

Clearly Brilliant!

Clearwater Lights: The Erica Driving Light and Billie Brake Light

By Jane R. Schluter RA# 33524

In 1999 I bought my first motorcycle, in 2002 I realized BMW made motorcycles. Somewhere between then and now, as the most talked about brand in the industry, I deduced that Clearwater lights were the most talked about lights in the industry and were the lights by which to measure others.

I spoke with Clearwater Lights President, Glenn Stasky, to find out more. We had an enlightening conversation.

He is a cool, altruistic, and philanthropic CEO, not only one who has created a company with distinguished products but also who comes to the aid of his fellow man when needed. The latest example is the Santa Rosa Fires (see sidebar). It was during this same conversation that he also mentioned it would be interesting to see if I could install Clearwater Lights myself.

While motorcycle mechanics and accessorizing is something that has always interested me and I have wanted

to take on for some time, it has definitely eluded me. I admitted my true ineptitude to Glenn. I suggested that maybe I would need to Skype Jocelin Snow for assistance or that possibly my 9-year old could do a much better job? I still decided to take on this challenge so I immediately messaged Jocelin to solicit her help and she immediately agreed. However, I also knew she was training for the GS Trophy, after which challenge she would want some recovery time, and then she was scheduled to hit the rally circuit, so I let her off the hook.

Instead, I elicited my friends at BMW Motorcycles of Manhattan to help me in this endeavor. I know everyone well because I worked there some years ago. This was a fortuitous choice since BMW of Manhattan is one of the new-



Photos clockwise from top left: BMW of Manhattan Service; bike on the lift, ready for installation; Erica Driving Light assembly; Clearwater's CANopener;

est dealer sales points for Clearwater Lights, thanks to the efforts of Service Manager Mike Salamon. I asked Mike why and he said, "They are the best aftermarket lights I have found, the installation is relatively easy, and the design is well-thought out."

I rode into Manhattan with my R 1200 GS Rallye and a box containing my Billie Brake Light kit and my Erica dimmable LED auxiliary lights. I arrived with my beautiful lights, my beautiful bike and a zero mechanical skill set; it was intimidating. Mike and Rodney McIntosh were there to greet me. All

of the guys there are great, and it just feels like home, one that is a lot better furnished with motorcycle tools than mine. We took my bike back to the lift and we started working. I worked with their master tech and my friend, Jeff Schroeter, who has been working on motorcycles most of his life. Jeff was a mechanic on the San Jose BMW race team and is now a regular crew mechanic at the Bonneville Salt Flats, as well as a hobbyist custom bike builder. I was in the best of hands, and that comforted me.

Before you start, you need to make sure you have the correct brackets for the engine guards mounted on your bike. BMW, SW-Motech, and Touratech all require different mounts for the lights – primarily due to the differences in the diameter of the bars. We laid out our pieces for the Billie Brake Light assembly and the Driving Light assembly.

Bike on the lift, we took off a few of the minor side panels, removed the rear license plate and cover and the bolts on the back tail. While I understand the removal of bolts, the removal of the panel pieces was intimidating due to their keyhole fit; an easy break if mistakenly force fit the wrong way. Besides breaking pieces, electrical current was also a concern of mine, but then we disconnected the battery. It makes perfect sense, no battery, no chance of wayward electrical current. Jeff was quickly demystifying my fears with ease and quiet confidence.

