WIN A COMPLETE STATE-OF-THE-ART DAKOTA DIGITAL INSTRUMENT PANEL OF YOUR CHOICE - PAGE 09

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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER, 2009

LED

MODERN LIGHTING FOR VINTAGE STREET MACHINES

BY MARK SIMPSON
PHOTOS BY MATT SPROUSE

Building a great street machine often includes a mix of time-tested performance and appearance improvements, matched with the latest technology has to offer. An advancement we were excited to see was the introduction of LED (light emitting diode) lighting for cars and trucks. LEDs are nothing new, but the application in automotive use is a natural. Their rugged design enables them to withstand shocks that could easily burn out a traditional bulb. There is little doubt that if you've spent any time at all parked in rush hour traffic you have seen your share of LED lights on everything from semi trailers to new Cadillacs, and everything in between.

While known for their durability, their brightness level cannot be ignored. The increased visibility and near instant response that LED technology provides means safety is greatly increased.

Adapting this new technology to vintage street machines also seemed to be a natural progression. The overall size of the taillight on early cars pales in comparison to their late-model counterparts, and much like the center mounted third brake light, other drivers become accustomed to the large glow to warn them of stopping or signaling lane changes.

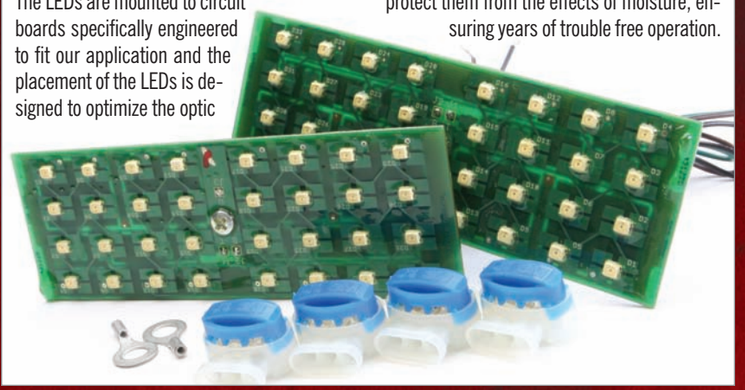
Recognizing the benefits of LED lighting, Dakota Digital, a pioneer in digital instrumentation, expanded their line of products to include complete LED lighting systems to upgrade older street machines. They have designed each system to take advantage of the optics of the stock taillight lens for maximum brightness and performance. Their complete line of taillight conversions offers more than 70 direct fit applications, covering cars and trucks from 1940 through 1990.

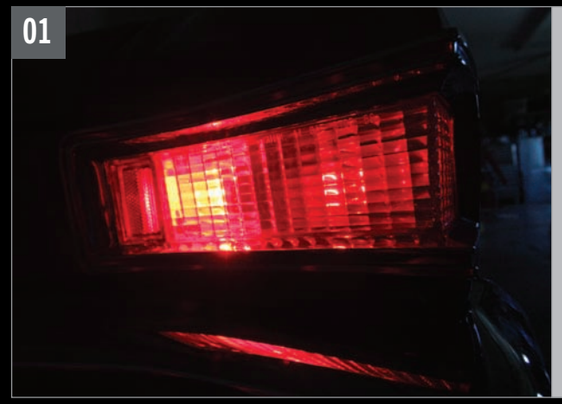
Manufactured right here in the U.S.A., Dakota Digital's Sioux Falls, SD, manufacturing facility prides themselves on the high quality of their products and backs up their lights with a limited lifetime warranty. We were anxious to test their claims of effortless installation utilizing the original wiring harness, taillight lens, and assembly.

The complete conversion process on our project '68 Chevelle was straightforward and took less than an hour to complete, but the payoff came big the first time we pressed the brake pedal and lit up the area in a veil of red. Follow along as we go through the conversion process start-to-finish and give our Chevelle a bright and safe new future.

DAKOTA DIGITAL'S LED CONVERSION ('68 CHEVELLE)

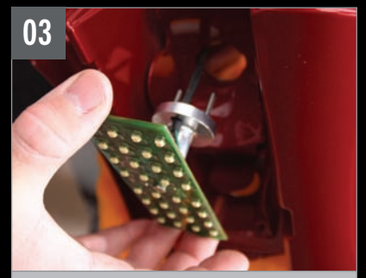
Dakota Digital's LED taillight module kit comes with everything you'll need to get the job done. The LEDs are mounted to circuit boards specifically engineered to fit our application and the placement of the LEDs is designed to optimize the optic quality of the original taillight lenses. The circuit boards are encased in a resin coating to protect them from the effects of moisture, ensuring years of trouble free operation.





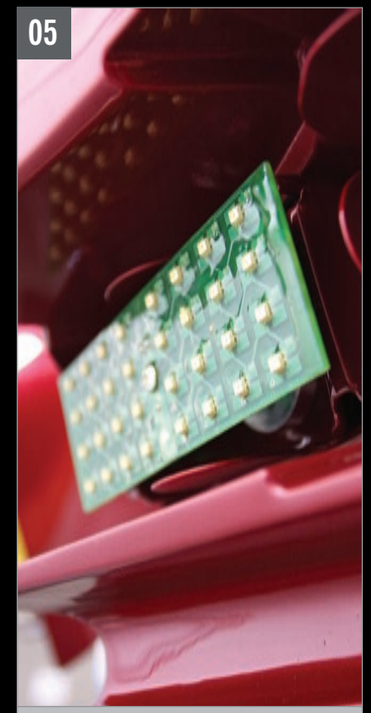
01 The original taillights and bulbs served our project '68 Chevelle well for years, but with the recent advancements in LED lighting conversion kits, like the one offered by Dakota Digital, we felt the time had come to upgrade our lights, for safety, durability, and appearance.

02 We began by removing the rear taillight assemblies and the bulb sockets. This was an excellent time to carefully inspect the housing for any needed repairs or replacement.



03 The LED circuit boards mount to the taillight assemblies using the original bulb socket hole. The machined aluminum post extends the LEDs close to the lens.

04 A backing plate was then placed on the backside of the taillight assembly and secured using the provided self locking hex nuts. Tighten evenly working side-to-side.



05 The circuit board is located close to the back of the lens and fills the reflector area.

06 Taillight lenses and housings are not included in the kit. Dakota Digital suggests you inspect them carefully and replace any parts that can not be cleaned or repaired.

07 Included in our kit were these moisture resistant wire connectors. They made short work of splicing into the original wiring harness to connect the lights.

08 The change in load on the flasher may cause the taillights to not signal properly. Using this "no load" flasher, available from Dakota Digital, will remedy the situation.

09 "Wow, that's bright!" could be heard from across the shop the moment we tested our new lights. The added safety makes it worthwhile and never changing a bulb again... well, that's just a bonus.

SOURCE

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