

# photoworld



2009/#1



**Cover: by Duncan McEwan**  
*Loch Tulla Pine*  
*The perfect reflections were so dark that a 2 stop ND grad filter on the upper half was necessary to bridge the exposure difference between sky and reflection. A900 + 24-70mm CZ SSM. 1/30 @f11. ISO 200. Lee 0.6 ND grad filter.*

*Duncan McEwan will one of 15 guests speakers on Sony's stand at Focus on Imaging, NEC, Birmingham, 22nd-25th February (admission £6). In this issue we also feature another guest speaker, Gustav Kiburg.*

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## HELPLINES AND INFORMATION

Authorised & warranty repairs, assistance and enquiries

OUR website [www.photoclubalpha.com](http://www.photoclubalpha.com) is now packed with detailed features on the Minolta and Sony Alpha systems, has a busy **Forum** and you can search the site for help on topics. It has a full directory of useful links for downloading software or obtaining help. For personal advice from the Club, use e-mail only please, to [david@photoclubalpha.com](mailto:david@photoclubalpha.com). Letters can not be answered by post.

A **DEDICATED** helpline is available for Konica Minolta Dynax and Dimage digital system owners, and also for film camera owners. The helpline phone number is **0870 0104107**.

**ALL REPAIRS** for Konica, Minolta and Konica Minolta branded photographic products are handled by;

JP Service Solutions  
 Johnsons Photopia Ltd  
 Hempstalls Lane  
 Newcastle under Lyme  
 Staffordshire ST5 0SW  
 Tel: 01782 753366 – Fax: 01782 753340  
 Email: [kmsupport@jpss.co.uk](mailto:kmsupport@jpss.co.uk)

**SONY** may announce further firmware upgrades or indeed products. Your first step should be to check Sony's website regularly:

[www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk)

Their general helpline, which will have information on any other numbers, addresses, departments or offices which Konica Minolta owners may need to reach in future, is: **08705 111 999**

For downloadable printable manuals, legacy firmware and software updates, visit:

<http://ca.konicaminolta.com/support/americas/>

For the Sony European user service – there is still no UK user club:

<http://www.sony.co.uk/nextlevel>

To order KM/Sony parts, accessories, and new Sony flash components etc, visit the Photoshore, where Bernard Petticrew also hosts an advice forum:

<http://www.photostore-uk.com/>

## MINOLTA REPAIRS

by specialist workshop in Milton Keynes

**FOR MANY** years **Camera Repair Workshop**, based in Milton Keynes close to the original Minolta UK service department, handled the repair of classic SRT, X, Vectis and later film cameras for Minolta UK.

They have obtained many of the spare parts and KM's stocks of older 'cannibalisation cameras' like 7000 and 8000i. Their proprietor is David Boyle, and his two technicians are Minolta trained. As an independent repairer they will specialise in film and digital, and hold parts going back to models like the XM. *The Dynax 9 is an exception, previously serviced by a special European centre, and must be sent to JP (see above).* No VAT is chargeable at present, and they offer Photoworld Club members a **10 per cent discount** on prices which they say are already better than former retail repair charges. This enables the Club to continue with its 10 per cent service and repair discount offer.

The **Photoworld Club Camera Check** scheme will be operated by Camera Repair Workshop, though in absence of Konica Minolta's former bulk shipping arrangements, the return carriage costs have increased and a charge of **£25 per camera/standard lens** combination is now required.

Your equipment is bench-tested for shutter speed, metering, focusing and aperture accuracy, externally cleaned and adjusted (this includes mirror box and film track, and all accessible parts or adjustments). If performance is below standard, a quotation will be issued for optional servicing. A certificate is completed showing the test results and functions checked, and returned with the camera. Camera Repair Workshop were actually responsible for most of the Club Camera Check work, and hold a stock of original 'Minolta Club' certificates along with all the necessary bench testing equipment.

They are based at:

**Unit 9, Wharfside, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK2 2AZ.**

**Telephone 01908 378088, fax 08712 427677.**

**Email: [cameraworkshop@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:cameraworkshop@tiscali.co.uk)**



# 16-35 and 70-400mm lenses due any time now – as price rises hit the UK

**E**XCHANGE rate related price rises – outside the control of European distribution and hitting the UK harder than almost anywhere else – are all set to see the cost of typical DSLR system products rise rapidly. All the major manufacturers have announced increases; Pentax changed the launch price of a pocket digital camera from £150 to £185 the same week it was announced in January, Nikon increased the price of the D3X from £5,499 to £5,999 before the first stocks had cleared the shops.

Sony is in exactly the same position. On January 14th, I wrote in the British Journal of Photography that the Alpha 900 had fallen as low as £1,499. That article was actually written on January 3rd, and by the time the magazine was published the lowest price you could find the camera was once again near to £1,700 with most dealers £100-200 higher if they had it in stock.

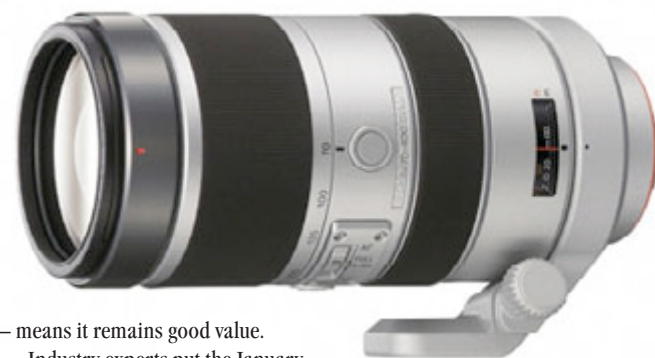
The two new lenses for the Alpha system, a Sony Carl Zeiss 16-35mm f/2.8 ZA SSM T\* and a Sony SAL 70-400mm f/4.5-5.6 SSM G, were expected to be launched in January in the UK, but had not appeared as we went to press. They went on sale in China including Hong Kong, and rapidly sold out at prices very close to the originally stated figures.

UK advertised stock appeared to be available at around £1,100 including VAT for the 70-400mm, though I was unable to find anyone who had ordered and received one from the internet vendors showing it as 'in stock'. The 16-35mm f/2.8 was similar shown as available for around £100 more, with the same story in terms of finding anyone in Britain with hands on an actual delivered lens.

The RRP of the 16-35mm lens is £1,599.95 and of the 70-400mm £1,399.95. These prices are already in the premium lens bracket – far removed from the 70-300mm G SSM level – and any future increase will make them even less accessible.

These two lenses have already been priced to allow for the shifts in Yen versus Pound Sterling values which happened in 2008. Any further adjustment may just mean strict maintenance of the RRP. When considering the Alpha 900 selling at typical prices like £1,699, you have to remember this is against a launch RRP of £2,099 and a return to selling at £1,999 – tabled for February

This may be your last chance to buy Alpha system items at 2008 prices, with increases of up to 50% due



– means it remains good value.

Industry experts put the January 2009 price increases as between 10% and 25%, compared to the final quarter of 2008, and expect further similar increases in Spring. It's clear that the days of cheap Japanese photographic equipment are over for a while. Sigma confirm that overdue RRP increases are about to take effect and could be as high as 50% over 2008 figures by later 2009.

At the same time, remaindered or discontinued lines have been cut in price with items like the HVL-F56AM flashgun spotted at below £100. Sony's more popular DSLR cameras, the Alpha 200 and 350, did very well in the run up to Christmas with availability extended to hundreds of non-Sony dealers. Sony used independent wholesalers to get the kits into small photo shops at prices to match even the biggest chain stores and internet sellers. The result has been a real growth in Alpha system ownership and you are likely to see Alphas out and about this year as family cameras.

My advice right now is to look for bargains and do not hesitate to buy anything you know you want. Once the bargains are gone, there will be restocking them at such low prices again. Even before the end of 2008 there was a shortage of many lenses worldwide (which is also why the two new full frame superlenses were launched first for the Chinese market only).

But, don't despair if the Sony Alpha system appears to be leaving your budgets behind. The Alpha 900 may demand these new lenses for best performance, but the main line-up of models from Alpha 100 to



700 and the earlier Konica Minolta 7D and 5D are still perfectly at home with less ambitious glassware.

Independent makers have shifted up a gear and during 2009 you will see many affordable and truly superb bits of glass arrive from both Tamron and Sigma. In this issue you will find my review of the Sigma 12-24mm which, I am afraid, has given me a perfect excuse for not buying a 16-35mm f/2.8! I have also been trying out the new Sigma 50mm f/1.4 HSM (unrivalled in the entire history of 50mm standard lenses) and Tamron's new lightweight, low cost 70-200mm f/2.8. Both of these I have tested using the Nikon D3X, as they were not yet available in Alpha mount.

The final month of 2008 saw me obliged to put my Alpha 900 down much of the time and use the D3X, as well as Canon's EOS 5D MkII, instead. I was commissioned to write tests on all the cameras. At the end of this, I did not feel in ANY way unhappy

to own and use the Alpha 900. All three cameras have their strong points (not all cost £6,000!) and all will produce stunning large files. All demand good lenses and technique.

