

Gladius Product Review

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Like many of us flashlight freaks, I have been eagerly awaiting the release of the result of the partnering of Blackhawk Industries and Strategos Intl., the Gladius by Night Ops. Leo got first shot at the particular light I have been testing, so I'll try not to be redundant to his post. I will preface this review by saying that I have been a dedicated Surefire (SF) Incandescent light user for a number of years. I will also tell you that, as of yet, I have not jumped on the LED bandwagon. During this review, I will often compare the Gladius to the SF M2. My reasoning behind this is that it is a quality incandescent light similar in size. With that being said, here goes the review:

Packaging:

The first thing I noticed about the presentation of the Night-Ops Gladius was the fact that it came in a plastic carrying case. This case is reminiscent of the box housing later model Glock Pistols. My first thought was that Ken Good could have saved me a little "jingle" on the box as I normally throw out the cardboard variety as soon as I get the batteries inserted and make sure the light works. I haven't had the heart to throw this one out. The fact of the matter is that the plastic vs. cardboard cost probably has very little effect on the light's pricing. In fact, it might be cheaper to mold the plastic and slap on a decal than it is to print graphics on cardboard boxes. Who knows? It is a nice touch, though. Upon opening the box, you will notice it is padded and contains the Gladius, a lanyard and two lithium batteries. Also included is an instructional manual. You might ask, "Why would I need instructions for a flashlight?" The answer will be more apparent as I discuss the lights functioning in a later portion of this review.

The Light:

I have been hearing and feeling the buildup to this light's release like the rest of you and I honestly could not wait to get my hands on it. For the purposes of this review, I will discuss the light from lens to tail cap. It is not my intent to regurgitate scientific quantitative measurements and specifications for this light, but to give you my opinions from an operator's viewpoint. If you are interested in some more detailed "scientific" measurements, I would refer to the specification sheet located at the following URL:

<http://night-ops.com/pdfs/Gladius-Specifications.pdf>

According to the manufacturer, the lens used in the Gladius boasts more light transmission than any other light of its kind. Enough said about that. I noticed

the reflector of the Gladius to recess farther into the body of the light than the reflector of the M2. I'm sure this was well thought out by the scientific types.

The bezel of the Gladius appeared to be roughly the same size in diameter as the bezel on the SF Z2. This would explain its nice fit, bezel down, in a SF v70 holster. The body diameter did appear to be in the one inch range, lending itself to be more versatile should you choose to use the light in a weapons mounted capacity.

As far as the tail cap goes, I will admit I was a bit skeptical as to the durability of this design. The tail cap is actually of one piece design to include an anti-roll flange nearest the body of the light. I've never been a big fan of anti-roll flanges due to the fact that they never seem to work that well for me and I don't usually like laying my tactical light down. Of course, I have used tactical lights for utility purposes at times and it is in this arena that I see their biggest benefit. I noticed the flange area on the Gladius to be of larger size than I have typically seen on other lights. This raised another question in my mind as to how this would affect the comfort of the grip. Upon testing the flanges for their anti-roll capability, I discovered that while not perfect, they certainly were vastly superior in performance when compare to the offerings by Surefire. The light generally held its position on the different slopes of the hoods and trunks of vehicles I selected. I also tested the comfort of the grip to rid myself of any misgivings in that department. This light has a really nice feel and balance. I did not notice any discomfort from the flange design as I had expected. In fact, the flange fit neatly between my fingers and added the benefits of providing a reference for how deep my hold was and also added a sense of security in maintaining a grip on it. It is my understanding that Night-Ops will soon release a tail cap without the flanges, should that suit your particular mission better. As I mentioned, the tail cap is of one piece design and as we move to the rear of the light, I was met with my next stumbling block, the plastic rotary dial and push button. I will admit that at first glance, it just seemed cheap to me and I questioned its durability. As it turns out, my worry was again misplaced. After having been dropped several times short of abuse, the plastic tail cap has retained its form and function. The activation button did have a vastly different feel from that of the rubber covered lights offered by Surefire. I grew to appreciate this feel as I used the light over extended periods. The first thing I noticed was that I didn't have the ever present thumb fatigue I had suffered from using other lights. Seeing that the tail cap design appeared to be durable and comfortable led me to wonder why no one had ever thought of it before. The one piece design also claims to be water resistant, although I have yet to try it at depth.

The tail cap's functioning is what actually sets this light apart. The rotary dial performs four different functions:

1. Lock Out Mode

I actually like the way this light switches from its usable modes to the lock out mode. To lock the light out to discourage inadvertent activation, you simply move the dial to the most counter-clockwise position and while continuing the pressure, press down slightly on the button. To return the light to service, simply rotate the dial to the desired setting. In my opinion, this is vastly superior to the method employed in the Surefire lights, which require you screw and unscrew the tail cap until you get the desired effect.

2. User programmable Constant On Mode

Upon depressing the switch, the light activates in the Constant On mode. In this mode, you have the ability to dim or brighten the light for your situation (i.e. full lighting capability or dimmer for night time land navigation uses). This is the function, in my opinion, that sells this light as an all around duty/utility light. I found the best use for this mode to be used as a non threatening contact light. After switching the light on, I will generally move the rotary dial to one of its other positions for a full blast of light at the next press of the button. This allows for a pretty dynamic use of the light as a force option.