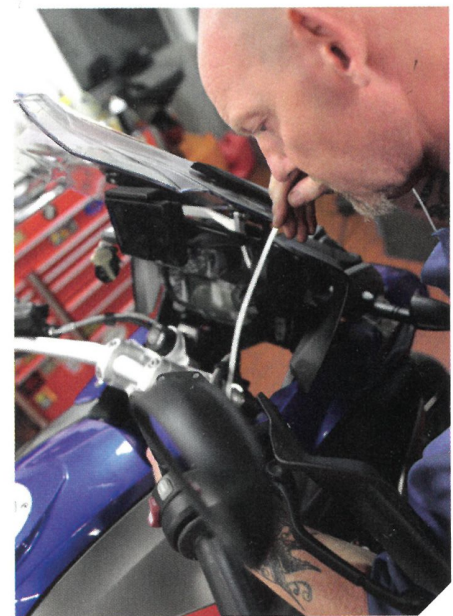
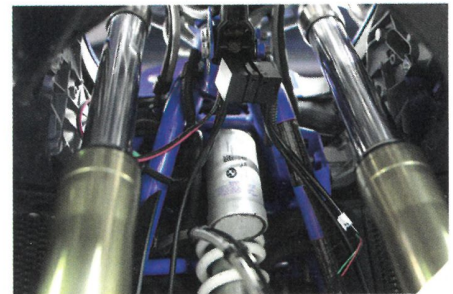
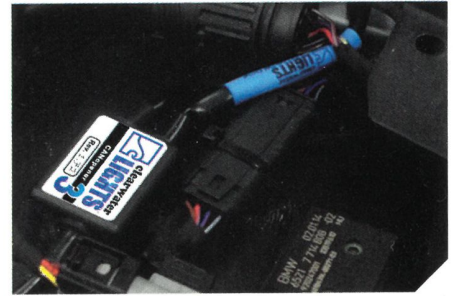
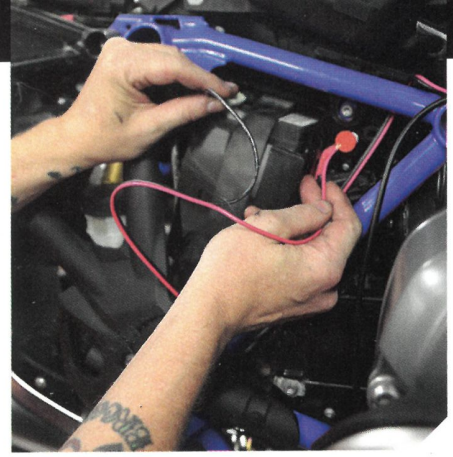
One of the truly fantastic parts of their light design is the CANopener, or brain, in layman's terms. According to Jeff and a few other techs to whom I have spoken, this is a game-changer for the Clearwater Lights. They are one of the only aftermarket lighting systems that has a direct interface with the BMW's CANbus electrical system and does not require complicated and cumbersome wiring harnesses and systems. The CANopener is easy to install. It fits under the seat and plugs right into the tire pressure monitor.

You might be tempted to plug it into your lean angle sensor but this would result in all kinds of ABS and traction control faults. It was a clean-off-the-area with some alcohol, stick it onto the bike, snugly into the area under the rear seat and wait to plug it into the tire pressure sensor. I have never felt so mechanically accomplished!

The CANopener significantly cuts down on installation time and reduces potential problematic areas. Most importantly, if there is a service issue with the CANopener, the bike will not have to be completely stripped and refurbished with a complete new system. Just remove and replace the "plug-and-play" Clearwater CANopener; however, Jeff has never seen one fail in his many years of experience. The days of trying to fit lights that were made for automobiles onto bikes or fashioning a lighting system for motorcycles with different random parts are gone. The installation process is a relatively short 2 - 2.5 hours.

We next tackled the Billie Brake Light system. We had already taken off the appropriate bolts, so it was a quick process of securing the assembly to the back of the license plate frame and pulling the wiring through the rear to connect into the CANopener. This task is facilitated with a massive Clearwater supplied zip-tie-like wire-threader that Jeff thinks is the bomb, he has saved them for other wiring jobs. Wow! Who knew that a simple tool like that would allow someone with little mechanical aptitude in mechanics to put a lighting accessory on so quickly. Of course, Jeff's supply of proper tools and guidance were a big part of my success.

Overall, the part that took the most time was snaking and securing the wires correctly through the bike. I soon learned that if I followed the frame using the most direct route from front to back I was okay, avoiding any areas that the wiring could somehow be caught in a moving part. For example, you want to keep the wire behind your



Photos from top: disconnecting the battery; CANopener nestled under the back seat and connected to the tire pressure sensor; wiring harness under the beak; threading the wiring harness.



Light mounting bracket

suspension travel arm on the left side of the bike. Every part of the design was well-thought out. Each wire going from the CANopener to the actual lights had a separate wire connector with a fuse so that in case of water it would pop the fuse but not damage the light, the CANopener, or short out the battery.

I was able to adjust the direction of lights as well as choose if they were to be mounted above or below my engine mounts. There is even a little unobtrusive indicator that goes to your handle bar, so the driver knows the Clearwater Lights are on. The Clearwater Erica Driving Lights can be adjusted through the GPS toggle switch. It was relatively easy, and Rodney showed me how. I held down the turn indicator



Aligning the lights

for 5 seconds and then used the toggle to dim or brighten the lights. So cool! Even one technically uninclined could do that as well.

