photoworld

spring07

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As ever, global warming means that Spring has probably come and gone in some parts of the UK – it was three weeks early in our northerly regions – so with luck you are enjoying Summer right now. Our theme for this issue is appropriately very much flower and garden angled, as it looks like being a great year for gardens.

We have a good meeting in Edinburgh with over 40 photographers present in March, but it was a sign of the times that a good few were old friends now using Canon or other makes rather than Minolta or Sony. Over in Austria the former Minolta Club has restyled itself (very ambitiously) as Foto Club Austria but is almost entirely supported by Sony. It would be wonderful to see similar support – including an expanded hire service which in Austria now includes Sony A100 bodies and a batch of new Sony and CZ lenses – happen in the UK. We can only survive a limited time without backing or new incoming members. Our thanks go to Sigma for supporting this edition.

Each magazine issue will be placed on our websites in PDF form, so if you lose a copy yourself, it's easy to acquire a printable version by downloading. The Winter (January) 2007 edition is now downloadable from **www.photoclubalpha.com**.

– David & Shirley Kilpatrick

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Photoworld magazine is an independent quarterly from Icon Publications Ltd which provides free membership of the Photoworld Club UK. The aim of the Club is to provide support services, information, inspiration and activities for owners of Minolta, Konica Minolta, Seagull, Sony Alpha and other equipment compatible with the Minolta SR, MC, MD, VS, AF, AF-xi and AF-D mounts. Membership of the Club is not dependent on subscription and you may also sign up, receiving emailed information only but no magazine, through www.photostore-uk.com, www.minoltaclub.co.uk or www.photoclubalpha.com. Subscriptions cost £19.95 for four issues (UK/Europe), £23.95 (Rest of World), payable to Icon Publications Ltd, Maxwell Place, Maxwell Lane, Kelso, Scottish Borders TD5 7BB This publication has no connection with Konica Minolta Holdings or Sony Corporation, or the brands mentioned. The logo typeface is 'Minolta Classic' designed by Justin Bailey.

Alpha 300 and 500 in pipeline?

Photo courtesy of www.photopolis.pl

According to the best reports of Internet 'detectives' assembling translations from different media attending a Sony press conference which was held in March, two new DSLRs seen as prototypes or mock-ups at the earlier PMA show will be launched in the next 18 months.

The 'Alpha 300' *(working out the model name from product numbers used by Sony for their prototypes)* is likely to be announced in July and go on sale in time for the seasonal build-up from October. It is a beefed-up version of the A100, with a slightly larger body and probably some more professional features in terms of weatherproofing and controls. Though there has been talk of a new or larger sensor, it seems most likely that the A300 will use either a revision of the A100's 10 megapixel CCD, or a 12 megapixel CMOS sensor similar to the Sony products used in the Nikon D2X and the Sony DSC R-1. This will be backed up by a new BIONZ processor, and given the criticism levelled at Sony for the high ISO noise levels of the Alpha 100 we can assume maximum attention will be paid to getting a clean result at 1600.

A vertical grip is included in the specification for the 300 from the start, and mock-ups were shown with the grip fitted. The absence of such a grip for the Alpha 100, as with the Dynax 5D, has put some potential buyers off.

The 'Alpha 500' is thought to be a full frame DSLR, or very close to full frame – it may be something like 1.2X in order to leave sufficient margin to have SSS anti-shake. The aim-point for any full frame sensor is now 22 megapixels, since Canon has hinted that the next generation of EOS 1Ds will go up from 16 to 22. The Alpha 500 would probably be launched at *photokina* 2008 with immediate availability.

The 500 has no built-in flash, and the pentaprism housing is very retro – pointed and hugging the glass inside. The size of the prism says 'full frame' but the mockup shown may be a red herring. Sony could be seeing how their dealers and the press react to such an unusual design. There is plenty of time for the final shape to be very different.

The '500' may have onboard GPS position tracking and WiFi picture transmission too. Both are features the Japanese industry is keen to add to professional DSLRs.

Both cameras, in line with earlier Sony statements, appear to reduce the dependence on mechanical controls. The 500 has a top plate LCD and only a single mode dial with PASM; the 300 has Scene types and Auto on the mode dial. New 3-inch large rear displays will be a certainty as this is the next phase for review/preview LCDs. Live composition on the rear screen, with mirror up, is also a likely feature.

Sony also showed mockups of eight new lenses, known to include a full frame 24-70mm *f*2.8 Carl Zeiss and a new superior grade 70-300mm *f*4.5-5.6. Five lenses will be released in the next year including an 18-250mm *f*3.5-6.3 DT.

The reintroduction of the Macro Flash four-tube ringlight type head may be tabled for later this year.

Eventually Sony should have a line-up of five DSLR models, since this is considered necessary to compete across the marketplace.

– DK

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 right). 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

HELPLINES AND INFORMATION

Authorised & warranty repairs, assistance and enquiries

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**

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

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**

Our website www.minoltaclub.co.uk has a full directory of useful links for downloading software or obtaining help, on its front page. 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:

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

Sony GPS CS1 map tracker

We tried out a satellite positioning gadget which can pin your digital shots to their location

The first question anyone asks about the Sony GPS-CS1 device is whether it will work with their non-Sony digital camera. The answer is 'yes' but you may need to buy some extra software, as it only comes with software to link up to Sony *Picture Motion Browser*.

The program is only provided with the Sony Alpha 100 and two Sony printers DPP-FP55 and FP35, but like most image-browsing utilities it works with all JPEGs no matter what camera was used to shoot them. The CS1 installer CD and a Sony website download will also update *Cybershot Viewer* and replace it with *PMB*.

If you have Sony software and a GPS-CS1 unit with its installer CD, you will be able to use any digital camera with the satellite tracking system.

First you have to understand that GPS positional recorder units are not magic. They can not provide any information for shots you took before you bought the unit, or any that you take without wearing or carrying the little pod and having it switched on. If the satellite signal is lost – which happens surprisingly often – any pictures taken during these periods can't be linked to the data.

You must have a position log file created by the GPS-CS1, which automatically includes the time indicated by the satellite, and EXIF data compliant JPEGs taken with a camera while the unit was switched on, time-stamped to match periods when your map co-ordinates were recorded.

A single NiMH or high power lithium AA cell will run the CS1 for 14 hours, but regular alkaline batteries run down in minutes and must not be used. You switch the CS1 on, aim it more or less at the sky, and watch until the light flashing twice every second (searching) changes to once every two seconds (recording). Then you just let it dangle from your camera strap or your belt via its carabiner clip, or pop it in the top of your rucksack or camera bag.

It will record your position every 15 seconds, as long as it is officially aiming upwards. Since it hangs down and tends to rotate inwards, it may be orientation which causes signal loss, and mounting it on a backpack might be far more reliable.

Back at home, with the CS1 still switched off after its day's work, you plug it in to your PC via a USB cable supplied, and the *GPS Image Tracker* software automatically launches and extracts the positional log file. It also clears the CS1 memory ready for another day's use.

The log file is extremely small, so you could store tens of thousands of them in the space taken by a single photo. Before you associate image files with the CS1 data using *GPS Image Tracker* software, you should check that the time and date set on your camera matched the time-zone for shooting. If you have wrongly entered the time, or forgotten to change the hour, *Picture Motion Browser* has a useful 'Batch Date Change' function which lets you correct the entire shoot instantly to the nearest second.

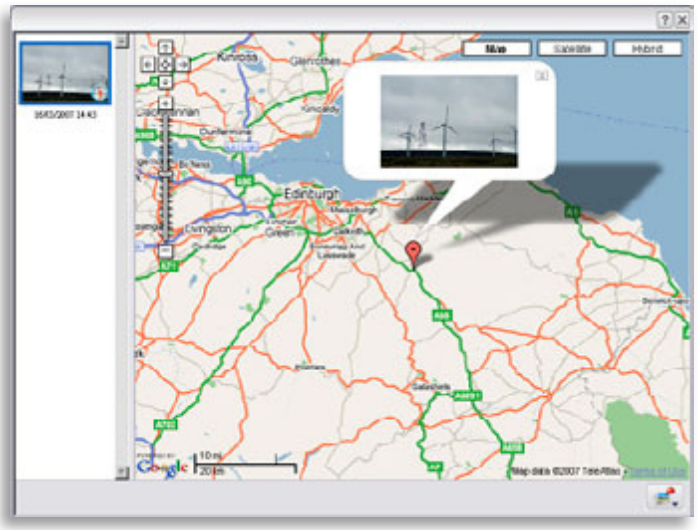
With the time corrected, you then use *Image Tracker* to associate GPS data with the files. It will identify those shots for which there is no logged position within 15 seconds, and allows you to remove them from the list. Finally, you save the GPS map data back into the 'metadata' fields of your JPEGs. Once this is done, your images have a permanent record of where they were taken embedded in each individual shot.

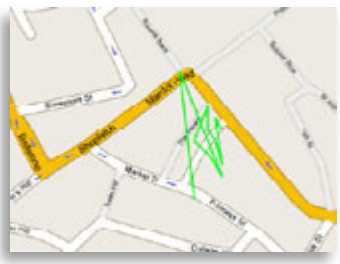
The last part of the sequence is to view the images in *Picture Motion Browser*. This program was updated with a plug-in by the installation software, and now shows a small symbol on each thumbnail which has GPS data. A map icon appears on the taskbar of the program.

