapes and sizes and the fairly recent introduction of sidelights surrounding the headlight which look like a glowing doughnut go by the name of “angel eyes” (how sweet). The more

prosaically named LED sidelights look like the Christmas rope lights that adorn our balconies

Photo: Projector lights, LEDs and Angel Eyes



Fogs, blinkers and bikes

High intensity rear fog lights are compulsory throughout Europe. Where a car has two of these lights, no problem, but if one only it has to be on the left side or centre of the car. There are various solutions to this for UK/Irish cars where a single light will be on the right, from re-wiring, changing the clusters or mounting a supplementary light. The reversing light can be anywhere at the rear of the car.

Indicators, you know those lights that do not seem to work on Spanish cars, must be amber not red like in the USA. Most vehicles have four only though others, particularly larger vehicles, have them on the side too. An indicator flashing at double speed means that one of the bulbs has blown

One of the most bizarre ITV rulings that I have come across is that motorcycles can have one or two headlights but not three illuminated at the same time. This is very upsetting to Harley-Davidson owners whose bikes often have three lights. However this also can be overcome by having an either/or switching arrangement. Even this quirk pales into insignificance compared to the time when a Harley was declared to have too many brake lights!

Well I hope that this has been illuminating for you (groan)

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