The Alpha 900 remains, for me, by far the purest design as a working DSLR with simple, logical controls and no surplus of complex unwanted settings or functions. It reminds me most of classical film-era SLRs and feels less 'digital' than almost any digital camera I have used. The Alpha 700 is very similar, of course.

I also took the 900 for its first proper, intensive week of travel stock shooting and returned with an exceptional success rate. Here, the camera leaves behind the film era totally as countless shots secured with the 900 would have been lost entirely to a camera loaded with film.

Shirley, using the Alpha 700 instead of her earlier 200, quickly decided there was no going back – the larger, brighter optical glass prism finder and faster operation of the entire camera won her over despite the increase in weight.

We feel that with the 700 and 900, we are set up for some time to come. We've possibly managed to beat the 2009 price increases even though both these cameras were not bought at their lowest discounted level. We are now all set to get out of touch once again! From 1985 to 1992, we used 7000 and 5000 cameras and did not upgrade. Then in 1992 when the prices were right we moved up to 9xi and 7xi, and once again stuck with these all the way through to 2004, resisting the lure of the Dynax 9 and Dynax 7.

From 2004 to 2008, things changed so much it's hardly worth thinking about – we had no fewer than eight new digital SLRs to buy within a four-year period and many experiments to make with various lenses.

Now, just in time given the recession, I think it's time for the final assembly of cameras (Alpha 700, 900 and 350) to give a few years of service along with a well-proven set of lenses. No doubt many of you will welcome finding yourselves in the same situation, with a mature product well capable of delivering whatever you want, and no impatience for the next generation to come along.

– David Kilpatrick



# Winter Warmers



**T**o enter your own pictures for future *Gallery* pages, just send digital files (full resolution – 6 megapixels from a 6 megapixel camera, and so on) in RGB JPEG high quality form by email to **david@photoclubalpha.com**, or by post on CD (TIFFs may be used on CDs only, not by email, no layers, no 16-bit please) to :

**Photoworld Gallery, Icon Publications Ltd,**

**Maxwell Place, Maxwell Lane, Kelso, Scottish Borders TD5 7BB.**

CDs or DVDs must be universal (Mac or PC) and always 'finished' never left open for another writing session. Please do not send memory cards.

You may enter as many images as you like at any time, including your name and address and all relevant caption details. *Gallery* entries will be considered for cover or portfolio use and web editions. Each contributor chosen receives a year's subscription/renewal, or a prize of similar value which may be a photographic book or other item.



# *gallery*



*Winter warmers: our pictures for this issue prove that beautiful warm colours can be found whatever the season. Left, icicles hanging from the eaves seen through a window in December, by John Neele of Bergen op Zoom, Netherlands – Alpha 700, 1/20th at f/5.6, 70-200mm G SSM lens set to 200mm, ISO 200, hand held with SSS. Above, night and fog with sodium lighting, an unusually successful image where the strong diagonal of the steps leads to the distant figures. By Armen Gharib of Yerevan, Armenia – Alpha 700, 18-70mm lens, 1/15th at f/5.6 at ISO 800m, 45mm focal length. Below – January dusk on the east coast, by Paul Murphy of Cramlington, Northumberland. Alpha 700, Konica Minolta D 17-35 lens at 17mm, ISO 100, f/11. This was a tripod exposure of 1.6 seconds using an ND Graduated filter and Polariser stacked. These three pictures were selected from contributions to the Photoclubalpha web forum – [www.photoclubalpha.com/forum/](http://www.photoclubalpha.com/forum/) – where you can show and discuss pictures.*





# gallery



*Continuing the theme of winter light, Shirley Kilpatrick shot the huge November sunset at Port D'Andratx in Mallorca — a spot recommended by guide books as having the best sunsets on the island. She used the Alpha 700 with 18-250mm Sony SAL lens set to 250mm and the picture is not cropped. 1/500th at f/10, ISO 200, processed from raw. Below, John Gilkerson of Newcastle-upon-Tyne used the 18-700mm zoom on his Alpha 200, exposing in October for 1/30th at f/16, ISO 200, at 20mm.*





*Above: Alan Ross of Prestwich shot the chimneys at Ilam, Derbyshire, but added a dawn sky taken from his house to form this composite. Both shot on the Konica Minolta Dimâge A200.*

## Sony – Focus Stand L28 Featured Photographers

Sony's Focus stand L28 will have a programme of short talks by 15 amateur and professional photographers, some including model shoot demonstrations.

Confirmed names include:

Richard Blanshard  
Nick Webster  
Alonzo Diaz  
Cliff Carter  
Mark Tiller  
Duncan McEwan  
Paul Atherton  
Dave Lawrence  
Mike Jones  
Michael Wayne Plant  
James Brown

The show runs from February 22nd to 25th at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham.

# PHOTOWORLD DAY EDINBURGH SUNDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> MARCH 2009

A regional indoor meeting has been arranged for **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2009** in the premises of the Edinburgh Photographic Society at 68 Great King Street, Edinburgh. Doors will be open at 10.00am with the programme starting at 10.30am and finishing around 4pm. The cost is £4.00, inclusive of refreshments. No prior booking is required.

Photoworld publisher David Kilpatrick will be present on the day.

The programme will consist of lecture, demonstration, discussion and critique sessions. Members on the registered list will receive full details of the programme nearer the time. Any newcomers requiring further information should contact Duncan McEwan.

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# The Sigma 12-24mm on Alpha 900 full frame

SIGMA's 12-24mm f/4.5-5.6 lens is now almost a vintage design. Rummaging through magazine archives I realised that the first time I tried this lens, there was no such thing as a consumer priced DSLR and the whole experience was based on film.

The current version – labelled EX DG – indicates that a revision took place, optimising the coatings and perhaps part of the mount design to reduce possible reflections on digital reflexes. I know for sure that I tried out the pre-DG version on two different full frame digital cameras, both made by Kodak, one in Canon and one in Nikon mount. I still have the original raw files and the results while impressive in angular coverage leave a lot to be desired. The outer field of the lens was not sharp on these cameras, and there was a lot of colour shading and vignetting.

The Alpha 900 is more of a revolution in DSLR design than is generally realised. Changes made to the way the microlenses focus the rays on the sensor, and to the position and strength of the low-pass anti-aliasing filter which sits in front of the silicon 'film', combine to give the 900 an ability to extract clean images corner to corner even from a wide angle like this.

It was not just the non-arrival of the Sony Zeiss 16-35mm f/2.8 which prompted me to request a test sample of the Sigma 12-24mm yet again (maybe the fourth or fifth time Sigma has loaned me this lens in various fittings). I remembered something I had forgotten! Full frame did not just open up the proper angle of view of my 17-35mm f/2.8-4 D series Konica Minolta lens, it also opened the door to use lenses such as the Sigma 15-30mm f/3.5-4.5, Sigma or Tamron 14mm f/2.8, or the ultimate wide angle still unmatched by any other maker, the Sigma 12-24mm.

I had, unwisely, sold a nearly new Tamron 14mm f/2.8 for a third of its new price only two years ago. I bought it for that price, used it in the Konica Minolta Dynax 7D, felt that I was not getting anything more from it than I did from the KM 11-18mm f/4.5-5.6 and disposed of it. We did not know the full frame Alpha 900 was coming, and I was no longer using film.

That Tamron would have had one



singular benefit on the Alpha 700 or 900. Both these cameras have an f/2.8 central focus sensor. It is a bit technical to explain clearly, but normal AF sensors have a lens to focus the image received from the camera lens, and this secondary lens has the effect of limiting the apparent aperture. All the normal sensors in your camera's AF module – whether it has 9 or 11 AF points or less – 'see' any lens you fit as if it was stopped down to around f/5.6.

This reduces the light for focusing, but also reduces accuracy. A wide-angle lens has loads of depth of field at f/5.6 and that means the AF

*The 12-24 has good geometry (top, at 12mm, uncorrected) and resists flare (bottom, 12mm, cropped to 10 x 8 shape).*



system is only going to get the image sharp within the range of depth of field, not precisely at the correct focus. It does not matter much with a lens like the 11-18mm f/4.5-5.6 because the effective aperture is very close to the virtual aperture seen by the AF module. Even so, you get less accurate focus with wide angles.

The 700 and 900 both have a single central AF sensor which 'sees' any lens of f/2.8 or faster at a virtual aperture of f/2.8 – and, of course, also 'sees' any aperture between f/2.8 and f/5.6 correctly. This sensor only comes into operation when you fit such a lens. Focusing accuracy on the 17-35mm f/2.8-4 D is transformed, it is optimum with new lenses like the 16-35mm or 24-70mm f/2.8 models. And it would, of course, have been superb with the Tamron 14mm f/2.8 as well.

So, that was my loss! The question with the 12-24mm Sigma, which has a limited aperture similar to the 11-18mm Sony SAL, was whether it would focus accurately.

