

Article & Photos by Larry Crain

Getting Rid Of That 80's Look



Now don't get the wrong idea and think that I might have this article headed down the path of trying to get you into a new hairstyle or a different set of clothes that would move you from the 80's and into this decade. What I'm talking about is the car parts that we have been using since the 80's or maybe even the 70's on our hot rods and street rods that are still in use even when there are newer and better parts available. In this particular article I'm talking about those little bitty aftermarket turn signal units that bolted on to the front and rear bumpers of cars and trucks that didn't come from the factory with directional lights. These bumper mounted turn lights do not look so noticeable when everyone else was running them but times have changed and don't you think it might be time to bring your car or truck up to date and get rid of that 80's look just like we did on this 40' Ford Coupe.

A perfect case in point is the car in this article which is a stock appearing 1940 Ford coupe street rod owned by Larry Milton of Zachary, LA. Larry had recently purchased this older street rod and it had a bad case of the 80's look with the bumper mounted lights and many other characteristics of a street rod built during that time. Larry decided to turn his street rod over to my shop in the hopes that we could keep the nostalgia look while updating the cars lighting with newer technology while not breaking the bank. The easiest and quickest solution to this problem would have been to convert the stock taillights over to a dual element bulb setup, but that would only have moved the car into the technology of the late 80's to early 90's. The best way to approach this job and bring the car into this century was to make a call to Ron Lambert at Lambert Enterprises located in Norris, TN, a company that specializes in LED automotive lighting systems. Lambert Enterprises offers a very simple and affordable conversion kit (LE-40F) that eliminates the bulb and socket set up in the stock 40' Ford taillight housing with a custom fit LED card. By doing away with the stock type bulb and the bumper mounted turn signal the coupe gets a more stock appearance and the added safety of the super bright lighting power of an LED whenever you hit the brakes or put on your turn signal.

With the helpful directions that came with the Lambert Enterprises LED kit and basic hand tools the conversion of this coupe's rear lighting took only part of one evening to install! The first step I took in this project was to get out the test light and verify which wire going into the stock taillight was the brake light and which was the taillight and tag them with a piece of tape with tailor brake wrote down on it. The second step I took was to disconnect the ground/negative cable from the battery which will save you numerous headaches and blown fuses. The 40' Ford taillight lens are made out of glass so take extra care when removing them and set them inside the car out of harms way until you are ready to reinstall them. With the lens removed you can unbolt the stock





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housing and cut the two wires leading to the socket as close as possible, this will leave you plenty of slack wiring for an easier installation. With the housing removed from the car it is now time to remove the socket from the housing by using a drill or pencil grinder equipped with a burring bit to remove the blind rivets that hold the socket in place. With the sockets removed, the housing was ready to have an insulator supplied with the kit silicomed into place at the top of the housing where the LED card might come into contact with the metal housing. With this step out of the way it was time to bolt the housings back into the body and run the LED wiring through the housing and set the card in place for a trial fit.

With the LED card in place it has two tabs at either side that rest on the taillight housing. While holding the card perpendicular to the ground to make sure that the light will shine straight back. I marked these two tab points with a paint pen. With the card removed I made two notches using a pencil grinder in the housing for the LED card tabs to rest in at the marked location and which would also provide a nice secure fit with little chance of movement. After trial fitting the card into the notched out housing and verifying that the card was in the correct position it was time to make sure the lens would clear the card. After a few tries the notches were finally deep enough to allow the card to clear the lens and gasket when they were put into place. At this point it was time to apply just enough silicone around the tabs and notches to prevent future water leaks. With the wiring routed through the back of the housing it was time to seal that area against intrusion from water and road grime also. Take note that when applying silicone anywhere around the LED cards to make sure it doesn't come into any contact of the circuitry.

Wiring for this type of project is pretty straight forward if you have a green, yellow and brown wire already in your car or truck's wiring harness. The car's yellow wire will go to the left LED card's green wire, the car's green wire will go to the right LED card's green wire and the car's brown wire will go to the left & right LED card's yellow wires. If your wiring doesn't follow this standard it might get a little complicated and this is where having a company like Lambert Enterprises on your side comes in handy. If you have any problem during the installation or questions about wiring the LED's into your current wiring harness, Ron Lambert is only a call away. I can personally say that Ron has talked me through more than one wiring headache over the past year and if you work on street rods/hot rods long enough you come to appreciate the kind of help that he offers because it is priceless.

With the new LED cards in place and the lens back on the housings it was time to remove those oh so tacky looking bumper mounted lights that took away from this cars nostalgia look. The first time the new LED's lit up behind those stock 40' Ford glass chevron's I don't know which was brighter, them or the smile of a very happy owner that knew the car looked better and was much safer having those Lambert Enterprise LED's in place. Larry Milton is now ready to get his 40' Ford coupe out on the boulevard cruising with pride since it has finally lost the 80's look.

For more information on the LED products that Lambert Enterprises has to offer check out their ad in Cruisin' Style Magazine or visit their website at www.lambertenterprises.com or give Ron a call at 865-494-9850.

