

photoworld





Cover: by Duncan McEwan

Landscape photographers in Britain head for the shores – and grab a wide-angle on the way. But few beaches provide anything as graphic as the black and white sand patterns found on Eigg. Dawn at Laig Bay, taken at 4.50am in mid-May. Although the wet sand is reflecting a lot of light, it required a 3 stop ND grad filter to balance the exposure. Alpha 900, 24-70mm f2.8 CZ SSM lens at 24mm, 1/4 at f22 (-0.3), ISO 200. Duncan's article in this issue covers this little-visited island.

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The ambassadors' party – Focus 2010



SONY'S UK Alpha sales expert Paul Genge has been heading up an impressive roster of Sony 'artisan' or ambassador photographers – Alpha users picked for the range of their professional and high-end amateur skills to present talks and demonstrations.

Visitors to Focus on Imaging were able to see Paul in action – “he's really in his element!” said the PR executive who showed us round the stand while Paul led cut-flower photo specialist Celia Henderson through her creative and lighting processes.

It was a busy stand with all the seats for the demo full, and queues at most of the pods carrying a whole range of Sony compact cameras to be handled.

Although the Sony stand was nothing like as elaborate as some other stands, the concentration on live demonstrations by a wide range of Alpha experts really paid off. At the Edinburgh event with Michael Wayne Plant (fashion and beauty photographer) a few days earlier, I had shown Paul the new design of Ray-Flash Ring which is compatible with the HVL-F58AM flash.

Importer of the Ray-Flash, Hardy Haase of Flaghead Photographic Ltd, told me he was delighted to have given Paul a sample to demonstrate on the Sony stand. He had taken orders for three of them after one demonstration alone!

This is an increasing trend for Alpha owners – discovering that third party makers are now issuing accessories which fit Alpha, even including that awkward Minolta flash shoe. Gear previously available only for Nikon or Canon has started to appear in Alpha fit. In this issue you will find a few short reviews of items I have bought myself; a budget priced TTL-auto ringflash, some real glass screen protector sheets, the Ray-Flash Ring (of course), a remote control with intervalometer timer.

In the Summer edition No 3 2010, I'll be testing the Loreo 3D lens for the Alpha 900/850. This is a complete stereoscopic lens unit which mounts directly to the full frame body, and creates two vertical 3D pair images each 12 megapixels in size. It has only just arrived for a three-month loan from the makers in Hong Kong, and 3D photography is not something you can test quickly.

Many of these smaller accessories are relatively inexpensive, especially from internet vendors. If they have UK distributors, they are not always set up to provide reviews samples, but their prices are higher. So rather than be unable to write about the product – or writing it about it at twice the 'real' price – I just buy one in from Poland, the USA, China or wherever it can be found.

Focus on Imaging did not reveal much new. But in September, we are off to photokina in Cologne, and there will be dozens of fascinating accessories to see. For Alpha too!

– David Kilpatrick

Keep your shirt on!

Never feel that your chosen camera makes you the odd one out in a crowd of Canon and Nikon users!

Perhaps you are the only one at your college or your camera club with an Alpha. Well, we reckon that makes you Alpha material... so we have designed two neat logos combining the symbols for Male and Female with the Alpha glyph.

It's an official Photoclubalpha garment *not* official Sony!

It would have been great to start with a low-cost almost giveaway T-shirt, but the quality of these can be poor especially in black. Yes, even the best black cotton will fade with wear and washing but it is a good quality garment to start with. That's why it has to be £13.95 including VAT and postage to cover our costs.

The Polo Shirt is, we think, a real bargain. Various local clubs and societies, as well as sports teams, have had similar polo and rugger shirts made by our supplier with embroidered logos. They look great and wear well at £17.95 each including VAT and postage.

The T-shirts have the web address of Photoclubalpha written neatly in the classic Minolta typeface across the shoulders on the back. The logo and male or female text line are printed centrally on the front.

The Polo shirts only have the logo motif on the front, to a smaller size, in chest pocket position. There is no text, if anyone asks you what it means, you'll have to explain it.