The answer, on testing the lens, was that the Alpha 900 focused it with exceptional accuracy. The centre sensor is also surrounded by a double cross pattern f/5.6 sensor, and whether this works jointly with the f/2.8 single strip element or on its own, the result with the centre spot



focusing I prefer to use was perfect.

After a few tests, I realised that the 12-24mm would be better for a week's shooting in Mallorca (including many tripod-mounted interiors) and left the 17-35mm behind. After returning from this shoot, the quality from the 12-24mm blew me away – Sigma immediately got a cheque (this lens was not going back home!) and the prospect of forking out £1,500 for a 16-35mm f/2.8 receded. After all, the 16-35mm would not do what the 12-24mm does, even with its fast focusing and Zeiss quality. There is a huge difference between 12mm and 16mm.

The point of 24 megapixels plus 12mm wide angle on full frame is that it does the same job as a 24mm perspective control lens would on a lesser resolution. I had already experienced working with the Nikon D3 (12 megapixels full frame) and Nikon 24mm PC-E tilt shift lens. For the shift function alone (architectural correction) my 12-24mm on 24 megapixels, cropped to 12 megapixels, would far exceed the possible range of movement correction on the Nikon.

Winter set in with a vengeance on return, and the low sun limits architectural subjects with heavy shadows at ground level or cast in to buildings. Not much use can be made of a sub-20mm lens in midwinter, without cropping out the foreground. Too many shots will have shadows, including the photographer's own shadow, included in the scene. The 12-24mm will have to wait until April or May to come into its own in the UK once again.

My loyalty to Minolta or Sony gear only kicks in where there is a choice. Sigma make life easy because so many of their lenses have no equivalent in ANY system, let alone the Sony system. After discovering the quality of the 12-24mm, I find myself wondering about some of their other unique long zooms. I have already tried the 20mm f/1.8 but treated it as a strictly low light, wide open lens shooting at ISO 800 or faster. It was impressive but not enough to merit ownership, as I don't shoot in those conditions often.

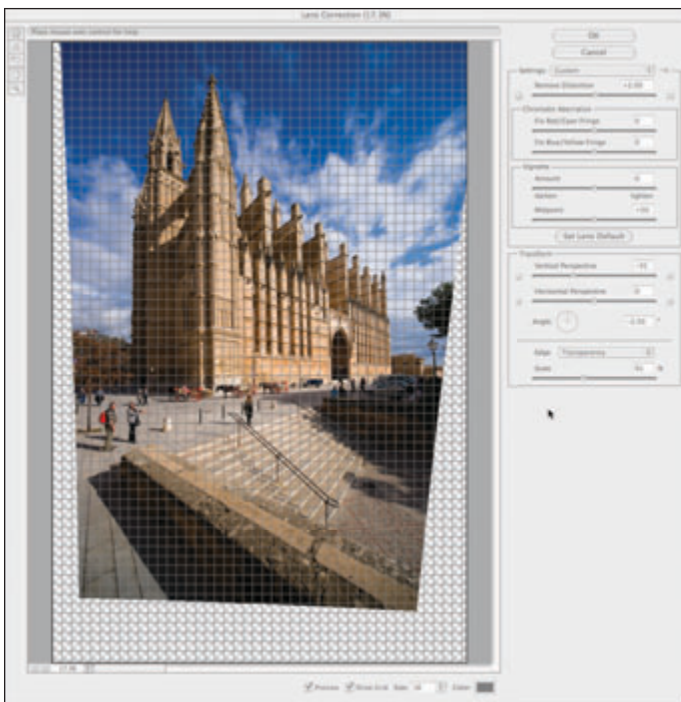
The 12-24mm is a different thing. If you own an Alpha 900, it opens the door to an extreme wide angle view which you will never have seen before. In the decade since this lens was introduced, no other manufacturer has been able to match it. The cost is modest by any standards at well under £500.

Result: a recommended buy for any Alpha 900 (or full frame film SLR) owner.

– David Kilpatrick



*By sacrificing some foreground (full frame, above) and using Photoshop Filter>Distort>Lens Correction (right), architecturally rendered shots can be produced and retain a high enough resolution for large prints. Palma Cathedral, Mallorca, is almost impossible to 'get in' without an extreme convergence from this viewpoint.*





# Rethinking the standard lens: Sigma's 50mm f1.4

ONCE again, an independent lensmaker has beaten all the 'marque' designers to achieve something entirely new in 35mm format photography. I make no apology for following one Sigma lens report with another, and one unique lens with another.

You may say that a 50mm f/1.4 standard lens is so commonplace it can not possibly be anything new. My first SLR standard lens was a 50mm f/1.4 Super Takumar on a Pentax, and a beautiful tiny lump of metal and glass it proved to be with its tiny 49mm filter thread... and sad inability to survive a fall on to the friendly concrete of our newspaper basement office floor. I had insurance and soon had another lens!

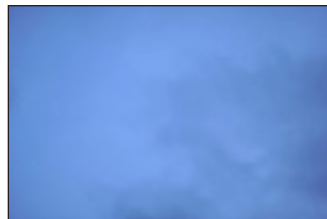
Sigma's new 50mm f/1.4 EX DG HSM is far removed from that design, or the classic 50mm f/1.4 Minolta AF (again, 49mm thread) which I still use. It takes a massive 77mm filter and has a front glass element which dwarfs any existing 50mm f/1.4, all housed in a body large enough to be an 85mm f/1.4 by Sony or Minolta standards.

It is the first Sigma I have tried with **HSM** – **Hyper Sonic Motor**, equivalent to Minolta/Sony SSM. It works perfectly, with a smooth almost silent focus action and ultra-fine adjustments for moving subjects (or photographer). Watch out for more Alpha mount Sigmas with HSM focusing, they are coming soon.

But the secret of this lens is the huge front element which leads to a funnel-shaped group (almost like a retrofocus wide angle) before the rear of the lens fits neatly into any DSLR lens mount. I tested both the Nikon and Sony fit, Nikon having a very restrictive lens mount some millimetres smaller in diameter than the 1985-designed Alpha mount.

If you hold the Sigma up, open its aperture, and peer through the back of the lens from about the same angle as the corner of the sensor, and you will still see almost the same big circle you get by looking straight-on. Try this with a normal 50mm f/1.4 and you see a narrow ellipse.

The result of this is minimal vignetting, or light loss into the corners of the frame. You can shoot a plain sky with the Sigma 50mm



Top: Minolta 50mm f/1.4 AF and Sigma sizes compared.

Second row: the rear exit pupils seen from an angle.

Above: nine blade iris.

The Sigma 50mm f/1.4 HSM suits the Alpha 900 well.



to have f/1.4 for easier focusing and viewing. But modern focus screens show no brightness gain, or focusing advantage, with any lens faster than f/2.8 – the standard Type G screen looks as bright as it's ever going to look with an f/4.5 lens, let alone f/1.4.

With the AF sensor, or manual focus, you will actually be focusing your lens at no better than f/2.8. Traditional fast lenses show a focus shift on stopping down. If you work at f/2.8 to f/4, your focus will be spot-on. If you stop down to f/8 there may be a small shift but depth of field will cover the losses. Open up to f/1.4, and there will certainly be a big shift in true focus compared to what you see on the focus screen, and what the AF sensors confirm.

So what's needed is a 50mm lens with ZERO focus shift. It should agree at f/1.4 with the exact plane of focus seen by AF sensors at f/2.8 or f/5.6, or a focusing screen at a virtual f/2.8. Sigma has achieved this. The new lens can be focused at any aperture, automatically or manually, using any type of sensor or focus screen and it will be sharp no matter what f-stop you set.

Supporting this is stunningly high resolution at f/1.4 with just a hint of complex aberration smear into the extreme corners, tidying up dramatically even when stopped down to just f/1.6 or f/1.8. Geometry is held to within -1% barrel distortion at test-chart distances, close to zero at infinity.

The nine-blade aperture gives a smooth 'bokeh' and at wider apertures the only complaint is a hint of colour tint on unfocused high contrast edges.

In use, I found myself wishing the Sigma would focus a little closer – 30cm or less is preferable in a full frame 50mm, and this lens has a true focal length around 48mm which shortens further at close focus.

This is an expensive lens (considerably more than Sony's own 50mm f/1.4) and a landmark in standard lens design. I would rank it alongside the 50mm f/2 Summicron from Leitz, or the introduction of the fully coated postwar Tessars by Zeiss, in the history of 'standard' lenses.

- DK





*The Tamron 55-200mm f/3.5-5.6 is a neat small lens which produces very sharp results and focuses quickly. Three pictures, below, Dumfries & Galloway Wildlife Park.*

## Tamron's tele-zooms cut the cost of quality results

FOR something less than the Sony branded price, there's a neat little Tamron lens out there ideal for owners of all APS-C format cameras – the 55-200mm f/4-5.6.

