

Tech review: Lighting up the darkness in your vehicle

May 27 2020, by Jim Rossman



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Sometimes I get to review things that sound really cool, but after I use them, I find I'm not quite the target market.

Which is just fine.

I love gadgets and technology and learning about things I'd never run across in my life otherwise.

I've spent the last few days setting up and using the Lanmodo Vast Automotive Night Vision Camera (\$499). It is very cool and does exactly what it says it will do.

I liked it, but I'm not sure I'd use it in my daily driving.

Let's take a look at what it does.

The Vast Night Vision System (I'm just going to call it "the Vast") is about the size of a car's rearview mirror. It has a large lens that faces the road ahead and a large 8.2-inch color screen that faces the driver.

It uses that large lens to bring you a clearer view of the road ahead when you're driving in the dark or in bad weather.

It is not a dashcam. It has no video or still photo recording. It is only there to show you a live view of the road ahead. Lanmodo says you'll be able to see up to 984 feet away.

Installation

Mounting the Vast is a bit tricky.

There are two options in the box: a nonslip mat that sits on your dashboard or a suction cup mount.

Either mounting method you choose still requires you to aim the Vast out the windshield and frame a view of the road ahead.

The camera does tilt a little so you can get things centered, but I found mounting to be trickier than I thought it would be.

You really want it to be somewhere in your field of vision, so anywhere on the driver's half of the windshield or dash works.

My dash isn't flat, so the wide mat didn't work for me. I also didn't want to mount the camera on my windshield. I felt it blocked too much of my view of the road.

I opted to use the suction cup mount to put it on my dashboard below the rearview mirror.

You can power the camera through your car's 12v accessory plug or through the on-board diagnostic port under your dashboard.

My version of the Vast came with a backup camera, which my car lacks. The backup camera adds \$100 to the price, so the Vast I tested costs \$599.

You mount the camera on the back of your car and then run a cable all the way through your car, up to the camera, where it connects to the main camera data cable.

You can wire the backup camera to the reverse lights in your car, and the Vast will automatically switch to the rearview camera when you shift into reverse.

Lanmodo recommends professional installation for the backup camera, which is wise advice. I just strung the wire through my back seat, out the hatch and to the camera I had temporarily mounted on my back bumper. I was happy with the view out the back.

How it works

Low-light photography has come a long way in the last few years.

Cameras like the Samsung Galaxy S20 and iPhone 11 Max have night modes that really amplify the light to produce good pictures with barely any light.

The Lanmodo Vast is similar to those in performance. Give it just a little light, and you'll be impressed with how much detail the camera can show. It uses a Sony sensor in its camera, and the quality is obvious.

When I first started using the Vast, I had to turn down the brightness of the screen. Luckily, there are easy-to-reach buttons on the top of the camera to adjust the settings. There are also rotation buttons to let you hang the camera upside down and rotate the image.

You can change the color image to black and white, which might help you see better in certain conditions.

The camera needs some light to work. You can't go out to the woods and turn off your car's lights and expect to see anything.

But I pulled into a [parking lot](#) and turned off my headlights, and a streetlight in the next block put out enough light for me to see perfectly.

I was impressed with how much better I could see in low-light situations with this camera.

Do I need one?

As I mentioned, there are some gadgets that are very cool, but I'm just

not the target market.

I'd put VR goggles in that category. I love [virtual reality](#), but it makes me dizzy, so I'd never own VR goggles.

I really like the Lanmodo Vast Night Vision Camera, but I can't see it helping enough in my city driving to justify the price.

If I drove a truck for a living, I'd be all over this one. Seeing clearer a long way down the road could be a lifesaver.

And if I had a motor home, I'm sure I could find a place for the Vast on the dashboard.

If you drive a lot at night, especially on roads without street lights, the Vast could be perfect for you.

Lanmodo is offering a \$100 coupon through June 7 on Amazon (look for a coupon directly under the price), or through its website by using promo code NVS-DALLAS. (Neither The Dallas Morning News nor I benefit financially from any purchases through links in this review.)

Pros: Great image in a very low-light rearview [camera](#).

Cons: Expensive

Bottom line: If you drive a lot at night, this could be just what you need to help stay safe.

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