

Improving Indicator Brightness

Modern cars have dazzling indicators and brake lights, with a large light area, multiple bulbs or LEDs per light, good reflectors and transparent lenses, plus high mount central stop lights. But your irreplaceable series 1 or 2 Alfa 33, out there in the traffic with careless, incompetent and bored drivers everywhere, has feeble little lights that have dimmed with age.

I was nearly rear-ended by a light truck one day when he didn't see my turn signal. Once he realised I was going to slow down and turn into a side road, he threw on his brakes, locked up some wheels, his truck turned to one side and almost rolled.

I quickly scurried around the corner before the little truck filling my rear view mirror tumbled into me or crashed into other traffic.

So I soon had a look at what I could do about my car's lights.



The picture above shows a standard series 2 rear light cluster. The red lights along the top, from left to right, are:

- Fog light (decently bright and irritating to other drivers)
- Visibility light (comes on with the headlights, really dim)
- Brake light (dim when the headlights are on, gets a bit brighter when braking)

Then you've got a reversing light and the clear indicator.

The indicator has a rough plastic reflector that doesn't reflect much light, and condensation over the years leaves dirt on the inside of the lens. Plus to make the indicator look clear but light up orange, the bulb (clear) fits inside a cup in the indicator made out of orange plastic with the rear-facing part painted silver. You can see this big silver circle at the bend of the indicator lens.

Of course heat from the bulb makes this orange plastic cup go opaque and block some of the light.

And then you've got the dirt on the inside of the lens stopping more of the light.

What to do?



You can see here the result of a good half hour of cursing and poking and breaking and cleaning.

I took off the boot trim and removed the tail light bulb holders, cleaning the bulbs and connections where necessary.

Then I removed the orange plastic cup inside the indicator lens. This is not easy to do because you have to break up the cup inside the indicator until you can fit the broken pieces back out the hole. And if it falls inside too far toward the reversing light it becomes hard to get hold of again....

Once that was done I cleaned the inside of the indicator lens using tissue paper wrapped around the ends of screwdrivers and stiff bits of wire.

Finally I replaced the clear indicator bulb with an orange one to make up for the loss of the orange plastic cup. The indicator looks a bit different but not much worse really.

And look at the difference in visibility!

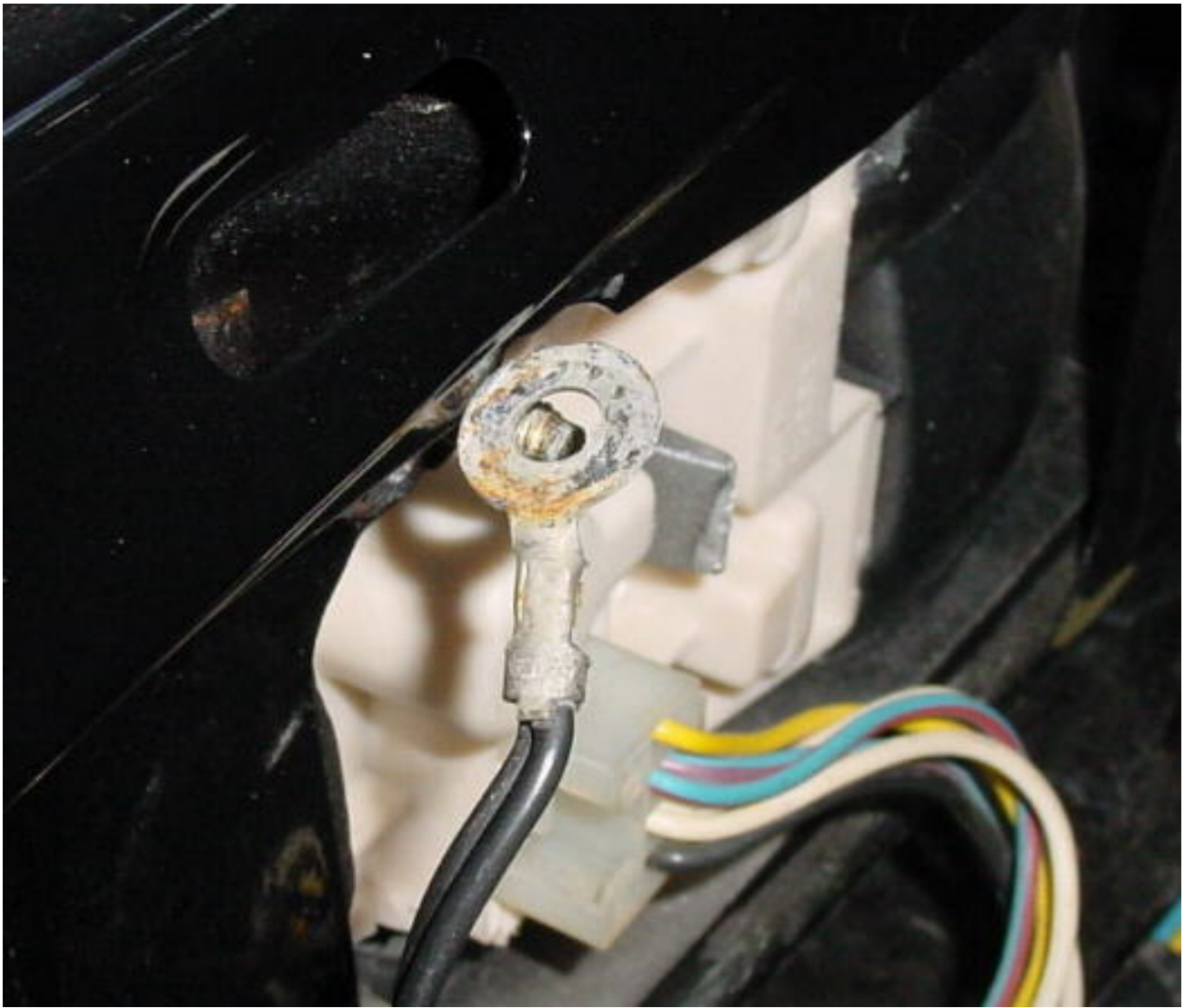


The indicator on the left is the finished result, running an orange bulb.

The one on the right still has the orange plastic cup in place, and you can see less light is getting through. More importantly other drivers don't get the glare of the naked bulb to draw their attention! I cannot remember whether the inside of the lens was cleaned on the right indicator in this shot, but it was not as dirty as on other 33s I've seen.

Clean the bulbs and the insides of the lenses on the other lights.

But if you still don't get much brightness, check the earth connection for each tail light cluster:



This ring terminal will be under one of the bolts holding the tail lights to the body. I think there's one per side of the car. It grounds the light circuits to the car body, and it shouldn't look all crusty like the one in this picture! Clean the terminal and the area of the car body it touches using sandpaper, CRC, electrical contact cleaner or whatever seems appropriate.

And if you still want more brightness for your brake lights, fit a dodgy jumper wire so that the rear fog lights come on when you press the brakes. Then nobody can say they didn't see you were slowing down!

Ben Gregory

1988 Alfa 33 1.7 QV

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