Not only is this lens very small and light, it can be bought for well under £100 and as a brief test showed us it is stunningly sharp and free from vices. In fact, it should be rated as better in relative terms than the full frame Tamron 70-300mm, for which it is an almost exact equivalent on the smaller digital format. It will not cover full frame and is therefore recommended for use on Konica Minolta 7D/5D, and Sony Alpha 100/200/300/350/700.

Giving an overlap with the 18-70mm f/3.5-5.6 kit lens, and available in two-lens kit as a Sony rework, the Tamron is also sold by dealers in the Dundee. We borrowed one from London Camera Exchange Colchester branch, thinking it would be a basic quality optic, and ended up seriously impressed by its sharpness.

Putting it simply, this little lens is possibly the best tele zoom we have used in the 200mm range. It can be recommended without hesitation as a second lens if you own a camera with the 18-70mm, it even shares the 55mm filter size.

### Budget 70-200mm

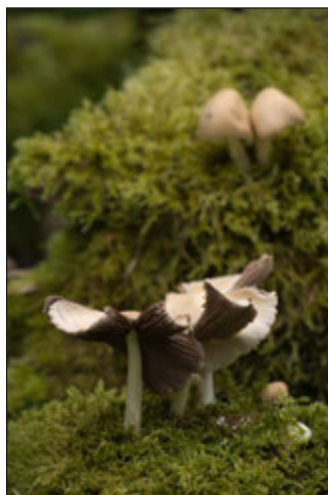
Of even more interest, given the very high cost of owning a genuine Sony 70-200mm f/2.8 SAL G SSM, is Tamron's new 70-200mm f/2.8 with



its conventional screw-driven focus motor. Sigma has a similar but much heavier and slightly more expensive HSM (ultrasonic motor) option. The Tamron is unique in retailing for £699 or less, and we were able to test one only in Nikon mount. This might seem inappropriate, but Tamron has made a decision to restrict loan samples to Nikon fit; fortunately, the Nikon D3X is very similar to the



*The Tamron 70-200 f/2.8 design is very traditional in black – and though fairly long, it is lightweight due to the use of modern materials.*



Alpha 900 and it's easy enough to report on the qualities of the lens.

The one thing we can not test is the focus speed of the mechanical drive. The Nikon version includes an in-lens motor (not ultrasonic, just a motor, old-style) and is moderately slow. The body-driven Sony Alpha version is assumed to be similar in speed, and from tests we think it will be just that little bit less capable of tracking action than the Sony product.

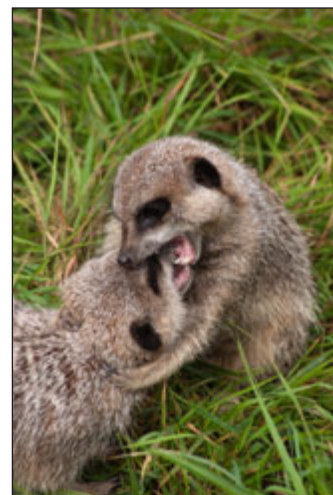
Not everyone wants to track action, and the Tamron proved to be exceptionally sharp. Optically, it may even be better across its range of focus and focal lengths than the Sony which suffers from a curved field at its

closest focus. Certainly, it's not far off being a match at normal distances.

The Tamron 70-200mm is an old-fashioned looking lens, long and narrow, and finished in black. It lacks the visual appeal of the Sony lens or the earlier Minolta, and it also lacks the feel of mechanical excellence. Instead, it hits the hand with unexpected lightness and a vague warmth – it is essentially a big lens in a plastic barrel. But the lightness does not make it lack robustness. All operations are reasonably smooth too, the zoom being a bit more lumpy in action than the manual focus.

### System impetus

It's very good to see new lenses appearing in Alpha mount, even if we can not get samples! Both Tamron and Sigma are committed to supporting the Alpha mount better in future. This comes after several years of famine, too many designs



never appearing due to the small market share Minolta used to have.

Sony has turned this round, capturing third place in the DSLR market. As a result, they have competition from these independent lens makers. Owners have more options, and a saving on one lens may enable a purchase of a more desirable Sony Zeiss lens of a different focal length or type. Sony does not necessarily lose out (especially as they own a substantial holding in Tamron!).

So, when you are budgeting for your outfit, bear in mind that you may be able to afford that 24-70mm f/2.8 Carl Zeiss if you choose a lower priced Tamron for the long end.

In the past we were unable even to mention independent lenses as Minolta and Konica Minolta effectively owned the magazine; now that *Photoworld* is truly independent, we can do so.

- DK



# Tilt and shift on Alpha with vintage rollfilm SLR lenses

TWO years ago, we published a page titled 'Russian Roulette' which covered the use of two items – an 8mm Peleng fisheye, and an unbranded shift adaptor fitting Pentacon or Kiev lenses. It did turn out to be roulette in the end, as the fisheye developed an inability to focus beyond 20cm, and was eventually thrown away in disgust after wasting many hours trying to work out how to fix it.

At the time, the camera in use was the Alpha 100, and the shift adaptor was tested with an 80mm Kiev ARSAT lens. 'Russian' was not the right term as these lenses and adaptors are actually Ukrainian. With an equivalent field of view on the Alpha 200 of 120mm, the shift combination really had very minimal uses.

Then along comes the Alpha 900 two years later, with full frame, and very quickly it becomes obvious that depth of field is a problem when you

view the huge 24 megapixel files. A tilt lens, where the axis can be angled to the image plane in order to produce a tilted focus field, was needed.

An ARAX Ukrainian made tilt adaptor, found on eBay, provided part of the solution for £130 postage paid. At first, we tested it with the 80mm lens, and that was impressive – but a wider angle lens was really needed. Again, eBay came up with a choice of 50mm f/4 Carl Zeiss Jena Flektogon lenses made for the Pentacon Six system, and compatible with these adaptors. We opted for a lower cost, older, non-multicoated type at just over £100 from a British photo dealer rather than spend £200 or more on a later type shipped from Slovakia.

The Jena Flektogon (really a Zeiss Distagon under a different name) has a superb reputation and once fitted to the tilt adaptor, which offers up to 8 degrees of rotatable tilt, its standard lens view proved ideal for

If you have any Pentacon 6, Kiev 88, Exakta 66 or similar lenses a couple of moderately priced Ukrainian made adaptors can bring them back to life as part of your Alpha system.

*Below: Jena 50mm on the ARAX tilt adaptor and Alpha 900.*

*Right: left hand side, with 28-75mm at 50mm and f/11. Right hand side, with tilted 50mm at f/11.*





many subjects. The comparison pair of f/11 pictures seen here used the 28-75mm Konica Minolta D lens set to a nominal 50mm, clearly a much shorter actual focal length than the fixed '50mm' of the medium format lens. Without going to extremes and using full page repro, you should be able to see how the tilted lens has brought the lettering on the globe into pin-sharp focus at the same time as the music book.

The lighting was all done using the wireless remote flash system with three heads – HVL-F58AM on the camera as a controller, HVL-F42AM

at ground level and a Sigma EF 530 DG Super compatible head inside the spinet. The Sigma flashgun can not be used as a controller (sadly) and is always in the same group as the HVL-F42AM for power control, but works just as well as the 36, 56 or 42 models in this situation.

The Jena 50mm lens is also much more useful with the shift adaptor, a further £100+ investment. Ideally, the two would be one unit – a tilt-shift adaptor – but no such item could be found without a built-in lens and a much higher price.



*The original shift combination tested on the Alpha 100 in 2006 (from Photoworld January 2007). The adaptor is far more use on the full frame Alpha 900, and the 50mm Pentacon lens is also more useful than the 80mm. If you have any of these lenses around, the adaptors are worth buying.*





# Don't waste Winter!

Duncan McEwan finds the year's cold start is a great start nevertheless

Winter got off to a flying start at the close of last year and we are not even half way through, which is a promising situation. Some photographers are easily discouraged from going out at this time of year because cold conditions make life a bit uncomfortable. More serious outdoor photographers regard it as the best time of year and can't get enough of it – I fall into this category.

This winter has been made all the more enticing in that I have been able to utilise the outstanding features of the Alpha 900 and 24-70mm CZ f/2.8 SSM lens, a combination that can really match the crispness of wintry conditions. In an era of global warming, winter is the season that is most likely to be subject to greatest change, as far as the photographer is concerned. Leaves are still going to emerge in spring, change colour in autumn and flowers will continue to bloom throughout the summer even if at slightly different times. Increasingly, however, we are likely to see less snow and frost and for this reason alone, it is important to take full advantage of what we do get. Wintry weather nowadays seems to occur in increasingly shorter bursts rather than the sustained periods that were once the norm. A good fall of snow can be here today, gone



*Above: this fascinating pattern of ice and sand on the edge of Loch Tulla was nearly overlooked as I concentrated on the wider mountain vista. Alpha 900 + 24-7mm CZ SSM, 1/13 @ f18 +1/3 stop, ISO 200. Below: perfect winter conditions with the clear blue sky giving a blue cast to the snowy shadows which I feel helps to emphasise the chill of the day. Alpha 900 + 24-70mm CZ SSM lens, 1/80 @ f9 +1/3 stop, ISO 200. Right: Searching for a new angle on a much photographed mountain (Buchaille Etive Mor), I found this snow-covered round boulder formed an interesting comparison with the angular outline and sculptured surface of the mountain. Alpha 900 + 24-70mm CZ SSM, 1/125 @ f16, +2/3 stop, ISO 200.*







*You can meet Duncan McEwan and see more of his Alpha 900 work at Sony's stand,  
Focus on Imaging 2009, NEC Birmingham, February 22nd-25th*



tomorrow – how frustrating it can be when such conditions happen while at work, rather than at weekends.

