

New Beetle – Headlight and Bulb Replacement

by Mike C. -

It's hard to believe that the New Beetle has been on roads for more than five years now. Those of you who have owned a New Beetle since '98 or '99 may have already experienced a burned-out headlight bulb. As you have found out, these are totally different in concept than the old Beetle cousins. The only similarity, if you call it that, is the general look of the headlight with the big "bug-eye" lens. Instead of replacing an entire sealed-beam headlight, you only replace a small light bulb, just like any other modern car out there today. Not only that, but there are two bulbs – one for the low beam and a separate one for the high beam. The reflector, likewise, is made in two sections. One section is the projector portion (the lens on the top) that carries the low beam. The high beam bulb is below it, and you can see this bulb plainly. Hopefully, none of you New Beetle owners have had to, or need to, replace an entire headlight assembly (read – expensive!). However, if complete replacement is necessary, don't fret. Since you have to take the entire headlight assembly out just to change a bulb, this will be covered in the article as well.

You will not need any tools to do the job (one advantage over the old Beetle!). You may want to have some adhesive remover handy, along with paper towels, some car cleaner/wax, and a soft clean cloth.

Both high and low beam bulbs are H1 bulbs. This information can be found in your owner's manual or the Bentley manual for the New Beetle. Don't depend on the auto parts store or aftermarket suppliers' catalogs to tell you anything different. When you take out the old bulb, it should have "H1" stamped on the metal base or etched on the glass itself. Low beam is a 55 watt bulb, and high beam is 60 watts.

1. Before you try removing the headlight housings, check for a blown fuse first, since the headlight circuits on these cars are fused. The fuse is located on the regular fuse panel inside the car, on the left side of the dashboard behind the removable cover.

Well, since there are no visible screws anywhere around, how do I get the headlight out? It's not that hard at all.

2. Open the hood. Locate the seam between the nosepiece and the front fender (either side). Go up between the first two fender mounting bolts and look down a few inches. See a small knob sticking out at you? That is a release lever for the headlight assembly. Push in on it slightly and pull all the way up as far as the lever will go.
3. Now push on the headlight from behind with one hand and be prepared to catch the assembly with the free hand from the front. It may take a bit of a push because there is some gooey adhesive between the headlight and the fender.
4. Once you have the headlight out, pull the connector off the back of the housing and take the headlight somewhere where it is easy to work on. Put it on a pillow or something soft so you don't risk scratching the lens.
5. There is a black plastic cover on the back of the housing. See a tab on it? Push on this tab and pull the cover down to expose the bulbs.
6. There is a metal spring clip that holds these bulbs in place. Undo this and the bulb will fall out. Take out the new bulb and compare it with the one you are replacing. Make sure the wattage is correct, since they are both H1 bulbs.

Never touch the glass part of the bulb itself with your fingers.

7. Use the soft cloth to handle the bulb if needed. Line up the tabs of the bulb base with the slots in the reflector housing and drop the bulb in. Put the spring clip back on and make sure the ends of the clip are in securely. Put the bulb cover back on.

Now is the time to clean up the mess around the fender where the headlight mounts. Remember seeing that nasty-looking goo seep out from around the rubber seal on your headlights? That's the adhesive I was talking about earlier.

8. Take the adhesive remover on the paper towels and remove this stuff from the fender before putting the headlight back in. Don't remove all of it from behind the headlight itself, as it is there to keep excess amounts of water from getting behind the headlight. Just remove enough so where it won't make a mess anymore. A little wax around the mounting area on the fender will detail things out nicely.
9. Position the headlight up to the fender. Push on the wire connector. Line up the tabs on the headlight assembly to the slots in the headlight housing in the fender and push the whole thing in. Sometimes things won't line up on the first try, but keep trying. The headlight should go up against the fender fairly easily.
10. Once you get it to this point, grab the release lever, push all the way down, and lock the headlight assembly into place.

All you do now is test the lights. That's it! The headlight aim should not have been affected during this procedure. Some wax or glass cleaner will be good for cleaning the lenses and make them sparkle again. If you have those trick blue bulbs or other colors, always keep a spare bulb handy, of the same color and manufacturer, so you won't be stuck with odd colors until you get the right replacement.