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MEMBER TESTED

# Clearwater Lights Darla universal LED light kit

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**I HAVE HAD A SET OF DAYTIME**

Running lights (DRLs) on just about every bike I've owned—for me, they're as much a necessity as a helmet—but due to my general thriftiness they've either been big box store specials or cheapies from China. But when my latest set of LED lights conked out on me after one season, I began looking at more reliable and advanced sets. An internet search revealed there are lots of good light systems out there—Denali, Cyclops, Touratech, PIAA—but looking at my favorite forums, I kept coming across testimonials for systems from Clearwater Lights. Then, at the Des Moines rally a member demonstrated a set of Clearwater Darlas that really caught my attention. I meandered over to the Clearwater vender booth, and I was so impressed by the quality and features of the Darlas that I was convinced to give them a try.

Clearwater Darlas have been around for about four years and sit midway in the Clearwater lineup of light sets for motorcycles that run from the diminutive Glendinas (1.7 inch diameter, 900 lumens) to the almost thermonuclear Dixi (5.3 inch, 10,000 lumens!). What I liked most about the Darlas is that though they are small, they are adjustable on the fly, from 100 lumens, all the way up to 1100 lumens each, which

means they more than fill the bill for bright DRLs. As an added bonus, Clearwater's CANbus-friendly relay harness can be configured to trigger full 2000 lumens power

America, the hardware is stainless, the wiring is professional quality, and the lights themselves are CNC machined aluminum. Posi-Lock connectors (no more electrical tape), waterproof, three pin connectors from the lights to the harness, and precision machined and tapped mounting hardware made me think I wouldn't need to replace or upgrade this system...ever.

Installation on my F 700 GS took most of a morning, partly because I wanted to try different positions for the lights and partly because I'm known for blundering when I should be pondering. Even though I had the "Universal Darla Kit," I really appreciated that the photos in the instructions pictured my specific BMW model. In fact, as I worked on the installation, the phrase "well thought-out" kept popping into my mind.

The instructions were for a fork mounts, but after trying the lights there, I moved them to my Givi crash bars, which gave me a little wider triangle and a better conspicuity profile. Since these lights aren't cheap (about \$500), I also felt the crash bar mount would protect the

lights better in the event of a drop or hitting some debris. The Darla light bodies themselves are mounted with bike specific, powder-coated brackets and clamps that allow 45 degrees of vertical adjustment. Aiming the lights about five degrees below



Adding a Clearwater Lights Darla Kit provides a wider profile and more contrast to a bike's signature during the daytime.

when you flick on your brights!

My close inspection upon unpacking the shipping box confirmed my initial impressions at the vendor booth: the fit and finish of the Darla's places them on the top tier. Completely built (not "developed") in

horizontal assures you won't become one more reason for drivers to resent riders.

The instructions also call for tapping into the low beam wire behind the headlight to trip the relay, but I opted to use a Posi-Tap on the accessory outlet wire, which is just above the battery on the F7—much easier to get to. (The 2016 F 700 GS has its gas tank under the seat.) Doing it this way means the Darlas will remain on for 15 seconds after you shut the bike off, which I like, though I do get tired of people telling me “You left your lights on!” And speaking of leaving your lights on, Clearwater does not supply an on/off switch for the Darlas; they feel DRLs should be on all the time. However, as mentioned earlier, Clearwater does give you a nifty control knob that mounts off the left mirror stalk. It allows adjustment from 5 to 55 percent of full power. I am told that a quick user-activated program can allow the adjustment to extend from 5 to 100 percent of power if desired. Another wire from the relay is tapped into the headlight's bright beam lead, which will trigger full power to the Darlas when the brights are toggled on. That wire could be also connected to the horn for a blast of light every time you beep, which sounds kind of nifty. All strands in the wiring harness, at least for my bike, were more than long enough for mounting the lights in either position.

The Gallery pages on the Clearwater Lights website show their light kits in use on just about every BMW series, plus kits on bikes from every major marque. I'd suggest anyone who decides to invest in a set of Darlas should consider ordering a set of Darla slip-on covers (\$40). The covers come with both clear and special “selective” yellow lenses, which could protect the lights from an expensive repair. I use the yellows because of the contrast they provide with my headlight.

As evidence of how far LED technology has come, the three LED Clearwater Darla Lights only draw 24 watts, two amps each at full, 2000 lumens power. Seventy-five percent of all that light stabs directly forward in a 15-degree cone, while the remainder is spread up, down and sideways at about a 45-degree angle. If by chance the Darlas get



The Darla Universal Kit from Clearwater Lights includes a unique, handlebar-mounted dimmer to regulate the lights' brightness from 5 to 55 percent. The auxiliary lights can be boosted to full, 2,000 lumens power by toggling the bright beam switch.



Clearwater Lights can provide custom mounts for front forks or engine guards.

too hot, they automatically reduce brightness slightly. You can see how much Darlas can enhance illumination at night by checking out a video from 2016 by MOA member “Moto Mouth Moshe” on YouTube (Episode #12).

Premium construction, unique versatility, and elegant design—clearly Clearwater Lights Darlas are a choice worth

considering to enhance conspicuity, illumination and safety. For more information, visit [Clearwaterlights.com](http://Clearwaterlights.com), but better yet, call 916-852-7029 for expert advice on the best kit for your bike. Darlas can be purchased at the Clearwater site, at many BMW dealers and through Adventure Designs ([advdesigns.com](http://advdesigns.com)). ☺