One thing to be very careful about in winter is over enthusiastic use of a **polarising** filter. When using wide-angle lenses and a sun that is low in the sky throughout the day, there is a danger of getting unevenly polarised skies which can ruin an otherwise great image by having navy blue at one side fading to clear at the other. Using it at half rotation may give adequate improvement to the sky without it looking too unnatural.

In some situations it may be that the polariser has great benefit to other areas of a scene in which case you may have to live with the less than desirable rendition of the sky. I am not suggesting a polariser is redundant, but be aware of its effects and go easy with it in such conditions. As an alternative, I frequently use a neutral density graduated filter to deepen a blue sky in a more uniform way. With digital it is now possible to see this effect and to take action at the time. Aim to get as much right at the time of taking, even if software and digital techniques, such as replacement of a sky, can rectify matters later on.

Ice can be most attractive as a subject, offering strong shapes, pattern and texture opportunities. Even without resorting to a macro lens, impressive close-ups can be achieved with current short zoom lenses having a very good close focusing point. It often pays to look around your feet as you position yourself to compose a distant landscape.

I frequently find myself standing on something that could make an interesting composition as was the case with the ice and sand image, so it is worth treading cautiously and looking around – avoid damaging something that you may later decide is worth photographing. Smooth ice can form a highly reflective surface and by adjusting one's shooting position and angle it is possible to achieve the degree of reflection desired.

A sunset sky reflecting off ice can combine fantastic colour with interesting textures or shapes. When hoar frost forms on a surface it gives a great granular texture which is worth capitalising on when it is encountered – this can be particularly good after freezing fog has cleared away. Even an ordinary coating of frost on a subject can transform it in a moist appealing way as was the case with the image of the old railway wagons. Earlier sunshine had melted the frost on the other side of the wagons and that surface was nowhere near as interesting.

Exposure for snow no longer holds the uncertainty it formerly did for



*Looking more like the surface of rusting metal, reflections of a sunset sky have transformed the icy covering at the edge of a Highland loch. Alpha 900 + Minolta 100-300mm Apo D lens (set at 300mm), 1/100 @ f10, ISO 200.*



*Above: Loch Ba. The rather grey conditions led me to look for strong foreground features and the circular shape where the dusting of snow had melted on the surface of ice, presented an ideal opportunity. Alpha 900 + 24-70 CZ SSM, 1/20 @ f22 + 1/3 stop, ISO 200. Below: Rannch Moor. Freezing fog had left a heavy deposit of frost on the trees. Being there as the fog lifted and the sun came out was a magical moment. Alpha 900 + 24-70mm CZ SSM, 1/50 @ f20 + 1/3 stop, ISO 200.*







many film users. Instead, reference to the histogram display on digital cameras gives all the information needed to make compensations resulting in a perfect exposure. On the Alpha 900 I found that exposure compensation was fairly minimal, only  $+1/3$  or  $2/3$  of a stop at most, depending on the situation.

There is much more to winter than frost or snow. The very short days make it comfortable to shoot and dawn and dusk. With the sun rising and setting so much further south it may be the only time of year when that golden light will shine on a particular landmark. Low angled sunlight brings out wonderful modelling in the landscape but it can produce large shadow areas which have to be given consideration in your composition. Contrasty films like Velvia 50 made it difficult to handle such conditions but now, with in-camera dynamic range optimiser settings, it makes it easy to address this at the taking stage rather than having to pull back shadow detail in *Photoshop*.

Here's hoping that the second half of winter is as good as the first. If it is, make the most of it – just wrap up well and get out.



*Left: very overcast conditions give a subtle rendition of the frost covered twigs and branches of a larch tree. The greenish colour is due to lichens and mosses on the surface of the branches. Alpha 900 + 24-70mm CZ SSM, 1/25 @ f8, -1/3 stop. Handheld, ISO 200.*  
*Below left: Soft lighting and a coating of frost on the rusting machinery transformed this mundane subject. Alpha 900 + 24-70mm CZ SSM, minimum focusing distance. 1sec @ f22. ISO 200. The soft lighting proved ideal for portraying the antiquity of these derelict railway wagons. 24-70 CZ SSM, 0.6 sec @ f22, -1/3 stop. ISO 200, Lee 0.6 ND grad filter over sky area to reduce brightness.*





# King of the river

Gustav Kiburg's perfect images of kingfishers – taken using moderate focal lengths from a surprisingly close distance – caught the eye of Sony so much they have invited the Dutch photographer to present his work at FOCUS

VISIT the Sony stand at *Focus on Imaging 2009* (February 22nd-25th, National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham) and you will have a chance to meet the man who has captured some of the best close-ups of kingfishers we've seen.

Sony UK has invited Gustav Kiburg, 40-year-old amateur enthusiast, to show his work and explain his approach for the four days of the *Focus* show. It is the first time that Sony's Alpha division has been present at Focus, which was a regular annual fixture for Minolta UK and subsequently for Konica Minolta.

Paul Genge of Sony's UK Alpha division met Gustav at *photokina* 2008 – almost by accident – and the presentations will be in an interview format between Paul and Gustav.

Gustav's work was first seen on internet forums – including *photoclubalpa.com*, where the



*Gustav's regular hide (above) with positioned branch, and two-man hide (left) for visiting photographers.*

large image size allowed in forum posts (up to 1024 pixels square) gave a direct view of the quality of his images. He was also able to answer many questions about his working methods and technique, including his choice of portable hide. It may look just like a camouflaged tent with the lens poking out of it, but to a kingfisher it's part of the scenery!

Gustav's pictures have been taken at one 'secret location' – a woodland stream, with enough clearing to allow excellent light conditions, with a fallen branch hanging out just above the water on a level with the bank.

This has enabled him to set up the hide just a couple of metres from the birds' predictable perch, and shoot using lenses in the range of 70-200mm to 300mm, with and without tele converters.

His Sony Alpha 700 provides enough resolution to allow crops,







*Above: an unusual pose, 1/250th at f/5.6, 200mm, ISO 800. Below: February brings a different Winter look to the background and fluffed up feathers to keep warm. Again, at 200mm, ISO 400, 1/125th at f/6.3. Facing page, bottom picture: with a baby perch, juggling the fish by beak before swallowing, this shot shows the kingfisher's tongue. At the maximum 200mm zoom of the 70-200mm SSM lens, 1/80th at f/4.5, ISO 800.*



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and enough depth of field at typical working apertures for the entire bird to be correctly focused when the eye or beak is targeted.

"I have found a beautiful place, in a forest", Gustav explains.

"When I started wanting to shoot these birds, I looked for almost two weeks for this place.

"Every day when I finished my work I would go for a few hours, just looking around me. I saw them fly, then realised they were flying the most of the time to one location.

"Kingfishers have a territory which is their 'home', and that is the place where they will stay the most of the time.

"After I found this place, I set up my camouflage tent, and positioned the fallen branch over the water. I sit in the tent on a small chair, with my camera on a tripod. The Alpha 700 is fitted with the 70-200mm f/2.8 APO G SSM, and recently with a 300mm f/2.8 G SSM I have hired.

"Then it is a matter of waiting, sometimes a few minutes, other times many hours."

Gustav has also taken a few privileged photographers to his kingfisher territory, setting up a two-man hide for the purpose.

"I have been there now for about two years, in every season. You can see from the background of the picture what kind of season it was taken. When it is brown, it is Winter; in the Spring, you get beautiful colours with a little bit of sun; in the Summer the forest is green so you get a green background."

During the Christmas holiday period, Gustav braved a full day in his hide at -4°C using the 300mm lens. The light levels were low



*Above: a classic summer shot. At 200mm and ISO 400, 1/40th at f5.*

*Bottom: a midwinter shot taken on December 29th at the very end of the day, using the 300mm f/2.8 SSM at ISO 800. The bird has remained still enough for a sharp shot at 1/13th of a second.*



enough to mean shutter speed as slow as 1/13th at f/8 with ISO 800, at the end of his vigil. Despite this, the bird stays still enough to allow a sharp portrait – and the ISO 800 performance of the Alpha 700 gives a smooth, noise-free final image.

Part of Gustav's skill lies in using a small enough aperture to ensure the whole bird is sharp, while getting close enough to throw the background into a smooth differential focus.