The T sizing is generous – for example, size L is a neat fit for female size 20, loose on size 18. We will have initial stocks in a variety of sizes

The easiest way to order is to visit our website:

www.photoclubalpha.com
and use Paypal with our Buy it Now buttons. You can also order by mail with a cheque or credit card details.

Back in the day, we offered Minolta T-shirts. We never have had Alpha equivalents. So we made our own – designed for the Alpha male and Alpha female...



T-shirts have the words below the symbol and URL on the back.

Men's Polos/all T-Shirts

XS	S	M	L
34/36	36/38	38/40	40/42
XL	XXL	3XL	4XL
42/44	44/46	46/48	48/50

Women's Polos

XS	S	M	L	XL	XXL
8	10	12	14	16	18

T-Shirts are unisex not tailored. Polo shirts are supplied in male tailored cut for Alpha Male, female cut for Alpha Female. T-Shirts are Heavyweight 100% Ringspun Cotton (175-180gsm); Polo Shirts are the same material, but a little heavier in weight.

T-Shirts – available in black or white, sizes XS to 4XL

Alpha Male	Black or White, with Alpha Male text line	£13.95
Alpha Female	Black or White, with Alpha Female text line	£13.95

Polo Shirts – available in sizes S to 3XL (M) XS to XXL (F)

Alpha Male	Black or White without text small symbol	£17.95
Alpha Female	Black or White without text small symbol	£17.95

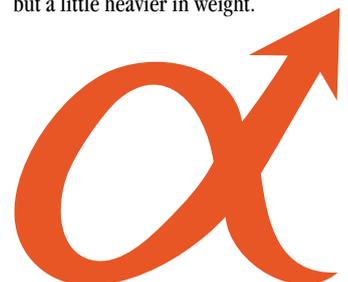
The shirts are printed (for T-Shirts) or embroidered (for Polo Shirts) locally in Kelso and you may specify any size within the range shown; depending on demand, it may take up to 28 days for orders to be completed and despatched. We hope to keep stocks of popular sizes for faster delivery.

Prices include VAT and postage. Cheques payable to 'Icon Publications Ltd' – orders to **Alpha Shirts Offer, Icon Publications Ltd, Maxwell Place, Maxwell Lane, Kelso, Scottish Borders TD5 7BB.**

or visit the address – printed on the back of the T-shirts only...

www.photoclubalpha.com

alpha female



alpha male



The DT 30mm Macro

This tiny, featherweight lens is a real source of inspiration as you are ever closer to the subject. It's an optical revolution based on a design that was first introduced a year ago, which enables a focus as close as 19mm from its minimum

All too often I find myself abandoning new lenses and searching out classic Minolta AF glass, not just because I can afford it but because there's no modern equivalent.

Even so, affording it does have a lot to do with the decision!

So when a new lens arrives with a specification I have never experienced before on any 35mm SLR – digital or film – I'll look at the price and judge what new, unique shots I may be able to take with it.

That's why I do not own one of the superb 70-400mm Sony SSM G f4.5-5.6 apo tele zooms. It's a thousand-pound lens, and a quick look through my archives tells me I am not a long tele shooter.

But I am close-up, macro and wide-angle shooter with a tendency to prefer 'steep' perspective where foreground objects are contrasted with further ones on a smaller scale.

The new 30mm f2.8 DT Macro

is not a wide-angle lens. The DT designation means it is built to cover only the area of 1.5X (DT format in Minolta-Sony speak) digital sensors. This is the size of sensor found in the Konica Minolta 7D and 5D, and Alpha models from the A100 to the A450 with the exception of the two full-frame DSLRs, Alpha 900 and 850. It measures 23.5 x 15.7mm, which is slightly smaller than half-frame on film (that is 24 x 17mm, occasionally extended to 18mm with very narrow gaps between frames).

On this format, the 30mm f2.8 is exactly the same angle of view as a classic manual focus lens I used to like, the 45mm f2 MD Rokkor. It's not far off in size, either, and has the same 49mm filter thread. I found a lens hood from the old 45mm Rokkor and it works perfectly on the new 30mm macro.

However, the 30mm is really a zoom in disguise. It starts off as a retrofocus standard lens, when set to infinity. It has to be retrofocus, like a wide-angle lens design, in

order to fit on to a body which has over 40mm distance from the sensor plane to the lens mount.