Clicking this icon when a GPS-active image is selected takes you directly to a Google-powered on line map, which starts off zoomed out to show an entire region. Your shot is shown as a thumbnail tacked to the map like a small flag. When you zoom in, you can go down as close as a single field, street or square and read street names, rivers and similar features from the map. It's the same kind of software which is used in Satnav units for cars.

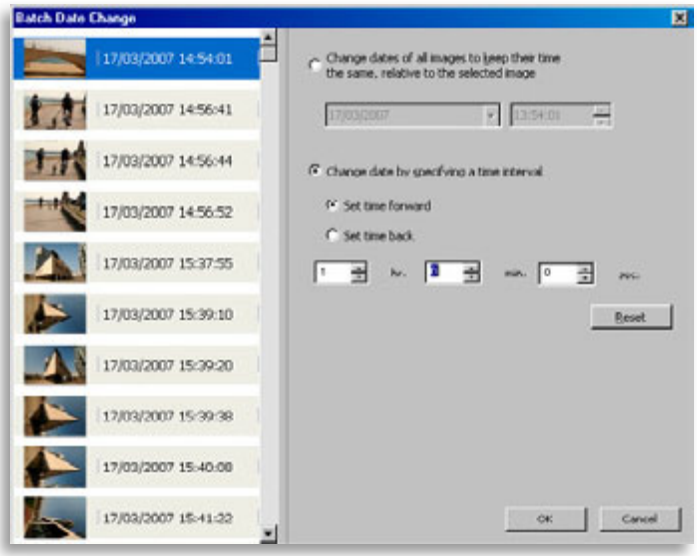
What if you do not own a Sony Alpha 100 camera? Chris Breeze's excellent independent raw converter and file manager,

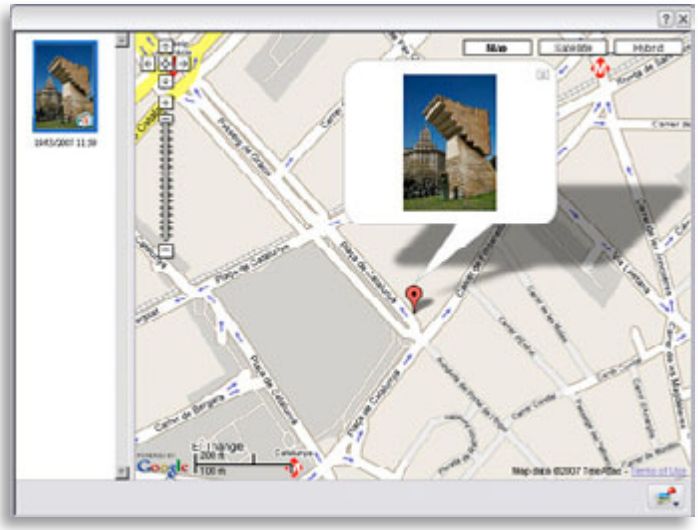
Right: two scales of map view, photograph taken standing next to car on A68, Dun Law Wind Farm near Edinburgh. The GPS data has placed me in a field a good way from the actual position of shooting.



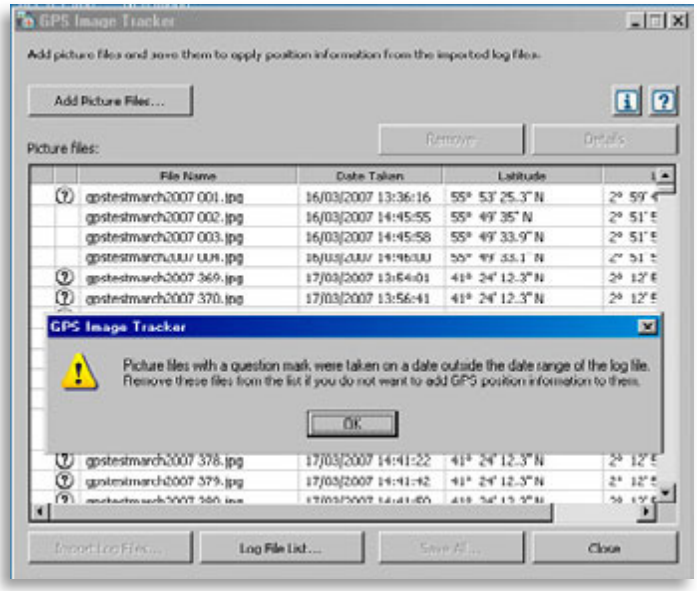


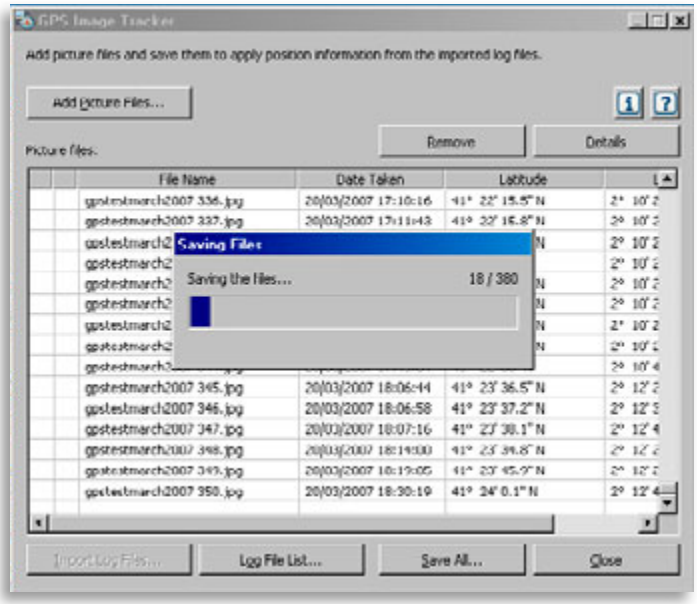
BreezeBrowser Pro log import, above, and a track created by the CS1, left (courtesy of Ian Leonard).





Above: a function within Picture Motion Browser allows correction of the shooting time – to within a second – for images where the digital camera's date or time has been set incorrectly. Below: GPS Image Tracker software warns that some of the images were taken when no positional data was received, and lets you remove them from the list for data-embedding. After doing so, the software shows a progress bar recording the data into the image set.
Right: slight lack of precision in this Barcelona shot could be due to the 15 second timing interval. The statue is in the lower middle of the grey square, not in the two-lane road. Bottom example: the GPS unit managed to track shots three floors underground in a shopping mall. Open air is no indication of signal reliability!





BreezeBrowser Pro, supports the GPS-CS1. Visit **www.breezesys.com** for informaton. The latest downloader works with the GPS-CS1 log files (manually downloaded and saved) to add data to images as you copy them from your card or camera. Unlike the Sony software, it will embed GPS data in raw files.

No doubt many more programs will arrive offering a GPS support with on-line linking to maps, and in Sony's literature, it's made clear that the support provided now may not be permanent. A different map provider may be involved, or it's possible a subscription might be needed to a map service.

Some digital SLRs now support add-on GPS devices – the Fuji S5 Pro is one – and with Sony clearly aware of this game, I reckon we will see a GPS module option for a future Sony DSLR in the next year or two. That will then record the position of your shots from the day you buy the camera, embedded in the file from the instant you shoot.

In practice

Testing the GPS-CS1 in Scotland and Barcelona, we found that drop out of signal was common and on any given shoot a quarter of the shots might be untracked. It was very rewarding and interesting to see the map pop up for others.

The accuracy of position was never all that wonderful; the statue to the first President of Catalunya was positioned in the road outside El Corte Ingles, and my car appears to have been in the middle of a field not on the A68 (see examples). The error seemed to be variable, and was not due to the 15 second timing margin in all cases. The field off the A68 was never on my itinerary!

For the price – £99 from SonyStyle UK or Sony shops, under £70 from some internet sources in the UK, £45 from Hong Kong – this little device could be a great asset. I would not use it in city streets where I knew perfectly well where I was, or at any fixed location event. Wandering the hills, getting out of the car for a landscape view on a long drive, travelling in unknown villages and beaches abroad – that's where the GPS reference can help you pin down the place.

This PC-only, slightly flaky and rather restricted technology is of course rocket science but it's the sort of rocket science we can all use!
– DK

Using film filters on digital

Real filters have fallen into disuse on digital SLRs because you can always create filter effects, in colour or mono, using software.

However, many old filters you may have are still useful. Apart from regularly fitting a UV, Haze or Skylight filter as lens protection when there's dust or rain around, and using a polariser to control reflections and sky effects, you may have colour conversion filters or ones intended for black and white.

The most useful colour conversion for digital is the B12 or 80B blue filter for shooting daylight film in tungsten light. Digital camera Auto White Balance often leaves a strong orange cast. Fitting the blue filter allows AWB to work perfectly. However, setting Tungsten balance manually can be as effective. We've done some tests which show that you get half to one stop extra dynamic range by using the filter. Preset and Auto white balance works by boosting one or more of the colour channels, and this always increases noise and lowers latitude. For top quality tungsten light shots, use an 80B and set Daylight or Auto WB on the camera.

Yellow filters are not much use on digital with the camera set to make B&W JPEGs, and even orange ones have little effect. An 8X red filter can change the result , more like an orange filter on film. It's well worth trying with in-camera B&W. So, for that matter, is a Green filter (G0). It's surprising how much extra contrast in earth, stone and flesh tones a Green produces in a B&W shot taken on the Dynax 5D.