The birds themselves are much smaller than people imagine, and the fish shown in their beaks are very young perch or pike which will soon grow too large for the kingfisher to catch. To learn more from Gustav himself, visit the Sony stand **L28** at *Focus in Imaging*, here he will be projecting his work and answering questions. There will be another 14 photographers featured too!





# Karry on Learning

Peter Karry is well-known as a lecturer teaching others to improve their photography - but that does not stop him becoming the student too...

One of the most enjoyable aspects of photography is that one just keeps learning. So when I saw an advertisement for a 2 day workshop that promised to “open my eyes to the creative aspects of photography” to be held in Southwold, Suffolk, I decided to participate.

The weather was appallingly wet as I drove there, but thankfully on the day the sun decided to come out. The small group (seven pupils and two tutors) met on Southwold pier. Each participant took along six prints to allow the tutors to assess where we were with our abilities, and the session started with this, which was an excellent way to introduce ourselves to our fellow members.

## Shaping up

Then we were given our first project – to find shapes – circles, triangles, diamonds; as well as pictures predominantly of one colour, and restricted to just finding them on the pier. This of course was the initial part of opening our eyes.

All of us were using at least one DSLR (I was the only one with Konica Minolta – although one person was trying out the Sony Alpha 350) and we were told to switch off our screens so that we would do the best we could to compose in the viewfinder without chimping. But the obvious benefit was to have our images assessed immediately by the tutors.

After that exercise, we walked along the seafront past colourful beach huts for which Southwold is famous, and shown the important differences between images using wide-angle and telephoto lenses, when filling most of the frame with one identical image close to the camera – we used a lifebelt on a stand as the main object, and the pier as background. We also had to capture images and details in the light of the midday, so that we could compare them later with images in different lights. Part of the education was that we should try taking photos in a completely different style – either by using a “jaunty angle” (at a definite tilt) or by moving the camera during the exposure.

At the end of the Promenade we



walked down to the harbour and were taken through the fundamentals of measuring exposure manually – so that we understood how the in-camera TTL exposure system compares.

This meant getting out hand-held meters and using reflected and incident measuring, and we tested out the differences using buildings with intense white and intense black surfaces. We then used our camera metering to assess the individual differences. After this we explored the use of the Depth of Field preview where available. All this was leading to the important message that we should slow down, and get the image right in the camera, rather than fire off a sequence of shots (a digital ‘bad habit’) in the hope that one would come out okay.

The exercises were temporarily suspended while we visited a harbour-side fish and chip shop. I just had to have the local fresh prawns and a bottle of Suffolk Apple Juice! Following this break we had some time to ourselves to explore the harbour, which of course was full of detail, texture, and colour. When we eventually left late in the afternoon, we were quite hot and so indulged in an ice cream – as you can tell, we weren’t ignoring the esoteric side of being at the seaside !!



*Beach huts photographed using a 'jaunty angle', top, and restricted to a fixed focal length, bottom.*



## Something afoot

The next session discussed how to capture movement, with fun exercises that meant a tutor walked past one spot and what shutter speed was right to show a stationary foot with the leg actually blurring – try it, the results will really surprise you !! All I will say as a clue is, do not think that you need your usual short shutter speeds !

So our next stop was to go down to the seashore and capture the movement of the waves coming in on the high tide as the light levels were falling. As part of the assessment, the tutors helped us consider our composition using groynes as a lead-in. The message in this instance was that we needed to carefully consider what to include in our composition as well as what to exclude.

Now much of what has been covered might seem mundane or 'back to basics' – but they emphasised the importance of reminding yourself that these components in your photography need to be thought about before taking your images.

## Early start

The next morning it was agreed that we meet at 6.20am, but I managed to get to the beach at 6am, to capture



the light of the dawn sky and I loved the light reflecting on the huts. Then as the group arrived, immediately the sun came above the horizon, saw us move into more exercises. We used the beach huts once again, and used different positioning and postures to capture different images of these colourful buildings – and yes, of course we lay down on the sand to create converging verticals even with these low-level rectangles. Various images taken at that time are shown.

Once again, our stomachs were making demands on us, so we suspended work to have a great British breakfast fry-up.

Then it was back to our project exercises, and we travelled off in convoy to Snape, where our first task was to leave our cameras behind, and we had to envisage where we could see potential shots in the morning light. Here we were taught that taking pictures can mean being in the right position for the details and textures of buildings and scenery at the right time of day – and being prepared to retrace ones steps at a different time of day or even in a different season to capture the right image.

Then we were asked to pick up our cameras, and use one lens set a specific focal length (I used my 24-105mm at 35mm, which created



an effective focal length of 50mm) and see what effect that had on our results. Following that, we were told to use that same setting and take photos by pointing the camera at arm's length, not looking through the viewfinder – for me most of the results were catastrophic !

Our final project was to walk around the buildings in this village, and be again creative in photographing some defined shapes – squares, circles, diamonds, and triangles. This wasn't as easy as it sounded – one had to approach the area with an open mind – although an area set aside for building work proved a valuable help.

After completing the task, we showed the results to the tutors, who pointed out several areas for improvement – such as avoiding distracting backgrounds (see first red diamond shape) giving some room for the shape to move into, using diagonals to good effect, or completing the shape (see the circles made by some yellow hose), – and off we raced to try again !

All of us could see how our results improved in this second session, so the coaching worked – some examples from my comparisons are included. All I need to do now is to slow down, and remember some of the lessons !



*Pictures from the second day's exercises – looking for diamonds, circles, squares, triangles and other shapes in local buildings and details (above and right).*

*Below: a diamond shape found, but with poor framing leading to a distracting line at the top of the shot. Bottom, the same re-framed for a focused composition.*





# Get converted! The latest digital 'DG' compatible Teleplus MC7 2X delivers.

THE Kenko Teleplus MC7 teleconverter, using seven elements to deliver a far better level of correction than cheaper four-element designs, has been a favourite with Minolta photographers ever since it first appeared in the early 1980s. It was the first independent teleconverter to work with the new Minolta AF system, and alongside its simpler 1.4X companion it was compatible with most Alpha mount lenses.

The excellent APO converters made by Minolta and now by Sony for the system have a big disadvantage along with a high price. They can only be used on a few compatible lenses, nearly all 'white' APO teles. The original 80-200mm f/2.8 APO zoom, for example, could not be used with an APO converter and nor could any of the popular lenses like the 70-210mm or 75-300mm models. Trying to fit the converter to these lenses could damage it.

The Teleplus converter, in contrast, placed its glass elements much further back in the mount and can even be used with standard zooms or wide-angles, though there is no good reason to attempt this.

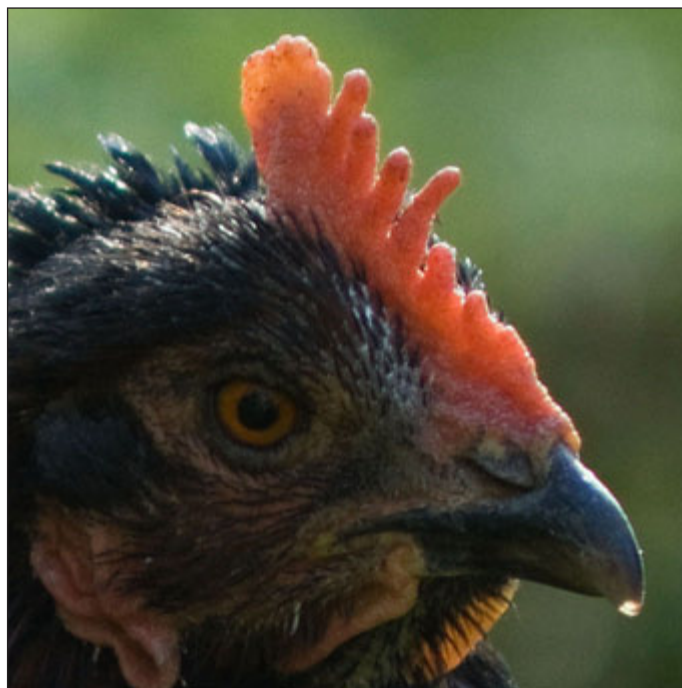
The latest version of the Teleplus MC7, which costs around the £100-£150 mark depending on whether you opt for an internet purchase or a High Street dealer, has eight electronic contacts and improvements to design and coatings to make it compatible with DSLRs and the Minolta/Sony Alpha 'D' mount.

But, be warned! You might assume it was therefore fully compatible with SSM ultrasonic motor focusing lenses. It appears NOT to be, and while you can manage to some kind of operation the AF action jitters and hunts in a way which will have any intelligent owner switching off the camera immediately. A brief test may not damage the valuable SSM lens, but the behaviour is clearly wrong and might do some damage.