In theory a 30mm lens should be 1cm or more inside the camera body, but it can't be with a moving reflex mirror to clear. So the retrofocus design is used to place it well forward of its actual focal length.

Sony then introduces some clever internal design, where a group of elements moves forwards leaving the rear group fixed. In a regular design, front group focusing does shorten the focal length of a lens; that's how it works. But the effect is slight, and front group focusing is often limited to portrait distances. Optical quality suffers if taken closer.

In this design, the infinity focus results in moderately good corrections. There is some visible barrel distortion and a bit of sharpness fall off to the corners.

What happens as you focus closer is that the corrections improve. At the same time, the focal length is getting shorter. By the time you get to life size macro, 1:1, this lens only has a true focal length around 24mm.

It also is no longer really an f2.8 – it's effectively an f2.2 being used at 1:1, and giving an effective aperture of f4.5 instead of the f5.6 which should be the case.

Sony does not tell you any of this. In order to discover it, I had to test the lens and study its behaviour. And I had to compare that with the patent.

On the camera, if you set f2.8 it will say f2.8 regardless of focus distance – and your image data will always say it's a 30mm lens. But as you focus, the changes have taken place due to the internal zoom and focus mechanism. By 1:1 you are only

19mm away from the subject and the total working distance is around 13cm from sensor to subject plane. Given the thickness of the optical unit, there's no doubt that the effective focal length is around 24-25mm.

That is – by odd coincidence – much the same as my vintage Minolta Micro 25mm f2.5. Mounting that directly on the camera body using an M42 adaptor, I can see that it produces a very similar result but with a little more magnification. The adaptors won't let me try it as a 1:1 macro.

The question is – why on earth would you want the subject to be only 19mm from the lens front?

I can answer that very easily.

When using Live View rear screen composition on the models which allow it (300/350/330/380/450/500/550), it is normal to hold the camera away from your eye. You may not have it at arms' length, but it could be in a comfortable waist-level or extended position.

Composing an extreme close-up this way is faster and surer when the camera is brought very close to the subject. It's what you do with your camera phone or a compact digital camera, and it is a natural action for many camera users.

There is a risk of disturbing the subject, or casting a shadow from the lens. The background may be messy without a long focal length to help you blur and isolate.

But, for the average user, the short focal length macro is intuitive; it works like their compact camera with its 1cm from the lens close-up ability, and although it does not have the same huge depth of field, the results have a similar 'Honey I've Shrank the Kids' look (cinema filmed with an endoscope!).

This is no doubt Sony's rationale for such an odd lens. For more expe-



The 30mm has an all-plastic mount and no link for the AF drive – the SAM focus motor is built-in

30mm f2.8 SAM

is about as much fun and
likely to buy for £149.
on a Sony patent published
us range from infinity to just
small front element.



At f4 hand-held, the 30mm almost gets 'inside' an early Spring flower and reveals every spot of pollen scattered on to the petals.

Below: a violet seen (for scale) in hand, and as seen at 1:1 with the Alpha 550 resting on the ground using rear screen composition .



rienced photographers, the 30mm has other merits. The entire lens and camera can fit between the ground, and the head of a small flower like a snowdrop. That was almost all I could find to photograph when the lens arrived, and the novelty of looking up into the flower from worm's eye level got me exploring other plants as they arrived in the garden.

The folding screen of the Alpha 550 proved vital for this. I also found other positions and subjects where the extended live view worked really well, and the very close positioning of the 30mm was an advantage. I could for example photograph my chinchilla in his cage, holding the camera into the cage, or photograph small dog and over-affectionate cats from the distances they prefer.

The lens hood I found and fitted does of course interfere with subjects, as it is 20mm long. But it led to a simple method for copying slides; just place the slide on a light-box, upend the camera set to manual focus with a Cokin A holder and lens hood fitted, and the focus distance is just about right. I have a box of old lens hoods and at some stage I'll do some surgery on one to produce a perfect slide copying device for the 30mm, complete with a diffuser.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find a write-up of the Delta macro ring-flash for Alpha, since I decided to concentrate a bit on close-up and macro for my articles this Spring. I thought that the Delta would be useless with such a short subject distance, but it turns out to have the ring-flash reflector designed to throw light inwards as well as forwards. Macro shots with this unit, even with the 30mm, were better lit than used to be the case with the Minolta AF-1200N kit.