Jeff's calm, cool confidence and instruction showed this extremely apprehensive and not mechanically-inclined individual that there was nothing to fear. I had known he was a brilliant tech but now saw him also a patient and kind guide that dispelled my fear of trying some motorcycle mechanics. The fact that I can speak about the design and mechanics is a testament to my new-found knowledge.

Thank you, Jeff, Mike, Rodney, and BMW Motorcycles of Manhattan for the hospitality, technical support and patient instruction. Thank you to



Wiring the lights

Clearwater Lights for providing me with lights that are on the forefront of innovation and design and can be installed even by a novice. My conversations with Glenn from Clearwater Lights came back to me, both assured me that I could attempt the installation. They even have YouTube videos on their website. I have found a new-found pride in being able to put on my lights.

Now that I put the lights on and we tested them in the fluorescents of a workshop, it was time to see what they could do on the road. That night, I left BMW Motorcycles of Manhattan with my bike buttoned up and now sporting Clearwater lights in the front and rear. Motorcyclists know the most important



The Billie Brake Light placement



The Brake Light when the brakes are deployed



Sotirios Amitsis

The Erica Driving Light by day

thing is to be visible to others on the road. Both of these lights have LED technology that stands out. The Billie Brake Light has a powerful LED light that projects your current braking situation to those behind you. The Erica Driving Lights have an amazing 6000+ lumens each. There are 6 high power LEDs housed in durable CNC machined aluminum casings that brag a low power level of 60 Watts (each) on high. Whoa! I drove home late that evening, the cars could see me and I saw them giving me more room when I needed to stop. Beyond the city limits, the Palisades Parkway can be dark. I could light up long stretches of road with no issue as these are really bright lights! As an ADV rider in more remote areas, Clearwaters light the way! Don't take my word for it, even my son noticed.

My friend Gina flew across the US, borrowed my R 1200 GS Rallye with my new Clearwater Lights and drove with

our friend Ken to the rally. She decidedly was more noticeable in daylight traffic and along the dark PA roads. I drove because both of my sons were desperate to go to the rally and I only had one spot on the bike. While there, we took them on a ride which made a lasting impression on them in more ways than one.

Today my older son, Sotiri, and I were listening to Sam Manicom's book *Into Africa*, and he spoke about his motorcycle lights. Sotiri, immediately asked me if they were Clearwater Lights. I stopped the book, turned to him with my mouth open in awe and finally asked how do you know about them? "Mom they are real laser beams!" Then it occurred to me he was on our friend's bike with Gina, and I was on my bike with the Clearwater Lights and my other son. He told me they really lit up the road, even though they were riding well in front of me.



Visit www.clearwaterlights.com to purchase or for information on their different variety of light kits available for your bike. One can also visit the Clearwater Light booth at an event or a retail dealer such as BMW Motorcycles of Manhattan.

Clearwater Lights relief project for Santa Rosa, California fires. October 2017

More than 200,000 tons of debris was cleaned up from the fires which were the "most destructive in US history, consuming 137 square miles in Sonoma County alone and carving a path through dense residential areas."

—*The Press Democrat*, Paul Payne, November 30, 2017.

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The Santa Rosa fire broke out on October 8, 2017, and evacuation orders were soon initiated. Glenn Stasky and his wife first heard about it as his friend texted him, saying he and 300 others had to sleep on the beach the night before with no blankets because their houses burned in the fire. His friend asked if he could bring some blankets. Tuesday morning Glenn posted a donations request on his Facebook page that he would be accepting donations at noon for the

victims of the fires. He walked outside at noon when he heard a commotion and literally there was a line of cars driving into their parking lot and down the street. Fox 40 TV also came. Clearwater Lights headquarters was so full of donations Glenn had to close production for three days and dedicated all the manpower to organizing the relief items of food, water, clothing, blankets and such. Glenn and his wife also coordinated pick up locations to get the relief quickly to the people in need. Saturday morning they drove three pickup trucks and towing a 20'



Glenn and Darlene Stasky

trailer stuffed to the ceiling! This was an incredible effort by the motorcycle community that brought immediate and desperately needed relief to those who had already lost so much in the fire. Clearwater Lights is not only dedicated to product excellence but more importantly, has proven its dedication to its fellow neighbors.