The good news is that with the latest AF modules in most of the Alpha bodies, the 2X Teleplus is actually capable of reliable autofocus when fitted to the original 70-210mm f/4 AF lens (the 'beercan'). The combination is f/8, a two-stop loss – and in theory, Alpha cameras should not autofocus at f/8. They have a limit just a little faster than this, around f/7.1, to allow lenses like the 18-250mm f/3.5-6.3



*The 70-210mm f/4 lens from 1985 makes an excellent combination with the latest Kenko 2X DG converter, autofocus despite the f/8 maximum aperture on all the Sony bodies from the Alpha 100 to 900. Below, an enlarged section of the shot above taken at full aperture of f/8, at 420mm focal length, with the Alpha 900. This represents a section of a double page spread sized print.*



*The Teleplus fits neatly between the main lens and camera body. It is very well made (above) with metal mounts and a full set of D-compatible contacts.*

to operate reliably at their longest settings. Autofocus also works with the 500mm f/8 mirror lens, because it has a special design which actually resembles a faster lens optically.

Lenses which the Teleplus 2X works well with include the Konica Minolta 28-75mm f/2.8 (D), the 28-70mm f/2.8 G, 35mm f/2 and f/1.4, 50mm f/1.4 and f/1.7 standards, 50mm and 100mm macros, 85mm f/1.4, 100mm f/2, 100mm f/2.8 SF, 135mm f/2.8, 80-200mm f/2.8, 200mm f/2.8, 200mm f/4 APO G Macro, and 70-210mm f/4. It can also be used on the 300mm f/4 and any of the longer lenses except the 400mm f/4.5.

Though it seems unlikely, in good light it even retained AF on the Alpha 900 when coupled to the 500mm f/8 RF mirror, an f/16 combination which the Alpha 900 should never have been able to focus. It wasn't reliable on anything except the clearest fully lit target.

Performance depends on the camera body as well as conditions. Fitted to the 16-80mm, the 2X creates a sharp 32-160mm f/7-9. It will not focus at all on the Alpha 350 at the long end, but will focus on the Alpha 700 in anything except very poor light. Using it with the 18-250mm (an extreme abuse!) the Alpha 700 will autofocus as far as about 90mm on the marked scale (180mm equivalent) and you must switch to manual beyond this. Focusing is very difficult due to the way the manual focus works on this lens, but not impossible despite the 500mm at f/13 combination.

The Alpha 900, although it uses a similar AF module to the 700, is able to autofocus at smaller apertures. It gave reliable outdoor performance with the 2X and 28-105mm f/3.5-4.5, a useful 56-210mm combination. The incompatibility with SSM prevented any experiments with the 70-300mm, a pity as a functional 600mm would have been a great outcome.

The **Kenko Alpha-AF 2X Teleplus MC7 DG** (its full name) is a worthwhile addition to any travelling outfit and a fantastic companion to one or two lenses such as the 80-200mm and 135mm f/2.8 vintage AF designs. Maybe a new model will appear with SSM compatibility in the next year, we will be watching!



## THE HIDDEN LANDSCAPE, with DAVID LANE

*Two separate one-day workshops.  
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at Seaford, East Sussex and  
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Landscape is a very popular subject with photographers, but David Lane's vision of the subject is rather different to most – he seeks the intimate detail usually overlooked by others, often moving to within inches of his subject. This 'hidden' and rarely observed 'miniature landscape' can provide individual and highly artistic images. As this type of photography is not nearly as weather dependent as with scenic views, pictures can be taken almost anywhere and at any time – providing you have the ability to see them! David Lane lives in Sunderland. His work is highly acclaimed, with many of his pictures being held in private collections and galleries.

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*One day, at Seaford, East Sussex.  
21 March 2009 (Saturday)*

This event has established itself as a 'must' in the Quest programme, and the formula of mini presentations by participants, a competition and a talk by a leading photographer has proved very successful. This year, we are fortunate to have joint speakers, Barbie & Russell Lindsay, from East Anglia. They will judge the competition and entertain us with a talk on their distinctive and inventive photography. Picture Forum is the opportunity for everyone to show their work, and we invite short presentations of up to 15 minutes (about 25 pictures). These can be with prints, slides, or digital files.

The presentations occupy most of the day, and are a vital and enjoyable aspect of the programme. It is your chance to show your photography, so please bring a selection of your pictures. 'Slots' may, however, have to be restricted, according to numbers, so when booking, please say if you would like to give a presentation, and if so, your subject, and whether you wish to show prints, slides or by digital projection. If possible everyone will be accommodated, but in view of the increasing popularity of this feature, slots will be primarily allocated on a 'first come, first served basis', but also with regard to the need for a balanced programme.

For practical reasons, the competition is open for prints only – not more than one per person. Barbie & Russell will give a brief critique and appraisal on all entries. Prizes will be awarded for the best work, one to

# Quest Workshops 2009

## Workshops and photo courses run by Colin Westgate FRPS – Alpha system user, sponsored by Photoworld

be chosen by Barbie & Russell, and another by audience vote, plus runners up. This is always an interesting and exciting day of sharing pictures and experiences, where everyone can join in. Not to be missed!

*Price £25 – includes buffet lunch & refreshments (but not bar drinks!). Payable in full on booking, not eligible for 'early booking' discount arrangements.*

## HOW WE MAKE OUR EXHIBITION PICTURES, with BARBIE & RUSSELL LINDSAY

*One day, at Seaford, East Sussex.  
22 March 2009 (Sunday)*

Barbie and Russell (Rusty) are two of the UK's most prolific and successful exhibitors from East Anglia, with numerous major awards to their names. Their individual styles are distinctive and innovative, and the availability of digital techniques has greatly extended the scope of their seeing. Imagination and conception are significant features of their photography

In this workshop, they will show a selection of their pictures, and will clearly demonstrate, using digital projection, how these were produced. Here is an opportunity to learn new techniques from these very talented photographers and to take your own photography to new levels!

*Price £55 (deposit £20).*

## WINTER LANDSCAPE, GLENCOE and RANNOCH MOOR, SCOTLAND

*9-15 March 2009 (Monday to  
Sunday). Hotel based, 6 nights.*

The landscape in and around Glencoe contains some of the most magnificent and spectacular scenery anywhere in the United Kingdom, and at this time of the year, a covering of snow usually enhances the mountains. Many photographers never get the chance to see this stunning landscape in the winter, and a week of photography in the area should guarantee some good pictures! Of course, the weather plays a vital part, but even in bad conditions, it is usually possible to capture the forbidding mood of the mountains, with the rivers and waterfalls flowing well.

We will concentrate on Glencoe, Rannoch Moor, Glen Etive and Glen Nevis, and the price includes a trip on the cable car to Aonach Mor, near Ben Nevis, weather conditions

permitting. Evenings will be spent viewing pictures and sharing experiences. Our base will be the Loch Leven hotel, set in a lovely location by the side of the loch. Travel arrangements will be to fly to Edinburgh, where we will pick up a minibus for the onward journey to Glencoe.

*Price £745 (deposit £150) Single supplement £75. (8 places)  
Price includes accommodation (dinner + b&b) and minibus travel. Flights are not included. The quoted price is for a shared, en suite, room and a supplement is payable for single occupation. If you require a single room, this must be made clear when booking and is subject to availability.*

## SOUTH WEST IRELAND – DINGLE and THE BURREN (two centre trip)

*24 March to 2 April 2009  
(Tuesday to Thursday week).  
Guest House based, 9 nights, 6  
at Inch and 3 on the Burren*

The main location for this trip is at Inch Strand, on the Dingle peninsula. This is one of the most stunning locations in the country, with over three miles of sandy beach, with mountains in the background. From here, we will explore the peninsula and surrounding area, including a visit to fascinating Dingle town itself. As well as landscape, there will be plenty of other subject matter, including the colourful shops and houses, and equally colourful characters! For the second location, we will move north to The Burren, where we will photograph the extraordinary terrain and coastline. The friendliness of the Irish is renowned and we can be sure of a warm welcome. Travel arrangements will be to fly to Shannon, which is convenient for both locations. Flights are available from London airports and we will collect a bus locally..

*Price £875\* (deposit £150)  
Single supplement £85. (8 places)  
Price includes B&B accommodation and minibus travel. It does not include the cost of flights, lunch and evening meals. The latter will be taken at the nearby Beach Restaurant. Accommodation is on a shared room basis, but twins as singles are usually available, subject to a supplement of £85. \*The price is based*

*on exchange rates in December 2008. A refund or surcharge will be applicable should the rate change by 10% or more either way.*

## WESTER ROSS and DURNES (two centre trip)

*(New Quest Destination!)  
19-2 April 2009*

*(Sunday to Monday week) 8  
nights, 4 at each location.*

This trip takes us to some of the most remote landscape in the UK. Our first centre is Dundonnell, at the end of Little Loch Broom. We will spend four nights there before travelling to one of the most northern parts of Scotland for another four nights. Here the beaches in the Durness area make outstanding subjects for the camera, with rocky outcrops in dramatic settings. The surging surf can be spectacular, with translucent green rollers crashing onto the golden sands. Travel will be by air to Inverness, and thence by minibus.