Finally, the 30mm has also been a general companion when out and about. Its resolution and contrast beat any zoom I have used on the Alpha 550, including the CZ 16-80mm. It's very resistant to flare when including light sources in the shot, as you might expect from a lens with not too many air to glass surfaces or a large glass area.

There is a similar DT lens – the 50mm f1.8 – which costs even less. It is not a macro and does not focus particularly close, which is disappointing. It's intended as a portrait or wide aperture general purpose lens for the 15X format DSLRs.

If the performance of the cheap little plastic 30mm with its buzzy focus motor is anything to by, there's another lens to go buy!

– David Kilpatrick



Wallace statue, 1/100th at f11 – superb colour and contrast, and perfect sharpness right down to the stone texture.



For medium-distance close-ups the 30mm is hard to beat. Baking and new potatoes contrasted at the farmers' market – f9 gives optimum sharpness, and with the Alpha 550's minimum ISO 200, a totally shake-free 1/640th.

Below: using a Cokin holder and hood to support the camera on a light box, this 35mm transparency was copied to a standard which for practical use beats a 50MB slide scanner file. It's sharp at f5.6 but with no visible grain, scratches or dust.





Live view and screen angle

The Alpha 550 is the camera I've used with the 30mm macro despite the Alpha 700 having a mirror lock-up function absent on the 550 and pretty vital for macro work.

In the studio shot (right) you can see just how close the minimum focus is to the lens front. It is something we are not used to, though the Sigma 17-70mm f2.8-4 Macro design does something similar.

The Manual Focus Live View screen is showing part of a discarded Energizer battery.

The inset picture above shows the 7X magnification to aid manual focusing – you can see that it homes in on three letters of the word ALKALINE. If you think that is a good aid to focusing, remember that it goes to 14X – double this.

I do not know of any Live View macro focusing which magnifies to the same degree on a 3 inch, 920,000 pixel screen.

To the right, this low view of Spring Snowflake flowers at Belsay House gardens (Northumberland, English Heritage) was enabled by the articulated live view screen and small size of the lens and camera combination.

Below, how these fir cones looked from eye level; and to the right, the close-up shot achieved using live view and holding the camera up to the subject with the 30mm macro. It's a natural partner to live view composition techniques.



α gallery



It's old advice – but it still works – Smile please! Above, it's not Oklahoma, it's summertime in Armenia from Armen Gharibyan of Yerevan. Armen used his Alpha 700 with 70-210mm Minolta AF lens at 160mm, wide open at f4. See Armen's photo blog at <http://ag.photoblogs.am/>. Right, from globetrotting photojournalist Henry Richardson, taken in West Papua New Guinea. Henry shot using a Minolta 700si with Tamron 28-200mm on Fujichrome 100. See <http://www.bakubo.com>

To enter your own pictures for future *Gallery* pages, just send digital files. Images should be no larger than 2000 x 3000 pixels or the equivalent data size for panoramas (6 megapixels). They should be saved as AdobeRGB or sRGB JPEG files, with embedded ICC profile and intact EXIF data, to level 8 quality (High) or better. Your details, caption, copyright information, website URL, email address etc should be written into the file EXIF or IPTC fields – use 'File Information' in *Photoshop File Menu* to view and edit these text fields.

You may also put caption, website, etc information in a separate text document attachment or in the body of your email.

The pictures must have been taken on Minolta, Konica Minolta, Sony or Sony Alpha equipment. Scans from slides, negatives or prints are accepted and full details must be provided of equipment used. EXIF data will be used to confirm the origin of digital entries.

Send by email to: gallery@photoclubalpha.com

You may also send by post on CD or DVD to :

**Photoworld Gallery, Icon Publications Ltd,
Maxwell Place, Maxwell Lane, Kelso, Scottish Borders TD5 7BB.**

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.