I found that it is necessary to use maximum contrast on in-camera JPEGs and you absolutely must bracket exposures with any coloured filter. Otherwise the results can be so far wrong the JPEG is useless.

Remember, fitting a coloured filter also affects the raw file. I have had some superb red-filter landscapes shot as raw with an 8X Red in place, then processed to monochrome. They are much smoother and have less image noise than 'almost infra red' versions done using *Photoshop Channel Mixer + Monochrome*, the usual method.

So, experiment with your old B&W and colour film filters – they have not yet been made totally redundant by digital!

– DK


Auto White Balance


AWB plus 80B filter


Tungsten WB preset


5D colour JPEG


5D BW JPEG


BW JPEG + 8X RED


5D BW JPEG


BW JPEG + G0 GREEN


BW JPEG + 8X RED


NORMAL COLOUR VIEW


BW from RAW with 8X RED

Creating a digital graduated filter

David Anderson started with a 5D raw file

One of the advantages of shooting with a digital SLR camera is that it opens the possibility for the photographer to sometimes recover the details from a photo that initially appear hopelessly lost.

As an example I visited the ancient village of Culross on a bright sunny spring day, when I noticed the contrast between the old Palace and the industrial petrochemical plant at Grangemouth on the south side of the River Forth. Although I tried a few exposure bracketed shots it was clear from reviewing on the Dynax 5D's LCD that I was not going to get what I wanted from one exposure. Perhaps if I carried a set of split neutral density filters I could have attained my desired result, but that was not an option for me.

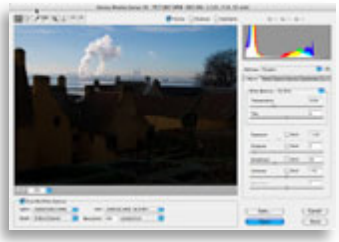
Fortunately I had taken the photos in RAW +JPG so I was able to process the RAW file in *Adobe Camera Raw* and obtain two different 'exposures' from the one photo.

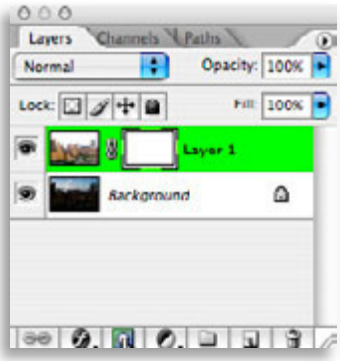
Here is the procedure I used:

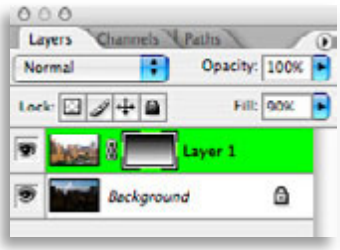
Adobe Camera Raw allowed me to adjust the exposure slider in the image settings, I ended up choosing one version at +3EV and the other at -1EV. These examples appear as screen shots below.

These two files were saved as 8 bit PSD files and then opened in *Photoshop*.

Using the **Move Tool**, I held the Shift key down and dragged the +3EV version on top of the -1EV version. Now I hadtwo layers.







Next I selected the +3EV layer and created a **Layer Mask** using the icon in the layers palette *(at the bottom of the screen shot, left)*.

I then selected the Gradient Tool and chose a linear gradient *(lower left)*.

I dragged a line from the top of the frame to the bottom, while holding the Shift key down to constrain the line to vertical.

This produced the desired gradual filter effect. The image was further processed with the Velvia Vision plug-in and then a small amount of USM was applied to taste.

The resulting photo *(below)* now showed the detail in both the dark foreground and the bright sky to the south, much more as I remembered the scene.

Carl Zeiss Vario-Sonnar DT ƒ3.5-4.5 16-80mm ZA

My Sony Carl Zeiss 16-80mm 'superzoom' arrived from Warehousexpress – the best price I could find and one of the very best dealers in terms of service – packed rather minimally for a £465 purchase. The neat Sony orange and silver box was wrapped in a layer of bubblepack and popped into a jiffy bag, that was all.

The inside of a postbag is a vicious environment and you never quite know what kind of heavy stuff your treasured consignment is going to meet there. There was a hint of a dint on one corner of the box. However, the lens appeared well protected inside.

The package you get from Sony is comprehensive. In addition to a CZ quality control certificate stating that your lens – fully compatible with the Dynax 7D and 5D – meets Zeiss standards you get the usual warranty papers, a soft drawstring lens case, front and rear caps and a superb lens hood. This shade, unlike earlier Minolta designs, is not ribbed inside but painted in about the deadest matt black you can imagine.

Canon lenses, as sold, normally include just front and rear caps – no case or pouch, no hood. They may now be addressing this parsimonious approach but for many years part of the small price difference between Canon and Minolta equivalents has been the lens hood, sometimes a lens case. Magazines making price comparisons often fail to add the price of the essential extra – the hood – on to the Canon RRP. Nikon include hoods, as do Pentax and Olympus. All Sony lenses, like all Minolta lenses before them, come complete with hood. The value of the hood and pouch included in the CZ 16-80mm package is around £50 RRP judging from average costs for similar 'separates'.

The new Zeiss lens cap, like the Zeiss side badge on the lens, is a great touch added to the Sony branding. It works the same way as the earlier caps, with clip-in spring action easily operated when the lens hood is fitted for action.

The 16-80mm ƒ3.5-4.5 is equivalent to a full frame 24-120mm ƒ3.5-4.5, so it is no surprise to find it is larger than the 24-105mm ƒ3.5-4.5 which has been one of the best of the late Minolta designs. This lens is due to reappear in Sony form as well. Even so, it uses the same 62mm filters and feels much the same in the hand.

The new CZ lenses are all fully compatible with older Minolta and Konica Minolta bodies but this zoom is for digital only

The Vario-Sonnor is designated as a DT lens, which means it will only cover the APS-C 1.5X factor format used for digital SLRs. I tested it on a film camera body and the coverage within its image circle is exceptional, showing almost zero falloff in brightness or sharpness right up to the limit of a crisply defined circle. It appears critically sharp even at full aperture – at all focal lengths

The Zeiss designed and quality controlled lenses come with a logo branded lens cap and a neat side badge

The style of the 16-80mm is cylindrical with no hint of softened corners or tapering. The barrel extends when zooming to 80mm. It is larger than the 24-105mm.

Before moving on to the mechanical aspects of the lens its optical pedigree is worth mentioning. It is a totally new Vario-Sonnar design, despite apparent similarity to the fixed zoom fitted to the Sony DSC R-1. It may be related to both the 24-105mm and the R-1's lens but it is not identical to either in detail.

Optically, it is simply stunning. It's head and shoulders above any wide to portrait zoom currently on the market, outperforming the 24-105mm but also beating independents with

The package you get from Sony is comprehensive. Below: the lens cap can be fitted and removed with the hood in place.

ambitious specifications. The whole emphasis is on sharpness, contrast and high MTF. It delivers the kind of the image you expect to see from a fixed focal length like the 28mm *f*2, the 50mm *f*1.7 or the 100mm macro.

Mechanically, it sucks. Sorry to say it, but the feel and handling of this lens are far below the expectations held by anyone who has used the Sony R-1 or pretty much any other Zeiss labelled SLR lens ever made. It is made of plastic, and when you operate the zoom you feel plastic on plastic. It may not be. It may be metal inside. But it feels like plastic all the way.

Even in the best samples, early buyers report that the image will jump to the side during some focusing actions, and that using the manual focus ring has the same effect. The front unit does not feel secure, and if you walk along, the lens emits a slightly clunking noise as if the barrels are able to move a bit.

Below: Coldstream town, 80mm at f11, from 1.5 kilometres distance, hand-held at 1/200th on the A100. Enlarged detail shows part of a 24 x 36 inch print from the file represents 150 dpi printing resolution.

Since my purchase had taken a slight knock in transit, I suspected it was damaged. A week of corresponding with other new buyers on Internet confirmed that varying levels of slop, focus shift when the zoom ring is touched, image position shift during focusing and poor response to manual focus occur with this rather expensive lens (RRP well over £500).

Two weeks into shooting, and the tolerances had got worse. It became impossible to zoom back from 80mm without the image going out of focus and needing a new AF-initiation, and the biting crispness I had observed in the first images was replaced at random by a visibly poor centering of the groups. This gives even a sharp image a slight directional quality. Warehousexpress agreed immediately to take the lens back and provide a new replacement, also taking on board my comments about the packaging used, which surprised their operator. With six lenses due in and six on backorder, mine was not going to be immediate. I did not opt for a repair under warranty as I don't believe any repair service is capable of returning a lens of this quality in precisely the same state as a perfect new one. These optics are too complex to centre, collimate and test in a repair environment.

So, having completed this article, I must wait for a new example of

the lens which will hopefully be perfect. If it isn't – if there is any hint of a sudden focus shift when the zoom ring is lightly moved, or a jerk in image position when focusing – the 16-80mm despite all its qualities will not be in my outfit.

My problem is that no other lens I have produces results like this. When the 16-80mm was performing – AF locked on and no need to reframe, zoom or tweak the focus – it tranformed the quality of Alpha 100 images. Unlike many other lenses, it matches or exceeds the demands of a 10 megapixel sensor and even makes 6 megapixel shots look better.

