

DRL. Yes or No?

There are no real proven benefits to DRL (daytime running lights) (see <http://dmses.dot.gov/docimages/p75/239101.pdf>). The reason some groups of riders remain sceptical is that they have been on the receiving end of SMIDSY's (Sorry Mate. I Did Not See You), even when headlights have been on.

In general terms, most studies have shown a dip for a few years in Road Traffic Accidents, (RTA), after lights-on, but the RTA rate then picks up again and continues to follow a similar path up the graph axis.

Unfortunately, some motorcyclists do ride as if lights-on convey some sort of protective cloak, possible due to risk compensation, (see <http://john-adams.co.uk/>). Is it likely that car drivers will suffer the same delusion?

Other countries: I have ridden and driven extensively in Scandinavian countries over several tens of thousands of miles over the last twenty four years, using bikes and LHD cars, (therefore getting a proper driver's view), and I agree that the glare can mask potential hazards:

- Overtaking: you see a line of cars and a glare of lights but cannot see how many are in that line, or that one occupant of this line is actually moving out to attempt to overtake. This is prevalent on wide carriageways with a so-called "road (or asphalted) verges" that encourage more aggressive drivers to push through, often in the same manner that the UK used to suffer with three-lane single-carriageways. In short, you can see something but the glare masks speed, position and direction. (The Swedish traffic authority is now in the process of converting this road layout to lanes segregated by the infamous wire rope fences on heavily used roads of this type).
- Cyclists and riders of motorcycles with small single or low powered lights hidden by glare when forced to ride on carriageways
- Headlight glare masking indicators, (a situation made even worse in my mind by these amber bulbs)

As I understand it, the reason car manufacturers "accepted" DRL was because they were held over a barrel by the EU and given a choice between accepting DRL or having to redesign car front ends to be more friendly to unprotected road-users. What would you do, spend a few Euros fitting lights-on units or millions of Euros on body re-designs?

DRL is a political agenda as much as anything, and as much about egos as road safety. DRL advocates have been seen to use statistics that offer no clear benefit under peer review to push "their" hobby horse. And, finally, after years of failed "initiatives" to reduce Killed and Seriously Injured rates, (KSI's), we finally end up with DRL's, scraping the bottom of the barrel of ideas. DRL's are cheap cheerful and easy to enforce \ engineer compared with the years it may take to, maybe, educate drivers to stop crashing into other road users.

As with the driving forces behind the new EU licensing directive, I bet DRL supporters are cock-a-hoop with glee at finally they have got their “breakthrough”.

Our own transport minister has made noises against DRL’s. How serious they are remains to be seen. Given the lack of cycle-tracks in the UK, UK cyclists seem at risk from being hidden by glare. Traffic densities in the UK are much higher compared with other countries and, it may be that glare is an issue. So, he is right to question the concept of universal “lights-on” and maybe reach for the right to opt out of certain EU policies.

I also offer this: Swedish motorcyclists have not been totally saved by DRL’s. In fact the Swedish road-safety brigade have been tinkering at the edges of this for a few years now, trying to make riders more visible by adding yet more lighting or adding strips of red fluorescent tape. I am sure they will quote “zero vision” to justify their wages, but again no benefit has been demonstrated. Perhaps the DRL fans have their own “zero vision”, as in they cannot see or tolerate any other way.....

And here lies another issue. If DRL’s fail, will they repeal the directive? I doubt it. The safety and environmental lobbies have got powered road vehicle builders and users on the run and as a result of this. They will grow bolder, not step back and seriously consider if what they are doing is really contributing to reduced crash rates. What next? Red flags? 10 mph speed limits?

I don’t see road users as blameless in this process. They also contribute to the problem by the decisions they make, giving others a stick big enough to use. However, these everyday decisions can be as much a response to their environment out on the roads as their ability, or otherwise, to make reasoned decisions on courses of action.

So, do we let the road safety lobby run steamroller over us or do we fit daggers into steering wheels and bike instrument clusters to impale wrong doers when they make the wrong choice and so remove them from the gene pool.....

The author:

Steve Dixey

47 years old, ridden bikes since he was 17, holder of a car licence since he was 20. Bike instructor since he was 20 at both learner and post-test levels. He has been involved in instructor training and assessment as well as directorship of rider training activity. Travelled extensively in Scandinavia in all seasons, from the southernmost to northernmost parts, speaks Swedish and has assisted in translation of Swedish studies. Has met with various groups in Sweden at local and national levels to discuss issues such as DRL’s, road safety and skills training.