Two very different tropical-looking beaches – above, Luskentyre on the Isle of Harris is a long way from realms of coral sands. Andy Bartlett was on a post-breakfast stroll, 100 yards from where his family was staying. “The fresh water is stained brown after flowing through the peat moors inland”, he explains. Taken with a Sony Apba 100, Tamron 17-50mm f2.8 at 22mm, f11, 1/50, ISO 100, +0.7 EV, hand-held with a circular polariser. Below, taken in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, by Sury Maturi with Alpha 700 and SAL 18-200mm, at 18mm, ISO 200, f11, 1/500.





Australian member Bruce Kingston photographed Gitgit Waterfall on the island of Bali, Indonesia, using his Alpha 900 and Sigma 28-105mm f2.8 lens; ISO 320, 1/10th at f22. Right, Paul Murphy braved the streets of Morpeth at Gathering time, facing up to some heavy Morris action; Alpha 700, Minolta 28-135mm at 75mm and f5, 1/400, ISO 200. Below: Mike Hawthorne caught his seagull in flight with the Konica Minolta 5D, 70-300mm Sigma Apo Macro hand held on a moving ship at 300mm. ISO 1600, 1/1250 at f10.



There are hundreds of great photographs posted in the discussions you will find on the Forum at www.photoclubalpha.com Visit the site, go to the Forum and create your own account to join in the photo challenges, showcase your best shots, and get help from members all round the world. All the pictures used in this Gallery are from Forum members.



PTO heads to Egypt for January 2011

The twenty third annual Photo Training Overseas course will take place in the beautiful cosmopolitan resort area of Hurghada in Egypt.

Course dates:
Friday 28 January – Friday 4 February 2011

A return to Egypt was the overwhelming choice of delegates in a poll taken amongst all those who attended Turkey in January 2010.

This promises to be even more stunning than the previous location that PTO visited in Egypt in 2009. It is set centrally along the west coast of the Red Sea and directly opposite Saudi Arabia. Hurghada is a former fishing village which is rapidly becoming the most popular tourist resort along the entire Red Sea coast. The town is buzzing at night and it is acknowledged as the leading area for diving, snorkeling and, in fact, all water sports. It also boasts the finest underwater garden in the world and, of course, a superb year-round climate!

The selected hotel for the 2011 conference is the *Sunrise Mamlouk Palace* – a large, five-star rated Egyptian property – well equipped, luxurious and modern, with interesting architectural features. All the sumptuous bedrooms have either a sea, garden or pool view, they are all generously proportioned and decorated in traditional Egyptian style. To see the hotel and read customer reports go to www.sunrisemamloukpalace.com then click onto trip advisor.

Everyone who attends will be on 'all-inclusive' which means you can effectively eat and drink as much food and alcohol as the body can absorb in a week, or even two weeks if that is your wish!

What HAPPENS Next?

To ensure your place book now visit the PTO website at

www.pto-uk.com
or telephone the booking hotline on
0161 483 3114

Due to the popularity of this resort/hotel we have limited availability.

SPECIAL FEATURES

- * Monthly payments available at no additional cost
- * Daytime flights available from Gatwick, Birmingham and Manchester
- * Informative print critique and competition
- * Ideal socialising & networking opportunities
- * Fantastic display of delegate images
- * Superb product exhibits from sponsors
- * Shoot your own images using PTO models
- * Great awards event
- * PTO is tax deductible for delegates



The speaker line-up is an interesting mix of well known practitioners from both the UK and overseas interspersed with some exciting new talent. One thing is guaranteed – delegates will be considerably more knowledgeable at the end of the training week than when they left these shores.

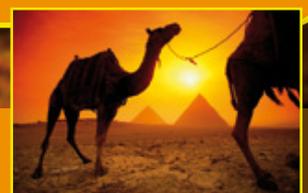
Sophisticated photography of children in the great outdoors will be covered by the outstanding BELLA WEST. The Guru of Photoshop – Mr Actions Man himself – GUY GOWAN will again enlighten delegates on the finer points of workflow at an understandable level. JOE SMITH from Malta will enthral delegates with his award winning black and white documentary and pictorial images. KEVIN WILSON will take wedding photographers back to the world of beautiful classical wedding imagery at the highest possible level whilst SARAYA CORTAVILLE will enthral you on her take on modern artistic portraits following her time managing a 'Venture' studio. CRASH TAYLOR will have a different slant on wedding photography using digital art to enhance every image. Last – but by no means least LLEWELLYN ROBINS will provide his own take on photographing the unseen image – objects, shapes and just about anything for pleasure and additional income.