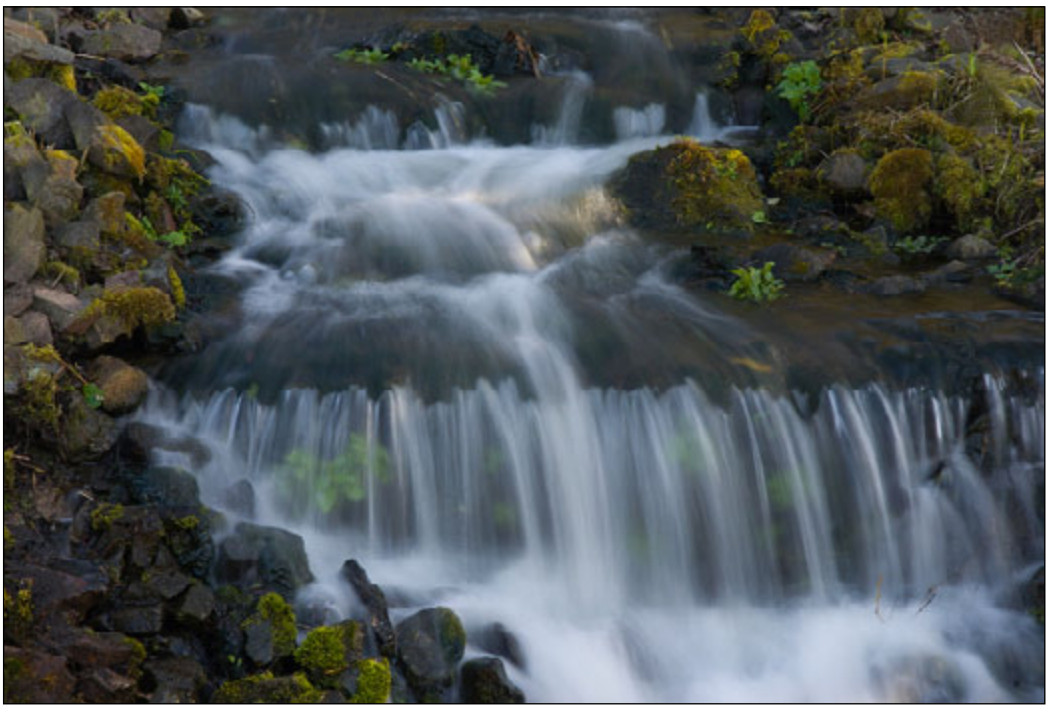
But… I'm not living with a Zeiss lens that doesn't feel as if it will be perfect in a month's time. I expect a Zeiss lens to feel perfect in ten years' time. I don't expect it to feel like this when new, and I do not remember the samples at photokina feeling the same.

I would not put anyone off buying this lens – nothing else offers the same range or the same bitingly sharp image – but you should be aware it's not in the same build class as the Zeiss ZA 85mm *f*1.4 or the ZA 135mm *f*1.8 with their heavier barrels.

The Zeiss T* coating is entirely unlike former Minolta coatings, and gives the lens a much higher overall contrast with saturated, very neutral colours. You may find it a little clinical for portraits and a soft-focus filter plus some warming-up of white balance is advised. It has very good resistance to flare, but produces visible chromatic fringes at both extremes. These are readily corrected when processing raw files using *Adobe Camera Raw* (-30 at 16mm, +20 at 80mm, are good startpoints for red/cyan fringe correction). Distortion is noticeable at both extremes too, but in horizontal format architectural views like room interiors at 16mm it is not visible. Anything other than the thinnest of filters may produce a shadow in the extreme corners at 16mm, just visible in the abbey shot.

This lens has a performance which combined with reasonable speed and good close focusing should make it *the* reason to choose the Alpha system. It must be the ultimate travel companion. It's a pity that mail order could be a lottery if my experience is in any way typical.

– David Kilpatrick



Top: Melrose Abbey at 16mm, no corrections applied, shows the excellent landscape format distortion optimisation. Above: hand held at 1/2 second with SSS, the Zeiss contrast brings life to subjects like this. Right: 'bokeh' in an 80mm focal length close-up, 1/40 at f7.1. The unopened buds on the left are in the foreground. This is very smooth differential focus indeed.

gallery

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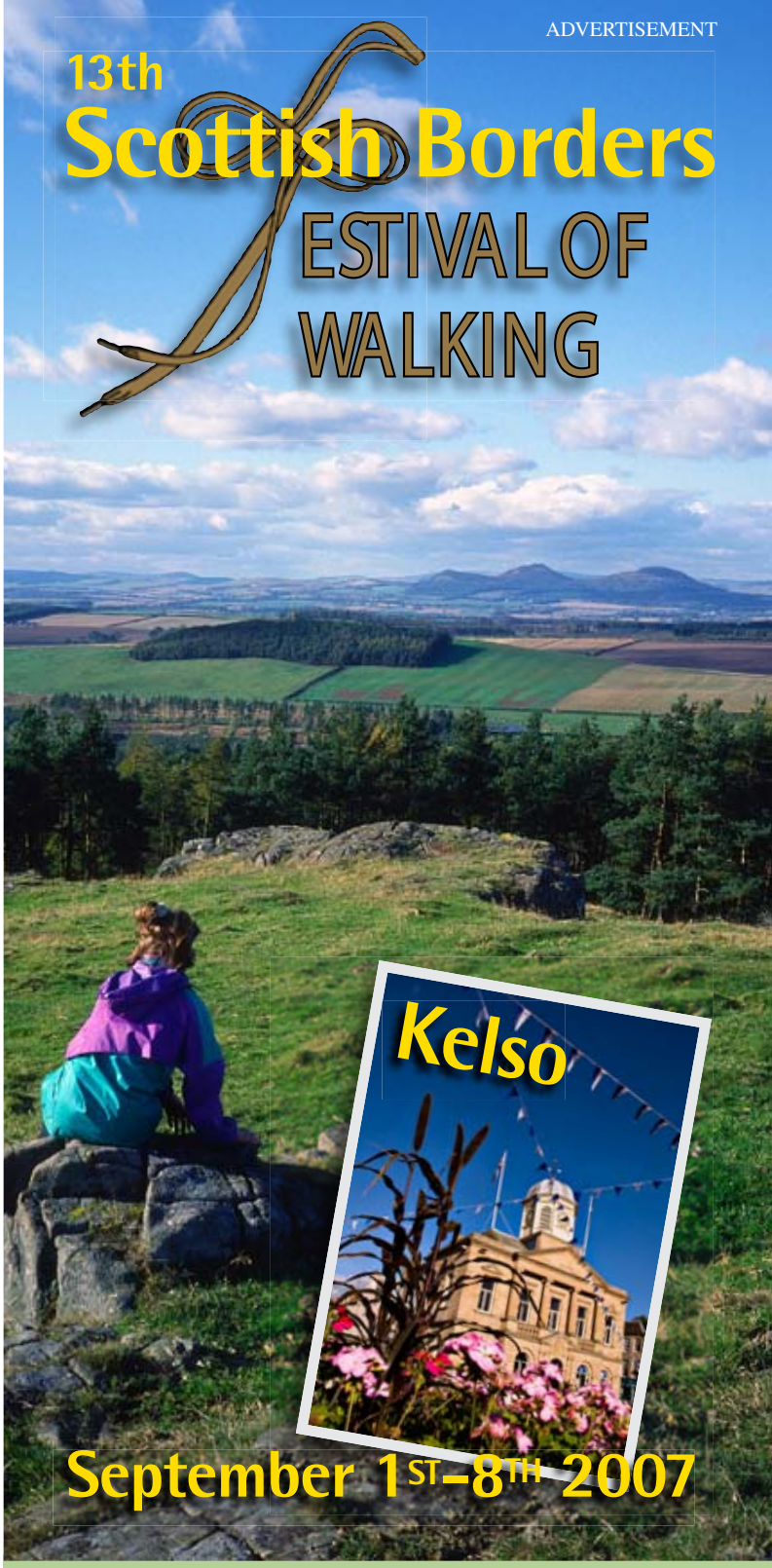
Where appropriate we will also publish details of websites of web galleries which our readers can visit to see more work.

We are now looking for entries for the Summer (July) edition and these should show late summer or autumn themes.

We start with a poppy and seed-heads from Barbara Nash photographed on Dimage 7i, right; and a bluebell wood at Elibank, below, by John Gilkerson. John used a Minolta Dynax 700si with Fuji Velvia 100F, exposing for 1/2 a second at f27 with a tripod, at 60mm on the 24-105mm zoom. Facing page: two studies by Tony Jones. Top using a Dynax 5D and 180mm macro, lower using a Dimage A2 set to 200mm equivalent focal length.



The 2007 Scottish Borders Festival of Walking opens during Kelso's famous St James's Fair, two days with wonderful street markets, performances, pageantry and good cheer. The week offers countless opportunies for photography.

There are over 40 walks around Kelso, the Tweed, the Cheviots and Lammermuirs, with something to suit walkers of all ages and abilities. Experienced guides lead and back mark all walks and will keep you informed about the diverse wildlife and fascinating history of the area on your journey.

In the evenings there is a full programme of entertainment, including a Festival Cabaret, History Talks and a Grand Ceilidh, featuring local and international musicians, speakers and performers.

