



Exclusive Road Test: 2016 BMW X5 with Autoliv Safety's Night Vision and Spotlight Beam Technology

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Introduction

When we here at iSeeCars.com say we have an exclusive test of a vehicle we mean just that. As we picked up our handsome gunmetal grey 2016 BMW X5 SUV from the Southern California base of Autoliv Safety Technology in Goleta near Santa Barbara they were sure to remind us that our tester was the only one of its kind currently in the United States.



In other words, an invaluable prototype we would be wise not to scratch. "So please try not to break it in any way," we imagined them saying to us considering we wound up road testing the vehicle for ten days along dark and winding roads in the middle of the night.

Hey, it was practically a requirement. Allow us to explain.

You may not know the name Autoliv but you should have given that this company is constantly developing technologies that seamlessly help keep you and your family safe when driving. They have 18 technical centers and 21 crash test tracks scattered around the globe and the company boasts \$9.2 billion in sales to automakers each year globally.

Suffice it to say, we felt a bit of pressure in this situation as we were kindly entrusted with the keys to a one-off North American prototype of a technology that this Fortune 500 company is working hard to get Government approved for full widespread use with hopes of releasing the technology in our market as soon as possible.

And after our experience with it we know how many lives it could save on our roads each year what with its ability to warn drivers immediately if they are at risk of hitting a pedestrian, deer, dog or most any living thing that might veer into their path on a dark road.

Perhaps they were just recalling what almost happened in their test BMW a few nights prior when we first sampled what we like to call their “spotlight beam technology.” Just to be clear, no deer, expensive Bavarian luxury vehicles or drunk college freshmen were harmed during this road test. And that may very well be all thanks to Autoliv.

Driving an Autoliv Test Vehicle at Night Near UCSB Right after the Bars Closed

The situation you are about to read about happened purely by chance, was in no way pre-planned nor is it in any way anything other than one of the scariest near misses most people in the car at the time had ever experienced in real life. Especially the driver, who is also the author of this piece. So to start, why were we driving around UC Santa Barbara at night anyways?



Well, after a tour of their offices and small factory at their site we set out in the 2016 BMW X5 equipped with Night Vision and the spotlight safety technology which shines a beam of light onto any pedestrian or animal who is in danger of moving in front of the vehicle as its moving. The system knows when you are stopped and knows not to activate the spotlights at stoplights.

There is also a center mounted screen where you can see how well the Night Vision camera illuminates the night by allowing you to see a brilliantly realized video image of anything living that may be in front of you. It also makes enormous mountains usually shrouded by nightfall glow in the dark which is quite cool.

Non threatening objects like mountains or non-moving pedestrians glow a rather noticeable white, moderate risks or things over 100 feet away are outlined in yellow and then turn red if the system believes you will impact with said pedestrian or animal as you get closer.

You also get a visual warning in the screen between the speedometer and tachometer in the BMW when it detects something in your path. Automakers like Audi and Mercedes have the night vision screen and all warnings dead ahead of the driver between the gauges. As of this writing Cadillac, Bentley, Maybach and Rolls Royce also offer the Night Vision safety screens as an option with some of their models as well.

The “spotlights,” which humans never notice but startle animals enough to get them motivated to move out of the path of your vehicle, are expertly hidden within the normal fog light assembly of the BMW X5. Only now the fog light swivels and pivot like an eye while the Night Vision camera reads the road ahead of you constantly keeping the smart brain of the system appraised of hidden dangers ahead. The first time you see it working in action is definitely a cool “ooh, aah” wonder moment.

And never once in all of the miles we put on the X5 while showing off the feature to countless amazed passengers did it ever fail us. It not only managed to see every pedestrian but also detected dogs and cats as well as deer and horses. Sorry, we never could find a moose or any Elk in Southern California but the spotlights did illuminate critters as small as rabbits and even one snake crossing a road very late at night.

Before you laugh at the thought of a car needing to detect animals, keep in mind that the IIHS (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety) attributes 1.1 million vehicle accidents and 200 motorist deaths each year just to accidents in this country where drivers impact with a deer. That doesn't even take into consideration a Moose which if you've ever seen one up close you know you never want one to land in your lap after hitting it with your car at 40 miles per hour.

On a purely personal note, the one thing Autoliv's Night Vision system with spotlight beam technology noticed that I as the driver of this special BMW will forever be grateful for was one young gentleman clearly no older than a college freshman who lost his balance on a sidewalk ahead of me near UCSB and managed to fall right on front of our vehicle. No his shoelaces were not tied together but classes had yet to start and we suspected he may have had a few too many beers that night.



At the time of this incident I was traveling about 40 miles per hour on a rather dark street full of other college students on bicycles, skateboards and even roller skates. Immediately the spotlight beams illuminated the rather “tipsy” young man face down in front of us on the ground and as his image appeared in red on practically every screen on the BMW’s dashboard, the additional warning I received allowed me to easily steer around him and stop the vehicle.

Safety Technology and the Emotional Toll of Car Accidents

Okay, let’s be more real about this. How did this experience affect me, the aforementioned author of the piece and driver of the BMW X5 in question? Put simply, this safety system made it so that I did not wind up running over and most likely killing another human being in what would have been a senseless accident. Humans trip, they sometimes take their eyes off the road for a moment but that doesn’t mean horrific accidents should happen.

This is not only a story about technology, it is a story about the value of human life. After this happened I wondered about this UCSB student, how devastated his family would have been, how racked with guilt I would have felt for the rest of my life. But Autoliv saved me from that just as much as it saved that young man’s life. And in the end, that’s all that really matters when it comes to making the road a better place for all of us.