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PRODUCT REVIEW

Small-Boat Navigation Lights

Reviewed by Eddie Breeden

On the water, you may know who, what, and where you are, but after dusk, that may not be apparent to other boaters. Illuminating your presence becomes not only prudent, but US Coast Guard required. Small sailboats under 23' "shall, if practicable," display running lights to make your boat's position and direction known. Small sail, row, and paddle boats **must** have "a white light that shall be exhibited in time to prevent collision." I'd rather have running lights indicate my presence long before that time, especially in populous areas where an encounter at night with a speedboat is likely. Large vessels have lighting and electrical systems built in, but lighting for small craft is often hampered by short battery life, difficulty adapting to your boat's configuration, lack of waterproofing, and impaired night vision.



(http://smallboatsmonthly.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/IMG_8128PS.jpg)

all photographs by the author

The Navlite includes port and starboard lights secured in a case that can be folded to provide a baffle between the lights. It also minimizes the glare for a kayaker looking over the foredeck.

Tektite has addressed all these issues. The Navlite system is a well-made, rugged, and easy-to-operate set of side lights. The red/green lights are housed in a sturdy Cordura pouch with Velcro straps. Grommets and a webbing attachment point make the system quick to secure to kayak deck lines. The fabric housing is designed primarily for kayakers and rowing shells but the strap fittings on each light broaden the lights' use on other small boats. An O-ring between lens and housing seals out water and a firm twist of the lens illuminates the lamp. Power is supplied by three AA alkaline



batteries, offering a listed burn time of over 50 hours. The LED bulbs have a 10,000-hour life and use about one tenth the power of an incandescent bulb. A pair of LEDs in each light illuminate a 2"-long white plastic insert in the lens that radiates the light in all directions. The red light has white LEDs, the green light has green LEDs.

(http://smallboatsmonthly.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/IMG_8130PS.jpg)

The red and green lights can be removed from the case and displayed separately. The white light has a split ring secured to the webbing loop to provide an easier way to secure the light to a halyard or other line.



(http://smallboatsmonthly.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/IMG_8135PS.jpg)

Each light has loops for 1" webbing. The red port light here has been removed from the fabric case and set on the gunwale.

The Navlite's brightness was quite good 100 yards down our dark driveway. I lashed the red lamp to a telephone pole on a straight country road, drove away about ¾ mile, and could still make out its glow. I took the Navlite and Tektite's white Mark III 1-LED Chemical Lightstick Alternative along on a short cruise in my newly built 20' open sailboat, UNA. When the sun set on our first day of sailing we were 2.5 hours from our anchorage. I tied the white light from the mizzen boom. I took the red and green lights out of the fabric housing and with 1" webbing passed through the lights' loops and secured them forward under the gunwales. The lights shone steadily and glistened across the water. After dusk, a tug pushing upriver was headed our way. I hailed him on the VHF and learned that he could make out our

lights at a distance of 1.25 nautical miles. The wind died with the daylight and the oars came out. It was a comfort knowing that with my back turned to the bow these lights showed my presence. At anchor for the night I put the white light aloft on the main halyard. The light was still strong at daybreak.

That old adage, you get what you pay for, certainly applies here. The quality of the Navlite and the Mark III 1-LED make them well worth the price. Flexibility of use and adaptability from boat to boat make this a fantastic setup.

(<http://smallboatsmonthly.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/SMBulletGraphic75.png>)



Eddie Breeden grew up racing Moths and Lasers and has a bit of offshore sailing—Bermuda and Block Island—to his credit. A native Virginian, he's an architect, married with 4 children. As an amateur boatbuilder he has built a Sooty Tern, an Eastport Pram, a cedar-strip kayak and a couple of skin-on-frame kayaks, all described on his blog, Lingering Lunacy (<http://lingeringlunacy.blogspot.com/>). His yawl, UNA, is the subject of the Reader Built Boat (<http://smallboatsmonthly.com/article/una/>) in this issue.

The Navlite, retailing for \$59.95 and the Mark III 1-LED, for \$19.95, are manufactured by Tektite (<http://www.tektite.com/index.php>).

Is there a product that might be useful for boatbuilding, cruising or shore-side camping that you'd like us to review? Please email your suggestions.

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