3. Strobe Mode

You heard me right, disco is back. This is probably the "sexiest" feature on this light, but it is very functional as well. I had heard stories from a vendor of becoming nauseous after having been "strobed". I was skeptical of this. I have been on the giving and receiving end of this mode and it is very disorienting and provides a great tactical advantage, but stops short of the nauseating affect. It is a great twist on the idea of powering with light to gain a tactical edge by disrupting your opponent's OODA cycle. This disruption is not, however, going to cause most people to drop to their knees in submission, but it will offer enough disorientation to allow you to move to cover or close the distance to contact if used appropriately. To see the strobe in action, visit the following URL:

<http://www.blackhawkvideo.com/videos/night-ops/gladius.html>

4. Momentary On

As the name indicates, this is the mode we have grown to know and love in a tactical environment.

After inserting the two lithium batteries, I was eager to see how powerful this light was. I was not disappointed. You can argue all day long about how many lumens are perfect for a tactical light, but in the end, it is how well the light performs on another human being that is my litmus test. To me, this argument is akin to the argument of whether 2 million SHU pepper spray is hotter than 1.5 million SHU pepper spray. Once it gets sooo hot, can you really tell the difference? The Gladius IS of sufficient brightness to perform its function of a tactical tool. I compared its beam and hot spot to that of a SF M2 and made the following observations. While it is a different kind of light, it was as bright as the M2 with a 125 lumen lamp assembly. In fact, it tended to wash out the incandescent light when both beams met on a surface. The hot spot was only slightly smaller than that offered by the M2 while yielding a noticeably wider corona of useful light. At distance, I didn't notice any substantial washing out of the light to any more or less of a degree than the M2. While using the light at the range, I had no trouble picking up the sights on the weapon, even in Strobe Mode.

As I discuss this light, I feel like this is as good a time as any to offer some observations on the light's finish. I am actually the second tester to have had the opportunity to use this particular light, so I am able to comment on some of the wear issues I have heard pondered in other forums. The Gladius's finish is not the normal anodized anodized found on many other tactical and utility lights, but a liquid ceramic coating. This is supposedly a lot more durable than anodizing and it does offer the benefit of an unlimited array of color choices. I, too, wondered about the durability of this coating and upon examining the light for the first time, the only wear I noticed on the Gladius was some superficial scuffing on the bezel consistent with v70 holster wear. This scuffing did not penetrate the coating to the metal. I would defer to my previous tester, Leo Hathaway, as to how many holster presentations were made with the light to cause what I saw. Again, these scuffs were miniscule and really not worth mentioning. In an effort to not be redundant, I chose to carry this light in a SF v71 holster to see how it worked, since holders are not yet widely available for this light. The Gladius fit well in the v71 holster in the bezel up position. In this position, the light is at least as secure as in the bezel down position in the v70 holster. While carrying it in this holder, I have made over 250 presentations from the holster and wear patterns have appeared on flange area of the tail cap. These wear patterns do penetrate the coating to the bare metal, but they only exist on the extreme edges of the flanges. They really aren't that noticeable and I can't say scientifically, but I would guess that you would see the same wear pattern on an anodized light under similar conditions to at least this degree or worse. As I mentioned

previously, I have dropped the light on several different surfaces to include finished and rough concrete. There are no visible remains of these falls and they may explain some of the flange's wear.

The Lanyard:

You might wonder why this is even worth mentioning, but I would argue that the devil is in the details. I have received a lanyard with every Surefire light I have purchased. These lanyards have never been of a length suitable for anything other than attaching the light to your wrist. I won't argue the soundness of this tactic in this forum, but it can have its uses. Another use, I have pined for was to be able to hang the light around my neck. I can see you pondering the tactical weakness of this idea. I am mainly talking about performing range exercises with the light or using it as a utility light in the same arena while marking targets, etc. The lanyard provided with the Gladius is of sufficient length to go over my substantial head. When I let the light fall to my chest, it is easily reacquired. The lanyard is also equipped with stops for adjustability should you choose to attach it to your wrist or other object. I guess if you chose to hang the light around your neck in a tactical situation, then that is up to you. It is, after all, your neck. The lanyard does narrow down considerably at the point where it attaches to the hole in the flange area of the tail cap. I don't know if it is a mere design touch for convenience, or if it is meant as a means to break away should you be grabbed by the light or lanyard. Regardless, you are more likely to be grabbed by another piece of equipment than you are to be grabbed by your light.

Battery Life:

This is another area where this light really shines. Everyone is by now familiar with the durability and low power drain of LED lights. I have given this light some serious use and have yet to notice any substantial drop in light performance. Not to mention that everyone I see either asks to see the light or, after signing a waiver stating they are not prone to seizures, gets "strobed". Again, this is not scientific information so I would refer you to the specifications sheet provided by the manufacturer for exact measurements.

Final Opinion:

Overall this light performs as well as advertised. In the hands of a trained law enforcement officer, it is a great tool. The strobe effect simply has to be seen to be believed. The overall fit and finish of the product leaves a quality impression with everyone who handles it. The brightness of the LED light is substantial and more than enough for most any tactical situation.

The biggest weakness I see in this light is availability of the light itself and modes of carry. I believe Night-Ops are ramping up its production in an effort to satisfy the demand for this product. I understand they are also developing holder options that should soon be available. Also on the drawing board are pressure switches to enhance its use in a weapons mounted role.

Some will balk at the idea of the suggested retail price for this light, \$249. This light is not for everyone for just this reason. But anyone who has attended any quality force on force low light training or has used a light in real life tactical applications knows you can't put a high enough value on a quality high performance light in these situations. I will tell you that you will not find another light like this on the market today at any price. You just have to ask yourself if you are worth it.