Regular features, such as evening seminars with different speakers on business related subjects, the popular digital photo-competition with superb trophies presented at the glittering Gala Awards Dinner – where beautiful prints supplied by *One Vision* will be on display all week before being presented to the finalists. The lively trade show remains in place. All this will combine with opportunities to shoot images using PTO models throughout the week in a fantastic resort location.

What does all this cost?

A remarkable **£950** which includes return flights, transfers, in-flight meals, seven nights accommodation in a five star Egyptian hotel on 'all-inclusive'. Seven leading practitioners will be conducting Master Classes. Plus four different evening seminars, a great location, superb weather and the best possible networking opportunities anywhere. Accompanying non-delegates pay **£750** which include evening seminars and the Gala Awards Dinner.

PLUS a second week for only **£180** all inclusive



Bass Rock beauties

Peter Karry made the journey north for an appointment to spend a day visiting the Bass Rock gannet colony in summer.

So there I was, ready and eager, waiting to take a boat to Bass Rock, the sky was blue and the sun was shining – but what was coming up fast? Heavy grey clouds and rainy showers. So I took my first shots while the sunshine prevailed – of the kittiwakes nesting in the ruins of the castle overlooking Dunbar's small harbour, took out my umbrella and sheltered until the boat arrived to transport a small group of people who had chosen this photographic trip.

The journey from Dunbar to Bass Rock takes longer than the one from North Berwick, but uses a fishing boat rather than the smaller vessel at North Berwick, which gives a much better chance to land on Bass Rock in marginal conditions. However, it is open to the elements, not just the spray from the sea's waves, but the wind and rain as well of course. Even so, there is only room for some ten photographers on each trip – though it can run twice a day.

On the hour's trip, you become a little conditioned to seeing the gannets that are the object of going on this journey, as they fly and skim past the boat. Even better, the owner had brought along a box of mackerel to throw into the sea whilst the boat is kept stationary (well – allowing for the movement of the boat going up and down in the sea's swell) near Bass Rock. First to arrive are the seagulls, but gannets bombing into the sea appear only minutes behind.

JPEG, RAW or film?

We had been advised to use JPEG output on our digital cameras to be able to capture the fast and furious diving continuously, but I did not fancy holding my Alpha A700 over the sea – just in case I lost my grip – so for this exercise I used film in my Dynax 5 fitted with a 24-105mm lens. And of course I did not need to worry whether recording to my digital CF card would create any delays.

Even so, I ran through five films in the short time that we waited there, and changing film in a boat rocking in the waves isn't easy or fast. I started by using manual focus and manual exposure, but then

reverted to autofocus and Aperture Priority exposure, as I found that the exposures were still close to the readings from a hand-held meter, and the camera was faster to focus than my adjusting for the different distances.

Once on dry land, I used the Dynax 5 with my Minolta 135mm for a few films, just so that I did have some shots – especially portraits – on film, which I scanned once the processed results were received back. The CF card I decided to use in the A700 for the day was 8GB, and I used the Sony 18-250mm lens on it so that I could take all sorts of shots from wide-angle to telephoto.

This combination was extensively used, except when there were soaking heavy showers, when both cameras were replaced inside my backpack, which was then placed inside a large bin-liner.

I used RAW file format (actually cRAW), so that I could more easily cope with the widely varying light conditions. But even so, at processing stage I had to take out some dust that crept onto the sensor.

The benefit of using the A700 raw is that the resulting file size means that you can happily crop out unwanted parts of the image to an A4 size at 300 dpi – which I did when I ended up with too much blank sky in the picture.

