

CAR LED HEADLIGHTS IMPACT ROAD SAFETY

By Ahmad Muto

Last year, motorists in the UK raised an alarm over vehicle headlights, stating that they were being 'blinded' at night. This prompted their government to investigate the design of vehicles and headlamps on UK roads, and launch a new assessment of causes and remedies.

Motorists argued that LED headlights, which are increasingly common on new vehicles, are making it nearly impossible for them to drive at night.

It is noticeable that LED headlights fitted on modern vehicles are whiter, more focused, and intensely brighter compared to halogen lights fitted on older cars that produce diverse light.

A long stream of oncoming traffic with LED beams has a high chance of straining the eyes, totally becoming a safety issue.

Isaac Musitwa, a driving instructor, pins it on motorists who have not bothered mastering the light switch traditionally placed behind the steering wheel, partly because driver training is done during the day.

He accuses them of only knowing how to turn on the lights.

"One turns on high beam and when they are approaching you, you feel like you cannot even move an inch from there. All you have to do is stop because however much you try to communicate to them using the flashlight, they do not know what to do. All they know is to turn on but not adjust for the different situations on the road," he observes.

However, Musitwa says they train their drivers on when to use high and low beams.

"We train our drivers to adjust from high beam to low beam in order to not affect oncoming traffic. To lower your beam when you see an oncoming car, it is best you adjust immediately. After they have passed, you can switch back to full beam when you are alone on the road. Lower when you see others. And repeat," he explains.



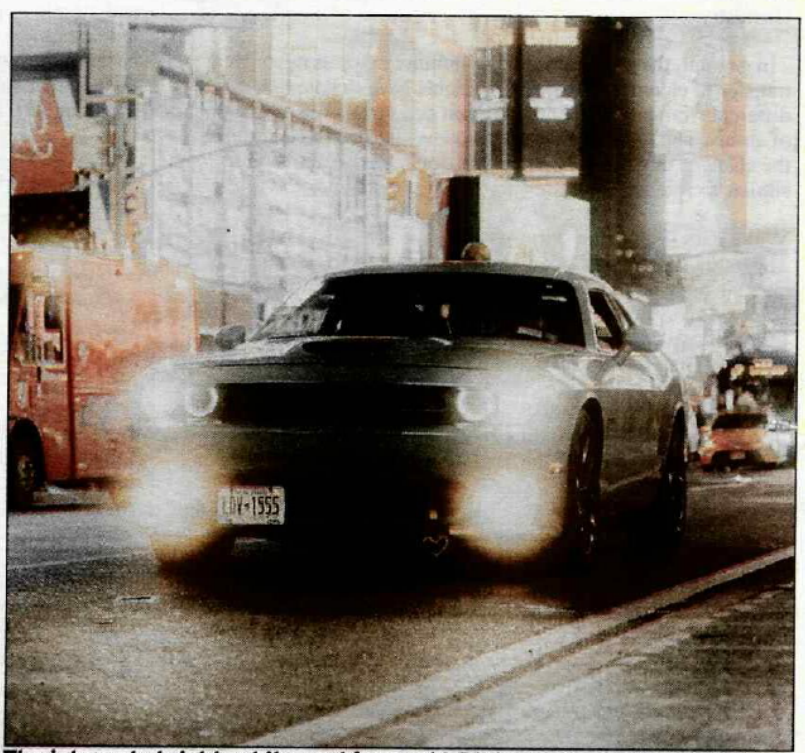
"In fog, high beam blinds you — you use the fog light. But some cars may not have fog lights. The daytime running lights can be used when it is raining, misty, or dusty; use your lights so you can be identified by other road users," Musitwa adds.

Emmanuel Aleti of the Inspectorate of Vehicles, says he has had incidents involving high beams from oncoming traffic, as it is common lately. He observes that modification of vehicles has contributed greatly to the menace.

"It is very common today because people have modified the lighting systems of cars by fitting LED lights that are extremely bright with uncontrollable beams. And once you are hit, you are blinded for some time before regaining sight. That is one key issue affecting motorists on highways at night," he says.

Aleti says this goes against one key tenet of driving — having clear sight. It disables a motorist from seeing properly and, therefore, disables them from making good judgement.

"If you do not see anything, you will not make good judgement because what you see is interpreted by the brain and you take an appropriate measure."



The intensely bright, white, and focused LED beam on modern vehicles has been flagged as a growing night-time safety hazard

MANDATORY INSPECTION

Emmanuel Aleti of the Inspectorate of Vehicles suggests mandatory vehicle inspection as a lasting solution, noting that even in Naguru, Kampala, they have headlight testers but have not deployed them yet.

"They test and tell if you are either too bright or if the bulb yield is inadequate.

"A high beam is dangerous, but so is a low beam because it will not illuminate ahead of you properly. There is a limit in the Traffic and Road Safety Act," Aleti says.