



Amber-colored front parking lights —a backward step in safety

EVERYONE who travels the highways will have noticed recently that there has been a change of color in front parking lights. Manufacturers of the new cars have adopted amber-colored lenses for the front parking and turn signal lights, a practice which began with the 1963 models. This step would seem to have been taken without a careful investigation to determine whether or not the change to amber lights would mean an improvement over the customary white parking and turn-signal lights.

It seems not to have occurred to automobile manufacturers that red had become associated with the rear of a car. The amber lights may very possibly appear to some to be red or reddish, the Automobile Legal Association (1047 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, Mass. 02115) points out, as reported in an interesting brief discussion headed "Beware of Amber" in the trade magazine *Product Engineering*. Thus, amber parking lights fail to provide the necessary sharp distinction of color so that the lamp will invariably be seen as an orange yellow, and not as a possible off-shade red. (Lights seen as red or reddish suggest to the observer the *rear* of a car, a car which may be stationary, moving forward, or backward.)

It is important, of course, that there should be no possible question in the mind of the driver whether the car which he sees ahead of him is traveling in the same direction as his

own. It is unwise to have any light on the front of the car which will not be infallibly distinguished in all conditions of light and weather from the conventional red taillights at the rear of every car, tractor, and truck.

An ambiguous interpretation of the color of the light was found to be most hazardous on three-lane highways, because it was difficult to determine the direction of motion of a car in the center lane. The uncertainty that permits one to mistake amber for red is rendered greater by the fact that the lenses of many automobile taillights made of plastic tend to appear amber or orange in fading light, and also that many foreign cars are equipped with amber tail and turn lights. Another serious disadvantage of the new amber lights is that like the white parking lights, many are located low, in the front bumper, where they pick up grime and dirt from the road. Under these conditions very little light goes through the lenses and is available to warn the oncoming driver. We think the choice of amber lenses for parking lights was ill advised.

CR strongly suggests in the interest of safety that the motorist should never use parking lights as driving lights; they are not a substitute for headlights during the period after sunset. Florida prohibits the use of parking lights when a car is in motion; perhaps it would be wise for the other states to pass similar legislation or regulations. ♦