Register with Visit Scotland to receive your free Festival Brochure on **T: 0870 608 0404**

The Festival Brochure includes details of all Walks and Evening Events and is also available on line at:

www.scotborders.gov.uk/walkingfestival

gallery

Safari shots remain popular as gallery submissions and with the shift to digital, we have seen an improvement in these. Even humble consumer cameras can do the job with a telephoto reach once unthinkable. This page – two shots from Stephen Henning of Fleetwood, PA, using the pocketable Konica Minolta Dimage Z5 EVF-zoom camera. Above, Ngorongoro Crater National Park at dawn, Tanzania. Z5, Anti-Shake on, 1/50 sec at f 4.0, 33mm (200mm equiv), ISO 100; below, Lioness and Cubs, Serengeti Natinal Park, Tanzania. Z5, Anti-Shake on, 1/80 sec, f4.5, 70mm (420mm equiv), ISO 160. Right hand page, Giraffe at Entabeni Game Reserve 200 mles north of Johannesburg, by Colin Brenchley of Worksop. Konica Minolta Dynax 7D with 75-300mm lens set at 75mm, 1/750 sec at f6.7, ISO200, hand held with anti-shake on.

gallery

OVER THE YEARS Sony has made many cameras which were similar is some respects to Minolta and Konica models. They used the same sensors – Sony was the supplier for the CCDs – and often had a similar set of features and overall body styling.

Rob Vermaas is a dedicated Sony user from the Netherlands who now uses the Sony A100 system and has thus become a Minolta system user, but his photo archives since the advent of digital are almost entirely on a large range of Sony models.

The two shown here were taken on the five megapixel Cybershot F505V, which was a year 2000 2.6 megapixel model using the same sensor as the Dimage 5 but extracting a smaller image; and the 8 megapixel Cybershot F828, which used a sensor similar to the Minolta Dimage A2 and Konica Minolta A200. These cameras used Carl Zeiss branded lenses. The F505V, used for the macro shot below, was a most eccentric design of camera where the lens unit appeared to be most of the construction with a small hinged body-pod hanging off the back. The lens was one of the first Sony-made CZ zooms, a 7.1-35.5mm f2.8-3.3 model with extreme macro focusing (see below). The F828 was a mid-2003 model, with a lens the same in range as the Dimage 7/A series but extremely fast – f2-2.8 instead of f2.8-3.5. Rob used his F828 for the fireworks shot on the right.

As Rob shows, Sony's heritage was a match for Minolta's and their Cybershot DSC camera series continues the tradition.

Photographs by Rob Vermaas http://www.vermaas.org/gallery/

Karry on… digitally!

KONICA MINOLTA 5D, 18-70mm, 2.5 seconds at f22, WB Tungsten. Plastic forks placed in a tube of mirror paper, and lit from behind by a slide projector. Post processing consisted of boosting red in the Levels palette, as well as removing some sensor dust.

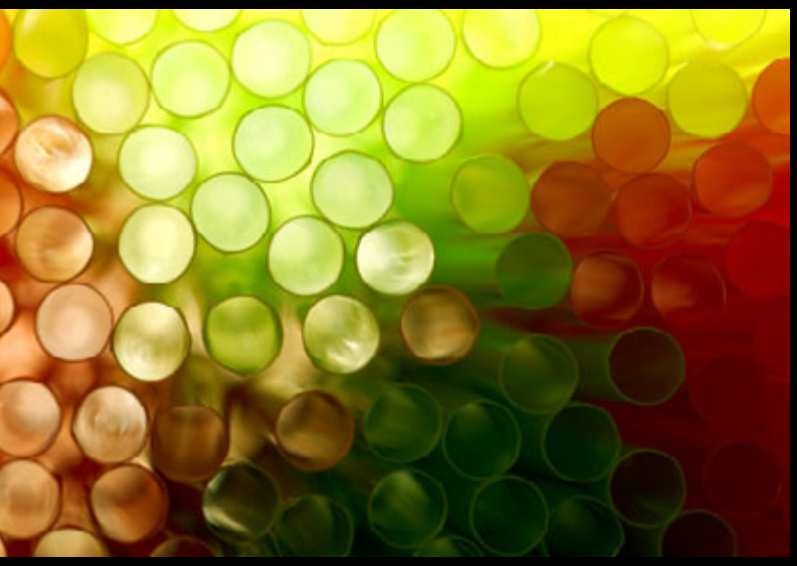
Below: 5D, 90mm f2.5 Tamron AF Macro, 2.5 seconds at f22. Straws placed in a reflective silver paper tube, and lit from behind by a slide projector.

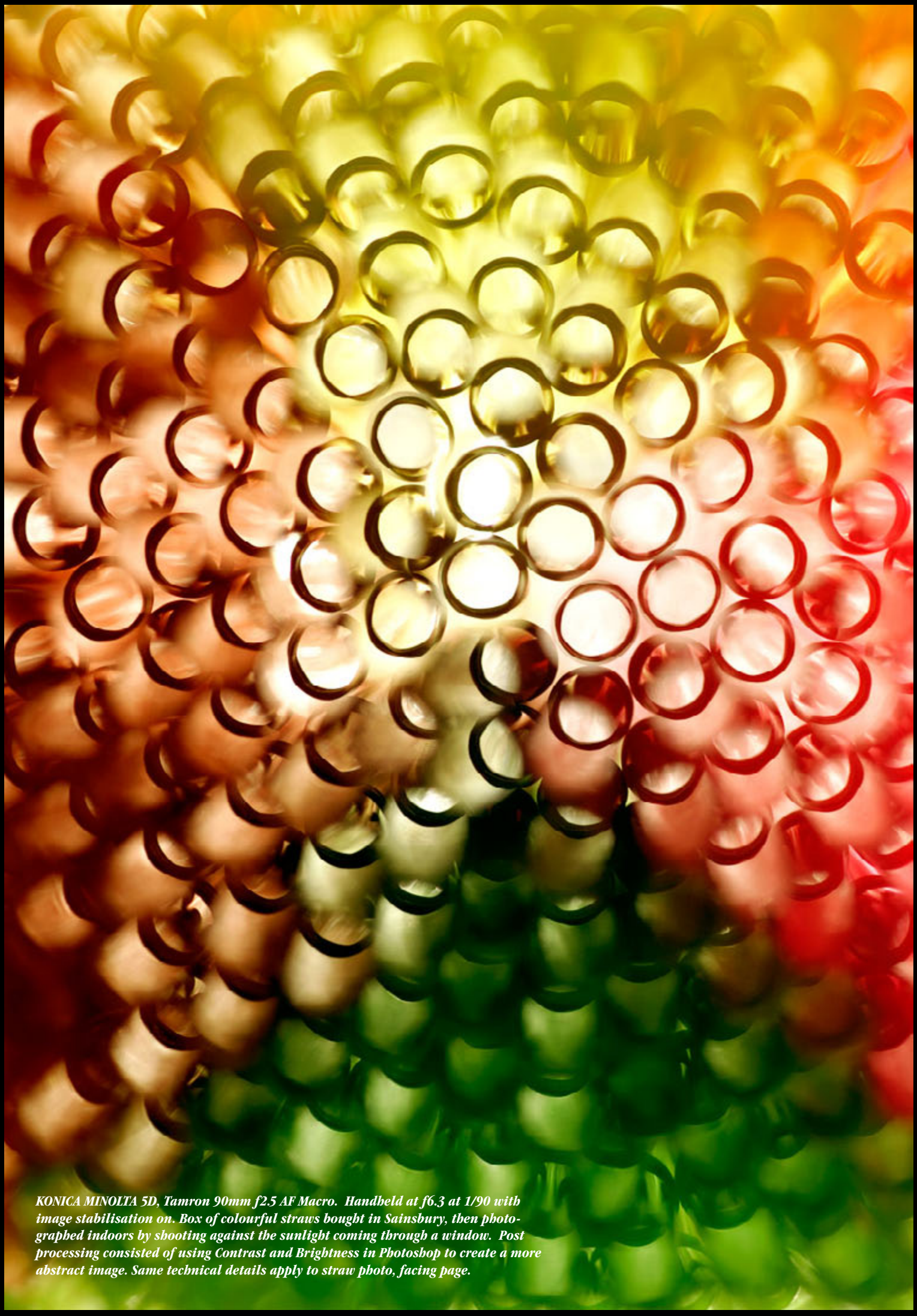
In the heyday of the Minolta Club of Great Britain – the mid-1980s – Peter Karry wrote a series of articles for the magazine under the 'Karry On…' heading.

He started with a comprehensive manual focus system producing distinctive colour transparencies and it was always his use of colour which made the slide shows and talks Peter gave for the club. When the AF system appeared, he used all the new technologies to great effect including some of the more unusual concepts like the Fantasy Card which altered the zoom setting of powered zoom lenses to create soft focus during a long (often handheld) exposure.

Now Peter has finally succumbed to the appeal of DSLRs and acquired a Dynax 5D and with it he has rediscovered the exploration of something as simple as colour in a home studio setting.

His photographs – using window light, silver foil paper, plastic straws and picnic forks from a supermarket – show just what you can do on a rainy day!





KONICA MINOLTA 5D, Tamron 90mm f2.5 AF Macro. Handheld at f6.3 at 1/90 with image stabilisation on. Box of colourful straws bought in Sainsbury, then photographed indoors by shooting against the sunlight coming through a window. Post processing consisted of using Contrast and Brightness in Photoshop to create a more abstract image. Same technical details apply to straw photo, facing page.

