Top 9 Secrets to Getting the Most Out of Your Detector

by Craig Peterson

Okay, you've bought a detector and are about to use it for the first time. Don't make the mistake of just slapping it onto the dash and cruising off. Improperly used and without knowing exactly what information it's trying to deliver will make it worse than useless. Here are our top 9 secrets to getting the most out of your detector.

Secret #1: Mount It Correctly.

First rule of installation: Mount it where it has a clear view of the road ahead and **put it where you can see it** without taking your eyes off the road. Sure, you can tuck it away somewhere, maybe to hide it from thieves, but what happens if the power plug comes adrift or some electrical calamity befalls the detector and it shuts off without being noticed? And think how much of a risk is entailed each time you look away from the road to study the detector. At 75 mph you're covering 110 feet per second; ask yourself how much time you can devote to scanning the detector for information.

Ah, but conventional wisdom says to place the detector as **high on the windshield** as possible for best performance. Admittedly this sounds like good advice; after all, don't radio and TV stations rely on tall towers to broadcast their signals afar? And doesn't a tall antenna on your car ensure optimal radio reception? Yes, but police radar is entirely different from the signal broadcast by your favorite FM rock station.

For one thing, it's not omnidirectional, transmitting in a 360-degree circle. A radar beam is deliberately very narrow, as little as 9 degrees in the case of some Ka-band guns. And this concentrated beam produces plenty of scatter, bouncing off anything metallic in its path and sending ricochets at tangents to the main beam. In all our years of testing detectors we've never seen one whose range increased when it was relocated from a passenger vehicle's dash to upper windshield area.

There's another drawback to mounting a detector up high: it seriously **screws up** laser detection. Keep in mind that a laser beam at 1,000 feet is a three-foot-square box (no, it's not a circle, even though the laser gun's collimating lens is circular in shape). The beam is so tight, not to mention small, that if aimed at the front license plate, the favored point of aim, many detectors, even dash-mounted, simply can't see it.

The larger the vehicle, the farther the detector will be from the front plate and the poorer its laser detection.