

Lights ensure visibility, safety

By Tara Marion

Are you in the dark about maintaining your vehicle's headlights and turn signals?

As they are crucial to your visibility and ability to communicate your intentions to others, you should ensure that they are in working order every time you operate your vehicle. However, most drivers leave it to their mechanic to check these lights during a regularly scheduled oil change every three months or 3,000 miles.

As Lance Garlow, service adviser at Don Seelye Ford, 3820 Stadium Drive, pointed out, the only other way to discover a problem is when another driver informs you of it.

If this were to happen, and you wanted to replace a burned-out bulb yourself, it's a fairly simple task. "If a person is basically mechanically inclined, he or she could do it themselves," said Leonard Horton, service adviser at Advantage Ford, in Galesburg.

If you do not know which replacement bulb to buy, consult your owner's manual. If you don't have one, ask an auto parts and supplies retailer to look for the model number on the burned-out bulb itself.

No matter what type of bulb you need, Horton suggested that you take two precautions with it.

"Make sure that you do not touch the actual glass part with your fingers or hands because the oil off them will take away from its life," he explained. He adds that you should also take care as you unplug the wires. "In older vehicles, the wires get frayed, dry and cracked, and you can do damage if you're not extra careful with the ends of them."

Depending on whether you prefer traditional glass or halogen, the lifespan of headlights is anywhere from one to five years. "There's really no set life span on them," Garlow said.

To replace headlights on some vehicles, you have to remove batteries or air ducts, but most of the time, headlights are just replaceable bulbs that disconnect from the housing.

Hazard lights and turn signals are similar. "When you're replacing one of those, you're kind of killing two birds with one stone, so to speak." Although it varies among automakers, the blinker in Ford vehicles will flash quickly to inform you that the signal bulb is burned out.

The parking or running lights and the taillights or brake lights have dual filaments as well. These lights are a replaceable bulb with an approximate five-year life span.

As Garlow explained, "This time estimate is just kind of a guess because it varies from vehicle to vehicle, obviously, and how often you run your headlights. "To replace these lights, you may have to open the trunk, remove the light's housing and access the bulb from the back.

Unless it's a full accessory with reading lights, the dome light lasts five to six years and is easy to replace. "It's just a quick pop-up thing," Horton explained.

The reverse lights or back-up lights only have one filament and should last approximately three to five years, although Horton said he very rarely sees them for replacement.

While the installation and life span of bulbs varies from headlights to back-up lights, Garlow reminded do-it-yourselfers to follow one universal rule of thumb: Be patient and don't force anything.