In an English country garden with the Dimage A2

Greg Wright looks forward to seasonal photo opportunities close to home

Even in a small town garden there is a surprising variety of photogenic subjects. The most obvious subjects are the flowers with many varieties at their peak in the summer months. With a little planning however it is possible to have something in bloom throughout the year, even in the middle of winter. Certainly it is very rewarding to plan plant combinations for photography.

Thinking about which colours and shapes will work well together and watching your plans come together can turn into a long term project, but it does not have to be. The time from planting to shutter release can be anything from a few weeks for a hanging basket to many years for a group of shrubs.

Besides flowers, many other parts of plants can provide interesting subjects. Tree bark can give fantastic textures especially when it is enhanced by side lighting. The trunks and branches of trees and shrubs can form interesting shapes. This is especially true of varieties of maple and rhododendron. You may not have mature examples in your own garden but there are many gardens that are open to the public were they are available to photograph.

Water and light

The leaves of plants have many varied shapes and textures. *Alchemilla mollis* is a great ground cover plant with large downy leaves. In late spring and early summer they are at their best soon after they emerge. They look even better in the early morning after a heavy dew, with drops of water held in place on the leaves. Obviously early morning is not always the most convenient time to make photographs in the garden but artificial dew can be made fairly easily with a garden sprayer! The trick here is to get enough water onto the plants, but not too much. The leaves should not be over saturated.

Hairy plants look fantastic with light coming from behind them. Backlighting really makes the hairs stand out. These lighting conditions can be tricky to deal with. One problem is the possibility of lens flare. This can be eliminated by making sure that the lens itself is shaded. Sometimes the lens hood on its own is not enough. Anything at all will do to help shade the lens, for instance a hat, a jumper or a reflector. Hold your shade between the sun and the lens so that the shadow falls over the lens. Before you press the shutter release, check in the viewfinder that the shade itself does not appear in the picture. Flowers such as borage are ideal for this backlit treatment. They are not to everyone's taste as garden plants so it is fantastic when you can find a good example growing in someone else's.

Bug fauna

Besides plants, all gardens are home to lots of wildlife. Many gardens are visited by a variety of birds but most of the wildlife in a garden is far smaller than this and far easier to photograph. Various insects including bees and butterflies visit flowers in search of nectar. Again, by choosing the right plants for the garden you can attract the insects you want to photograph. Often the more fragrant varieties attract the most insects which will make the garden even more attractive for humans as well.

In any garden there will be spiders. The webs that they use are great subjects. The geometrical patterns can make wonderful photographs. Again, they make the most striking images when lit from behind. You will need to use a lens that can focus quite close. A macro lens is the best choice but a close-up lens (sometimes wrongly called a 'filter') can often produce a useable image if you select a small aperture.

Depth of field is crucial to good garden photography. With the spider's web you will want the web itself to be sharp but you will also want to minimise the distraction of the background. One way to achieve this is to get the sensor/film plane parallel with the web and then use the largest aperture possible so that the background is focused out. With flower photography the problem is even more tricky. Here you will often want a zone to be acceptably sharp. Once you have decided on the exposure, shoot off several frames using different aperture settings and choose the best later.

Facing page: Scottish royal thistle showing differential focus at f3.5, 70mm equivalent focal length; New Dawn rose, at f11 for necessary depth of field, 200mm equivalent length. Above: Borage from below, also 200mm equivalent at f11. Below: Astrantia, almost wide open at f4, 200mm. All photographs on the Dimage A2.

Whether you are photographing webs or flowers, a tripod will be a big help, as is anti-shake in the Konica Minolta A2 I used for these examples. Not only will a tripod eliminate camera shake and give a sharper image, it will also help with composition. Once you have set the camera up on the tripod you can alter the composition step by step until it is as you want it. Using the self-timer or a cable release will ensure that there is no camera movement.

A little thought about exactly what you want in the frame will reap big rewards. Sometimes in a small garden the background to your subject may not be what you would like. It might be a fence that looks fine in its garden setting but may not be the backdrop that you really want for your image. Often the solution is to move in close. Make sure that your subject really does fill the frame.

It is often a great idea to isolate a small section of the plant rather than going for a full length portrait. The angle of view that you choose can also be crucial to success. If you shoot upwards by a few degrees more, maybe you can use the sky as a background. Or a few degrees lower and the plant's own leaves may come more into play. Not shooting too quickly is key here. Once you have taken your first shot, consider how it could be improved and don't stop until you have covered all possibilities especially if using digital where extra pictures cost you nothing but time.

When the nights draw in and summer becomes a memory you will be able to look back at your photographs and remember those hot, balmy days. Even better, you will be able to plan how to make next summer in the garden even more of a photographic delight.

– Greg Wright

Bug life – spider's web 1/30th at f3.5, 200mm; hoverfly on rose, 1/400th at f3.5, 200mm macro; spider in rose, 1/50th at f11, 200mm macro. Lavender flower, 1/125 at f4, 200mm; rose and bud, 1/200th at f11, 200mm.

Protection for the A2, A200, Dimage 5, Dimage 7, 7i or 7Hi

OWN a Dimage A2, A200 or earlier EVF-zoom model? Keep it safe and make it last! The CS DG-8 case is designed to protect your camera from dust, rain and minor knocks. It slips off easily for shooting, remaining looped to your camera strap. It has a pouch which will hold a spare battery and compactflash card. It can be bought on-line through our eBayshop at **www.ebay.co.uk** for only £12 – just enter this number in eBay's SEARCH window: **250068695874**

Flash choices for the Dynax and Alpha

Testing the flash options most widely sold for the Minolta/Sony unique hot shoe system became a necessity after the launch of the Alpha 100.

Despite the reliability of automatic TTL off-the-film flash metering ever since Minolta first introduced it with the Auto Electroflash PX series in 1981, things began to go wrong with the shift to digital SLRs.

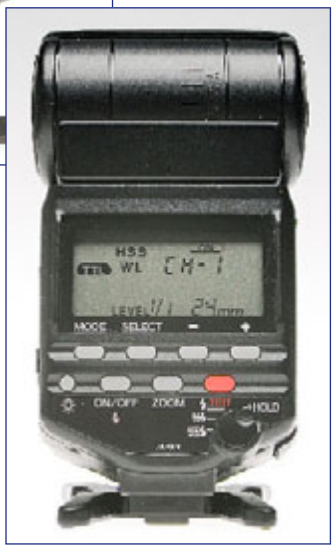
It is impossible to measure flash in real time from the image formed on a CCD sensor. The sensor, unlike film, has a glass cover sheet and does not reflect light in a diffused way. This change broke the system, forcing Minolta to use a technology introduced some years earlier to give more accurate results in difficult conditions – Pre-Flash TTL with or without ADI (Automatic Distance Integration) telling the flash computer the actual focus distance.

The pre-flash was always measured in the camera prism, and this was possible with DSLRs. However, only flash units with (D) in their model name would give the correct pre-flash intensity and ADI control. In theory older flash units from the 'xi' series should have been able to do so, but Konica Minolta chose to lock these out from auto operation. They will fire on digital cameras, but only at full power. It is possible to modify earlier flash units by adding a controller chip – see http://www.voitzsch.net/flashconv_en.shtml – but we do not advise this type of surgery with high voltage electronic gear.

From the start, there have been issues with brand new 5600 HS(D) flashguns giving under or over exposure with different Konica Minolta 7D and 5D bodies. The correct procedure, if your flash consistently gives poor exposure in straightforward situations, is to have the flashgun and camera calibrated together by JP Service Solutions, the official repair facility in the UK.

Fewer cases of the 3600 HS(D) producing poor exposure have been noted, and the pop-up flash generally produces good results.

TTL pre-flash metering, with or without ADI, seems to be very sensitive to reflective highlights in the shot. It can be affected by something like a white shirt which coincides with the focus-point of the AF system and cut the exposure by two or three stops.



The Minolta or Konica Minolta 5600 HS(D) is a large flashgun which has been replaced by the very similar Sony HVL-F56AM. It has a wide-angle diffuser which can also be propped open as shown, left, to provide some direct fill in with bounce shots. The head tilts and rotates, including the option of fully backward facing bounce. The rear panel gives clear information and the dedicated buttons are perhaps the clearest user interface. It accepts external power and cable connections (right).

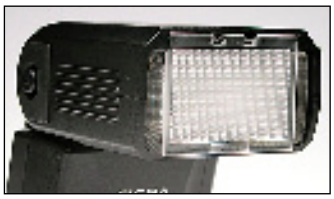
We therefore recommend always checking your digital shot after taking it. When using bounce flash, this tendency is reduced, because the flash is not aiming directly at silver, glass, chrome, or bright white parts of the scene. However, tilting the bounce flash head forward a little (as many will do) can allow some direct light to reach the subject, and it only takes a very small reflection from this to kill a shot completely.

The new Sony HVL-F56AM and HVL-F36AM units are nearly identical to the 5600 HS(D) and 3600 HS(D). Generally, they are proving better calibrated for use with the DSLR bodies out of the box and prices have been reduced recently. They are suitable for older Minolta and Konica Minolta cameras as well as the Alpha 100.

