

How to properly adjust your side mirrors



Ralph Seekins

The first vehicles I drove were tractors and farm trucks. One of the skills I had to learn early on was to use the side mirrors when backing a farm truck into or out of position. To do that safely and effectively, I needed to adjust the side mirrors so I could see the truck's rear corners and rear wheels. When I graduated to driving cars and trucks on the highways, I was taught that the side mirrors on highway vehicles should be adjusted the same way – so that when I pivoted my head from side to side I could just barely see the back corners of whatever it was I was driving. Folks had done it that way for years.

The problem with the way I was taught (and I bet you were too) is that the typical driver sees just a wee bit more in this side mirrors than he or she also sees in the centrally mounted rear view mirror. In fact, it is typical that about 1/3 of the side mirror area will be filled with a reflection of the vehicle itself. This traditional setting creates blind spots that can be greatly

reduced by simply adjusting the side mirrors to look farther out so that you can eliminate mirror overlap and see what's beside you as well as what's behind you.

To properly adjust your side mirrors, start by leaning your head all the way to the left and up against the left side door glass. Then, adjust your left side mirror until you just barely see the rear corner of your car.

Next lean to the right about the same distance toward the center of your car as you leaned to the left and set your right hand side mirror the same way. Again, adjust the mirror so you can just barely see the right rear corner of your car.

Now, when you sit in the normal driving position, you should have just a little overlap between the side mirrors and the central rear view mirror. As a car comes up behind you, it would be visible in the central mirror and, if it moves either to the right or left of you, its reflection will immediately move from the central mirror to one of the side mirrors as it travels into the normal "blind spot." You may need to make some minor adjustments to make the images line up properly. A good way to do that is to pull up across from a line of cars in a supermarket parking lot and adjust the mirrors for the best continuous image with

no overlap. Once you have that sight picture in mind, it will be easy to make future adjustments.

I found out that it took a little getting used to after I started adjusting my mirrors this way. I was in the habit of using my side mirrors rather than my central rear view mirror to see what was behind me. I can still use my side mirrors that way but it takes a body shift rather than a head pivot to do so. One big benefit to adjusting the mirrors this way is that I don't have to pivot my head nearly as far when looking over my shoulder for vehicles in my blind spot before changing lanes.

Some newer cars, like the new Lincoln and Taurus models or some made by other manufacturers, have an electronic blind spot warning system that illuminates a yellow light in the side mirror whenever another vehicle is in the blind spot. It's a nice feature but I'm still one who depends on using all three mirrors when on the highway.

Use this rear view mirror setting for the safety of yourself, your family and others on the road.

Ralph Seekins has more than 40 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 32 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln Mercury.

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