*Price £875 (deposit £150) Single supplement £110. (8 places)  
Price includes, dinner B&B and packed lunches at Dundonnell, and dinner B&B at our second location plus minibus travel. It does not include cost of flights. The price is based on shared en suite twin rooms. A supplement is payable for single occupancy.*

## ICELAND

*2-13 May 2009 (Saturday  
to Wednesday week), Hotel  
based tour, 12 nights.*

Following two very successful trips, this amazing island is now a 'must' in the Quest programme. Iceland has a unique and often bizarre landscape. This includes magnificent waterfalls, black sand beaches, lava fields, glaciers, icebergs, active volcanoes, mud pools, hot springs, geysers, and much more. The itinerary has been arranged to allow ample time for in depth photography of these exciting features, although we cannot guarantee an eruption! The tour will take in much of the island, with the exception of the interior, which is not accessible at this time of the year, or the remote north west, which would require an extra few days. We will, therefore, travel round the island, staying for one, or sometimes two, nights at hotels en route. This will



enable us to cover as much ground as possible while minimising travel time, and allow ample time at prime photographic locations. The light can be stunning and furthermore, as Iceland is full of surprises, expect plenty of unscheduled stops.

With a population of a mere 300,000 the island is never crowded, even in the capital, Reykjavik. At this time of the year, the temperature will be similar to March in the UK, and is unlikely to be excessively cold. Sometimes it can even be warm enough for t-shirts! It will not get very dark either, so if you have enough stamina, you could photograph for much of the night!

The schedule is to fly to Keflavik, near Reykjavik, Iceland's international airport, and then to drive east via Thingvellir, Geysir, Gullfoss, along the south coast via Skaftafell and the astonishing glacial lagoon at Jokulsarlon. We will then head north, diverting to one of the east coast

fiords, then continuing through the eastern highlands to Myvatn, where there are thermal springs. From there, we will head west and then south, ending in the Reykjavik area. The hotels are clean and comfortable, and particularly if you like lamb or fish, you will enjoy the food!

Flights are currently available from, Stansted (Iceland Express), Heathrow (Icelandair) and Glasgow.

*Price £1875 (deposit £400). Single supplement £375. (8 places). Accommodation (B&B) and travel in Iceland included. Flights and other meals are not included. It is advisable to book flights early to get the best deals, but do not do this without first confirming that the tour will run. Travel insurance essential. Due to great uncertainty with exchange rates at the time this programme was prepared, Quest reserves the right to charge a supplement in the event of any significant appreciation of the Icelandic kronur.*

**Colin Westgate's QUEST workshops, sponsored by Photoworld, have moved to Coopers Cottage, 154 Coast Road, West Mersea, Mersea Island, Essex CO5 8NX. Telephone 01206 384315. Mobile 07887 887101. email questphoto@btinternet.com. See the new website [www.questphoto.co.uk](http://www.questphoto.co.uk) for details of photo trips and the full 2008 programme.**

## Duncan McEwan:

### PHOTOWORLD SPONSORED LECTURES 2009

Photoworld subscribers will be admitted to these events on the same terms as members of the societies hosting them. Please contact Duncan McEwan in advance to notify your intention to attend, and receive further details on the venue.

#### February

- 5th Paisley Natural History Society – South Africa & New Zealand  
Paisley Museum & Art Gallery, 7.30pm
- 23rd Auchterarder CC - I Never Thought I Would...  
Auchterarder Parish Church Hall, 7.30pm
- 25th Armadale CC - Scotland: Land of Light  
Blackridge Community Centre, 7.30pm

#### March

- 2nd Dundee PS - I Never Thought I Would...  
St Paul's Church Hall, Dundee, 7.15pm
- 3rd Lesmahagow PS - Landscape Commandments  
Glebe Gardens, Lesmahagow, 7.30pm
- 5th Falkirk CC - I Never Thought I Would...  
Erskine Church Hall, Falkirk, 7.30pm
- 9th Harrowgate PS - I Never Thought I Would...  
Friends Hall, Homestead Road, Harrowgate, 7.30pm
- 10th Normanton PS – Scotland: Land of Light  
Altofts Community Centre, 7.30pm
- 11th Penrith & District CC – Special Brew 2  
Quaker Meeting House, Penrith, 7.30pm
- 13th Workington CC - I Never Thought I Would...  
Helena Thomson Museum, Workington, 7.30pm
- 22nd Photoworld Club meeting, 10.00am-4.30pm  
Edinburgh Photographic Society, Great King Street
- 26th Paisley Colour Photographic Club - I Never Thought I Would...  
William McMaster Centre, Renfrew, 7.30pm

**Duncan McEwan:** 01505-612673 – email [mcewan@dunarden.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:mcewan@dunarden.fsnet.co.uk), website [www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk](http://www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk)

# Duncan McEwan

## photo activities

## 2009 programme

### KINTAIL, W. ROSS

28 March-3 April 2009

Kintail is one of the finest mountain areas in Scotland and the Isle of Skye is only 20 minutes away from the Kintail Lodge Hotel where the trips will be based. Eilean Donan Castle is even closer. A full day on Skye, probably to Elgol, should be one of the highlights. On-site E6 film processing. Inversnaid: 01877-386254; [info@inversnaidphoto.com](mailto:info@inversnaidphoto.com); [www.inversnaidphoto.com](http://www.inversnaidphoto.com)

### ISLE OF EIGG

11-16 May 2009

Eigg is one of the gems of the Inner Hebrides and offers fantastic photographic opportunities in a small area. The coastline north of Laig Bay is probably the finest in Scotland with magnificent views across to Rum. A visit to Muck is also planned. Based in the Glebe Barn (no single accommodation). Light and Land: 01432-839111; [contactus@lightandland.co.uk](mailto:contactus@lightandland.co.uk); [www.lightandland.co.uk](http://www.lightandland.co.uk)

### HARRIS & LEWIS

6-13 June 2009

Explore the beauty of Lewis (4 nights) and Harris (3 nights) - fantastic sandy beaches, dunes, machair, boulder shores, sea cliffs, sea stacks, as well as bleak peat moors. Photograph iconic landmarks such as the Callanish Standing Stones at dawn and dusk. Marvel at the most stunning stretches of sand to be found anywhere. Evening light anywhere along the West coast can be absolutely stunning. On-site E6 film processing. Inversnaid: 01877-386254; [info@inversnaidphoto.com](mailto:info@inversnaidphoto.com); [www.inversnaidphoto.com](http://www.inversnaidphoto.com)

### ISLE OF SKYE

10-17 September 2009

Skye offers everything a landscape photographer could wish for – the Cuillin, Old Man of Storr, the Quiraing, Neist Point. Loch Slapin & Blaven, Elgol and many more. A trip to Loch Coruisk in the heart of the Black Cuillin may also be undertaken. Based in Portree (4 nights) and Kyle of Lochalsh (3 nights) with time in Kintail (Eilean Donan Castle etc). Co-led with Lee Frost.

Photo Adventures: 01665-830523; [info@leefrost.co.uk](mailto:info@leefrost.co.uk); [www.photoadventures.co.uk](http://www.photoadventures.co.uk)

### ORKNEY

26 September - 3 October 2009

Orkney is steeped in Norse and Viking history, as well as having some of the finest Neolithic sites in Europe – Skara Brae, Ring of Brodgar, Standing Stones of Stenness. The Atlantic coast offers wild, dramatic scenery – geos, caves, sea stacks, arches, the cliffs. A highlight will be the visit to the Island of Hoy where Rackwick Bay is considered one of the most beautiful places in Orkney. Light and Land: 01432-839111; [contactus@lightandland.co.uk](mailto:contactus@lightandland.co.uk); [www.lightandland.co.uk](http://www.lightandland.co.uk)

### TORRIDON

8-13 October 2009

Torridon has become a firm favourite with landscape photographers due to wonderful mountains, glens, lochs and coast. There is no better time to see it than in late Autumn when, apart from the colours, wonderful atmospheric conditions can occur. Based in Gairloch. Co-led with Lee Frost. Photo Adventures: 01665-830523; [info@leefrost.co.uk](mailto:info@leefrost.co.uk); [www.photoadventures.co.uk](http://www.photoadventures.co.uk)

### ASSYNT AND N.W. HIGHLANDS

17-23 October 2009

Based in Ullapool, this trip will explore the areas of Coigach and Assynt where there are many distinctively shaped mountains including Stac Polly and Sulven. Loch Assynt offers Ardvreck Castle and the tree-clad islands will prove irresistible. North of Lochinver is a wonderful coastline that includes fantastic sands and the rugged headland of Stoer Point. On-site E6 film processing. Inversnaid: 01877-386254; [info@inversnaidphoto.com](mailto:info@inversnaidphoto.com); [www.inversnaidphoto.com](http://www.inversnaidphoto.com)

**Bookings should be made with the individual organisers. Information can be had from them or from: Duncan McEwan: 01505-612673; [mcewan@dunarden.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:mcewan@dunarden.fsnet.co.uk); [www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk](http://www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk)**