The 3600/36 has no flip-out wide angle diffuser, and the bounce head does not rotate. This makes it unsuitable for bounce shots in portrait (vertical) format unless you remove the flash from the camera and use wireless control via the pop-up flash. It also can not cover 17mm (on film) or 11mm (on digital) wide-angle direct flash shots. There is no manual control and it's not all that much smaller than the 5600. The bounce head does not lock, which in some ways is good, as you can flip it up quickly. Those lock buttons are a nuisance sometimes.

The 5600/56 is a far more versatile flash, with excellent rear controls including manual flash power even on cameras which don't support this via their own menus (the 7D does). The flash head can be rotated as well as angled, allowing vertically held bounce shots, and there is a flip-out 17mm diffuser which can also be extended to use as a bounce fill reflector. The 5600 accepts an external power supply, and has a connection for the Cable CD or EX allowing cabled multi flash control. All these extras make the apparently high price well worth the difference.

The 3600 HS(D) is much simpler, below left and right. It has no head rotation for vertical bounce shots, no manual power, and no power/cable sockets.



The Sigma EF-500 DG Super is a very sturdy flashgun which works well in multi head wireless set-ups. It has separate bounce-tilt and head rotation locks (upper centre), an interface not unlike the Minolta/Sony design but with a 'real' on-off switch in place of button presses, and a similar flip-out ultra wide angle diffuser. The Sigma flash tripod-foot is the best of the bunch.
Below: the Metz 54MZ-4i is a twin head unit providing its own fill-in, and also has a thyristor auto exposure eye. The ND filter for the secondary flash would be easily lost. It has a simple two-button, one wheel interface which can be a bit confusing.

Third party flashes

There are two independent flash makes you should consider for Dynax 5D, 7D or Alpha 100 use (they also work on the Dimage 5/7/A series).

Sigma offers two different EF-500 units. The lower cost EF-500 DG ST lacks the wireless system or HSS but has ADI compatibility. Exposure with the EF-500 DG ST on camera, direct or bounced, proved to be around a stop under on all our three DSLR bodies.

The EF-500 DG Super is a far better option. This has HSS (High Speed Synch) burst mode, and Wireless. It is very easy to use and to make it 'talk' to Minolta or Sony models in a multi-head wireless set up. The rear controls are not as comprehensive and easy to navigate at the 5600, or as limited as the 3600.

Compatibility ends with the flash shoe and the wireless mode, and Sigma flash units have no socket for Minolta/Sony cables, mains units or high power battery packs. Both have flip-out wide-angle diffusers which can be used as bounce fill reflectors, and have separate lock buttons for bounce tilt and head rotation.

The only advantage the DG ST model offers is a truly simple user interface with Off, TTL, Manual Hi and Manual Lo powers. If you never want to mess with HSS, Wireless or multi-flash setups and just want a more powerful camera top flash for bounce shots it's fine.

The problem encountered with both Sigma units was one of consistent underexposure. This can be corrected by Sigma and they only require the flashgun back to make the adjustment. It may not apply to all units sold as the default calibration can be changed to suit the most common camera model.

Metz (Mecablitz) make one current model in their SCA system which uses interchangeable base sections to fit different cameras. The Konica Minolta/Sony base unit is the SCA-3302 and the gun is the 54MZ-4i, which supersedes an earlier 3i model.

This gun is by far the most fully featured, offering two things none of the others do – a twin flash design with fill-in, and a thyristor Auto mode which bypasses the camera's pre-flash and TTL metering entirely.

It has a single button bounce/rotate lock, like the Minolta and Sony, and a similar flip-out wide angle diffuser once again well suited for use as a bounce fill. However, the second flash tube which can be switched on or off as needed does this, adding bright catchlights to eyes and generally crispening up the look of bounce-flash pictures.

Covering the second reflector is a neutral density filter with a cutout. This can be flipped round to provide a 4X reduction in the fill flash level. It's a bit of a nuisance and fell off repeatedly. It would get lost or damaged in daily use and is best kept safely off the gun.

The Metz user interface is not the most intuitive, relying on multiple button presses plus a thumbwheel to scroll through choices. It is more fully featured than the 5600, with its additional A mode. This does

not mean 'Auto' in Minolta terms (flash switches on automatically when required) but A in the old thyristor-sensor autoflash sense.

We found the exposure with the 54MZ-4i to be rather 'over' with all bodies when using TTL pre-flash, better using A. There is no pre-flash with A, either, and as a result fewer cases of people blinking. This gun reminded me of why the old electric eye in the front of the flashgun is a very good concept to revive for the age of DSLRs. As long as it is aiming at the subject, it works better. All Metz results tended towards full exposure, ranging from correct to more than one stop overexposed.

For unlocking from the flash shoe, Sigma use a large plunger instead of the neat small button we are used to. Metz use a very crude screw-down thumbwheel, like the old sort found on regular flash shoes, which defeats the whole point of the superior Minolta shoe design.

Both Sigma and Metz ranges use hard switching for on and off – a sliding switch. Minolta and Sony use a soft switch, button press, with auto power off timeout.

All these guns come with tripod-mount 'feet' for standing the flash on a surface or screwing it to a tripod. The worst one is the Metz, a large ugly plastic square with a moulded thread. Next worst is the Sony/Minolta design, though it is neat and small. It's a little too small and it has a plastic thread. The winner is Sigma, with a very well designed foot capable of taking either Minolta or standard flash fittings, and an embedded brass tripod thread.

Your choice

All the flashguns reviewed here are functional and good value, but performance varies. It proved impossible to get the Metz, Sigma and Minolta flashes to agree on a three-head wireless set up using CH-1 but two Minoltas plus the Sigma, or two Minoltas plus the Metz, or Metz and Sigma controlled by the camera all worked.

You can safely add one independent brand gun to your armoury, but if you want two, stick to the same brand. Sigma offer recalibration of their guns if you find consistent wrong exposure, and Metz offer firmware upgrading of the shoe adaptor for the same reason. The current Metz version is SCA 3302 vM7 and any gun bought for Minolta/Sony should be identified as having an M7 adaptor, not earlier.

My favourite has to be the Metz 54MZ-4i for its extra features, despite the typical price of around £270-300 with the necessary Sony/Minolta foot. Beware all other Metz models which may be in shops and are marked as Minolta – they probably will be older stock, not digitally compatible. Intro2020, the importers, will tell you whether any model is 7D/5D/A100 compatible.

Value for money, the award goes to Sigma as the non-wireless ST model can be found for under £100. In terms of brand confidence, I guess that buying the real thing – whether used Minolta or new Sony – is always a safe decision and the exposures, while a bit dark, were most consistent.

The choice is out there and **all these guns performed well in wireless mode** where offered. For best flash exposure, remove your gun from the camera, control it from the pop-up, use wireless. Many exposure errors occurred with every gun on all three cameras in varying degrees in different situations. Results could be improved by switching to centre weighted or spot metering for some subjects.

Once you know the flashgun, and the way it behaves on-camera in exposure terms, it is possible in any case to compensate. But check the result every time!

– DK

3600 HS(D) pre-flash TTL direct

5600 HS(D) pre-flash TTL direct

EF-500 DG ST pre-flash TTL direct

EF-500 DG Super pre-flash TTL direct

54MZ-4i pre-flash TTL direct

54MZ-4i 'Auto' direct

3600 HS(D) pre-flash TTL bounce

5600 HS(D) pre-flash TTL bounce

EF-500 DG ST pre-flash TTL bounce

EF-500 DG Super pre-flash TTL bounce

54MZ-4i pre-flash TTL bounce

54MZ-4i 'Auto' bounce

EF-500 DG Super wireless pfttl bounce

EF-500 DG Super corrected RAW

As you can see from the above test conducted using a Sony A100 and all five flash-guns – Matrix metering, pre-flash TTL, Fill In mode, ISO 100 for direct, ISO 400 for bounce, lens at 50mm focal length, f8 – hardly a single exposure is correct. Using ADI instead of pre-flash TTL actually made things worse; using Centre Weighted metering improved darker results. Wireless removed the problems. Converting a dark Sigma shot (A) from the .ARW file and lightening it (B) gave a good result.

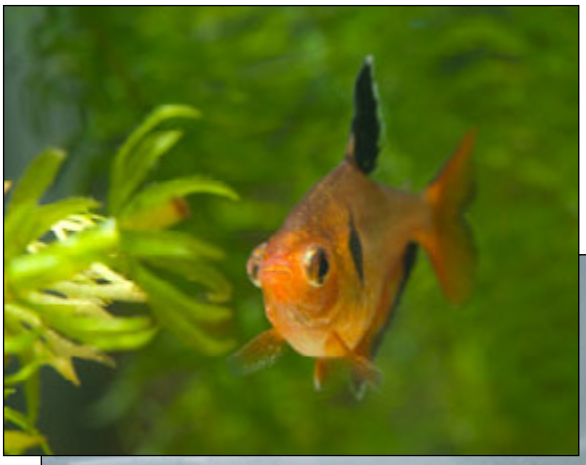
Three feet, top (KM, Sigma, Metz). Metz SCA 3302 shoe adaptor, left. Hong Kong eBay flash shoe adaptor, above… the ultimate solution to flash woes.

Wire-free home aquarium flash technique

The Minolta wireless flash system can be triggered by the built-in flash of your SLR, by fitting and removing a remote flash after setting the system to wireless mode. Once removed, the remote flash will provide the light, and the built-in flash only serves to control it.

