



Light bulbs

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Author: Kim Henson

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Have you ever struggled to change a time-expired bulb on a vehicle? Well, if ever there's an area that drives me up the wall in terms of manufacturers not thinking straight, it's in the lighting department.

Now we all know that it is a legal requirement for the lamps on a vehicle to function as designed. In addition, a bulb that's 'died' can be seriously dangerous. For example, a car with only one operational headlamp can easily be mistaken for a motorcycle, especially from a distance...

So then why, oh why, do the car builders act in such a negligent manner when it comes to enabling defunct bulbs to be changed? Surely, it should be straightforward for anyone - including mechanics and owners - to renew any of the car's bulbs, in order to keep the vehicle safe and legal?

In my humble opinion, all vehicles should be manufactured in such a way that a bulb could be purchased at a filling station (for example) and installed in seconds without the need for special tools and major dismantling (etc.). In this feature I'm concentrating on headlamps, but the other bulbs around the car are vital too - and they need to be just as easy to renew.

Recently I've been reminded again of the idiocy of some designs. In some cases the front bumper has to be removed in order to get at the headlamp bulbs (truly, who on earth thought up this spectacularly silly set-up?).



In others, there is insufficient space for fingers to be inserted between the back of the lamp unit and other components, so (especially if said fingers are cold and/or wet) there's every chance of dropping or damaging the new bulb, even before it has the chance to shine!

In other cases, the headlamps are stylish to look at, but incorporate apertures (at the rear of the reflector) which are just large enough in diameter to allow the bulb to 'escape' from the installer's squeezed and perhaps frozen fingers, to fall into the hidden depths of the headlamp assembly. Confession time... the other day it took two of us nearly the whole of a very frustrating hour to retrieve a bulb from its glass prison, by fishing inside the assembly using a short length of sticky tape attached to a small diameter cardboard tube. Before that, we had unsuccessfully tried grappling hooks, lengths of wire bent into special bulb-removing-tool shapes, you name it. Please forgive my assistant's evil thoughts, but at the time he was so mad that he expressed the wish that he could track down the designer and plant the bulb somewhere even more difficult to extricate it from...

The bottom line is that car design really shouldn't be like this, of course. Is anyone listening?

In saying all this, I realise that in modern cars, a great many components (including the lamp assemblies) have to be packed into a relatively small space. However, some manufacturers achieve this very well, and have bulbs that are easily changed in under a minute, even by fingers that are not experienced at such tasks. Well done to those car makers!



The bulbs on this Vauxhall Zafira are not too difficult to change, although access to the headlamp bulbs is a little restricted. However, on some cars you have to dismantle 'half the vehicle' in order to renew the headlamp bulbs. Just crazy, as our Grumpy Old Mechanic confirms