Despite having the camera right up against the glass of my home aquarium, with the camera flash aiming at the glass, any direct light during the exposure is minimal. All the light for these aquarium shots came from a 3600 HS (D) unit popped into the aquarium's feeding hatch as shown. The light is not as directional as you would imagine; the inside walls of the aquarium bounce it round, and you end up with very even illumination.

The best results were from the 50 or 100mm macro, with the A100 set to ISO 200 or 400, and the aperture to *f*11 or *f*16. Wider apertures don't give enough depth of field, smaller ones begin to lose sharpness, and ISO 100 meant underexposure. – *DK*



Below: the 3600 HS (D) propped in place – no wires to risk danger with the water. Left: Serpae tetra, 100mm macro, f11. Main picture: male Guppy, 50mm macro at f16, ISO 200. Inset picture: 1:1 macro face to face with a Peppered Catfish through the curved glass front; 100mm, ISO 400, f11. All on the Sony Alpha 100, processed from raw files. Do not use flash too often on your aquarium fish!

Big ringflash adaptor fits 5600 well enough!

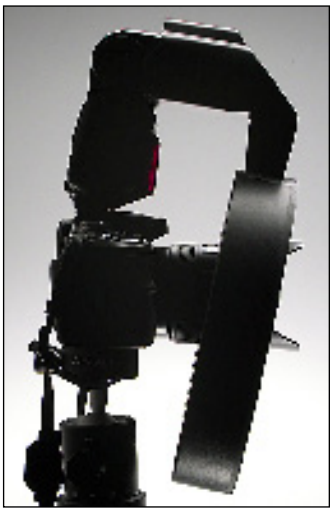
One of the problems of loyalty to Minolta – or Sony – is that too few third party manufacturers will take a risk on the camera system which has a seven percent market share, when two other makes have roughly 30 and 40 percent each.

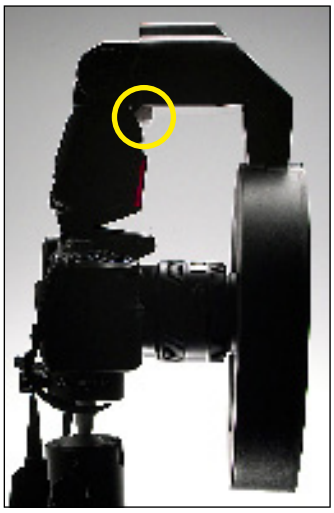
A Czech company has designed a novel giant ringflash unit which consists of a doughnut shaped hollow plastic assembly with mirrors lining the inside, a diffuser on the front, and a relay tunnel again lined with mirrors that connects to your camera-top high GN flashgun.

Of course, it is made in fittings for Canon and Nikon only. However, we borrowed a unit from the importers Flaghead Photographic Ltd after seeing it at Focus on Imaging. The head size looked so close to the 5600 – and if not, maybe it would fit one or the other of the various independent flashes.

In practice, it's a fit for the 5600. It is a little tight, but pushes home fully, and the locking screw clamps it on safely. It's a tight fit but dead secure on the Sigma EF 500 models too, but too small for the Metz 54MZ-4i. The position of the lens within the ring is as accurate on the Sony A100 as it is on a similar Canon. Since cameras vary in size and the height of the flash shoe above the lens axis, not all will centre the lens perfectly. The ring does not lie dead parallel to the film either, but you can support it if worried by that or place a small wedge to prevent flash droop.

The extra weight is not really damaging, but you would not want to run around with this fitted. The cost, at £120+VAT, seems high for a simple plastic assembly until you compare it with any alternative. The lighting produced is not unlike a studio ringlash, with bigger and sharper defined shadows than a small ringflash intended for macro work. If you have an *f*4.5 lens you're OK at six feet with ISO 100 as the power is significantly reduced. You would normally want to work at ISO 400 for an example like the shot shown below. – *DK*





Left: the Ringflash unit pushes on the 5600 flash head which has almost exactly the same dimensions as the Canon it's made for. The small clamp control locks it on. Below: the 5600 will drop to close-up position (angled down) because of the weight. A small wedge (circled) prevents this.

Lens in a body cap – with shift – for £12.50...

In the last two editions we have looked at the Penang 8mm fisheye lens from Russia, and the adaptor for Kiev-fit medium format lenses with shift control from the same vendors.

This issue, we bring you another Internet bargain – the $15 Loreo 'Lens in a Cap' from Hong Kong. Originally, Loreo just made this 35mm three-element pancake lens with a fixed focus but apertures down to *f*64, like a pinhole lens. Its uses include ultra depth of field, long exposures of moving water, and effects from flare or aberrations which are fashionable for some types of creative shooting.

The latest Loreo is their 'PC Lens in a Cap', which mounts a similar 3-element 35mm focal length lens into a 'body cap' and provides it with a few millimetres of shift.

This one has two apertures – *f*11 or *f*22 – and is set more or less on infinity. Actually, it's a bit more accurate than the Peleng in that respect and when an *f*11 shot taken using the A100 is examined at full size as shown on this page (for a 300dpi print) you would be forced to admit that it compares well with many zooms.

The geometry is interesting, as we are used to a certain level of barrel distortion and this goes the other way, but to such a small degree it is almost perfect. Edge fall off even on the digital format is present, and it needs chromatic corrections for both common colour aberrations if a raw file is processed using *Adobe Photoshop Camera Raw*.

As for practical uses, it shows a great ability to produce dramatic lens flare, and you might find some creative purpose for this. The shift function is next to useless, as only 3.5mm is possible and it hardly has any useful effect on the digital frame with a lens of this focal length. It is only $21 – barely over £10 – and fun to try out.

Loreo also produce a 3D Lens which can create twin-image stereograms on conventional or digital cameras. The version for APS-C costs a little extra.

Postage costs from Loreo themselves are minimal – we paid under £15 for the total – and the packaging is exemplary, reaching the UK in a few days.

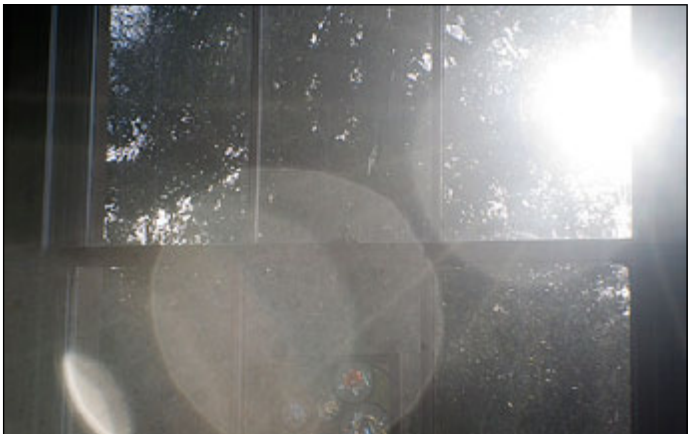
Visit **www.loreo.com** for more!

The total cost of a Loreo PC Lens in a Cap is only $25 from Loreo.com, for which it is very well packed and posted with all the right documentation. The non-PC version which stops down to f64 is only $19 posted. See the bottom of page 34 for how to enable your camera to use this type of lens.

The Loreo will not allow any correction of verticals to speak of, even just aiming up at a window like this. This shot was taken with full perspective correction applied. It also – above right – only works in the horizontal direction. No rotating in the mount!

Drop (above) and rise (below).

Loreo detail at 300dpi (larger than A4 print) is very acceptable. Flare can be dramatic, below. There may be a use for this. Those flare patches are classic!



Fire up for summer!

STUART BARRETT is a Sony A100 user with a special rôle in one of Edinburgh's lesser known and more colourful spectacles. He organises the photographic crew which documents the Beltane Fire Festival, and its associated Samhuinn Festival, in the city.

A team of volunteer photographers goes through a rehearsal and training process, so that they know exactly what will be happening and which parts of performance can safely be captured well from each vantage point.

These are his own photographs from the last Samhuinn Festival.

"The Beltane Fire Festival is held every year during the night of 30th April on Calton Hill in Edinburgh", says the Beltane Society's website. "An audience of around 12 thousand people come to share the spectacular procession. Justifiably famous for its intensity and colour, the event has become a much-loved feature of the Edinburgh calendar since it was first organised in the mid 1980s. The Beltane Fire Society is part of a large and important culture both in Edinburgh and the rest of the world. We hope that our efforts will inspire others to get involved in celebratory works around the globe.

"This Beltane is the 20th that has been put on by the Beltane Fire Society, and to mark this occasion, the society is organising several events in the period leading up to the festival itself.

"The festival begins at 9pm on the night of the 30th of April, and continues until 1am. Although access to the hill is open to ticket-holders later than 9pm, we recommend you arrive early to get a good view and ensure you don't miss any of the fantastic performance!".

For public safety reasons, the road to Calton Hill and surrounding roads will be closed – it is recommended that you don't try to park on the streets surrounding the hill. There are several public car parks within walking distance.

Tickets for the event are are priced £5 (plus Booking Fee) when bought in advance. A limited number will be made available on the night, but these are aimed only at those who are unable to buy in advance.

Tickets can be bought in one of three places – in person at: Forest Cafe, Bristo St, Edinburgh or Ripping Records, South Bridge; or the Hub Ticket Office, Castlehill, Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH1 2NE.

By telephone (at The Hub Ticket Office): +44(0)131 473 2000

You can see more of Stuart's Beltane Fire Society images at:

http://www.flickr.com/photos/two_truths/collections/72157600042571669/