As well as the tour leader (see below), we were accompanied by Jenny from the Scottish Wildbird Centre, who gave us advice on the birds and how to approach photographing them so that they were not alarmed by these strange creatures carrying black devices that have huge beaks on the front, as well as keeping an eye on us so that we did not disturb nesting birds. We were also advised not to venture near to any cliff edge. A gannet flying close by could easily make us lose our balance, and it is a long way down!

The sight of all those Gannets is truly amazing – as you approach Bass Rock, you will see clouds of flies in the sky – but no... they are the gannets in their thousands. There are 50,000 nesting pairs, and another 50,000 gannets not yet nesting – a total of 150,000 birds! On top of these are the ubiquitous and opportunistic

seagulls – which are keen to exploit any lack of concentration on behalf of the gannets by stealing their eggs or fledglings. They can be equally aggressive to the human visitors, by nipping your extremities.

I did decide to try to get the exposure right in the camera, so when using the A700 I watched the histogram carefully when the predominantly white birds comprised the main element inside the frame, and adjusted the correction accordingly. With the Dynax 5, I resorted to an occasional check on a hand-held meter (that I bought on eBay for £5) in incident mode.

Gannet surfait

So you would not think that there would be any problem capturing shots of these large wonderful birds? You'd be wrong. The problem is that there are so MANY of them, that getting a clear background for a portrait is difficult, and avoiding a stray wing intruding into a wider scene is nigh on impossible.

You can also be happily focusing on a chosen subject, when a flying missile intrudes into the picture! You might be used to this when photographing in a city and people insist on walking in front of your camera – but I could just not get used to this happening with birds flying past. Of course I had to capture the image of the well known courtship ritual of the birds clicking their beaks. Nesting gannets aggressively protecting their territory are also a good subject.

You may find that one of the more rewarding aspects is when the birds return from flying in with nesting materials in their beaks, as they slow down as they hover above their mate. It was obviously best to take shots as they approached rather than as they were flying past, but it did depend on the direction of the light – as shooting against the light of the sky was tricky.

Sometimes I went for a sharp image, sometimes I tried my panning technique, sometimes I used Single Shot AF, sometimes Continuous AF. There was enough time during the five hours spent on the rock to attempt all sorts of creative techniques and so it went by very quickly. The early advice given to us to spend the first 10 minutes just soaking in the atmosphere was great advice, which I recommend to you! It feels like a real privilege just to be in the presence of this horde of impressive wildlife.

The tour was organised and led by John Wright – of Photographers on Safari – see: www.photograpersonsafari.com



Facing page – gannet courtship, digital capture. Above: gannet submarining and emerging with mackerel bait. Below: no room at the inn for photographers with 150,000 birds on the former prison island.



Wild horses wouldn't...

One of those locations that I have *always* wanted to visit – especially with a camera – is the world renowned region of the Camargue. A part of the Rhone Delta on the Mediterranean coast of France, it comprises huge wild and marshy areas where white horses, black bulls, and pink flamingos abound.

So when I found that one of the growing number of photographic wildlife organisations – **Photographers on Safari** with whom I had already visited Bass Rock – offered a trip there as one of their regular vacations, I just had to sign up.

The organiser, John Wright, had worked out the logistics of flying to Marseille, hiring two minibuses to transport the 10 photographers plus him and his wife to Les Saintes Maries de la Mer to stay in the *Hostellerie du Pont de Gau*, some 90 minutes from the airport. This small hotel is thoroughly recommended by me, having a gastronomic restaurant with three levels of cost. We ate from the cheapest dinner menu, with an option to upgrade any day, but the high quality and choices of food on that menu was a delight.

We were advised to obtain items of clothing to use – such as waders which I bought specially on eBay. The option was to use thigh length waders, but I went the whole hog and bought chest-high waders, and was glad that I had done so as the water we entered was quite deep – and it allowed me to kneel down to get a lower angle on the shots when I felt this was more dynamic. Because I was using film canisters I was also advised to buy a photographer's vest for ease of changing, again found on eBay.

John had found a local photographer, Patrice, who runs his own trips, to take us to two different farms. We visited them at different times of day for the differing light conditions, from early morning to late afternoon. The horses were quite friendly and inquisitive, and when waiting to start even nuzzled or nibbled their guests. One photographer wasn't quite so happy when this inquisitive nature meant a horse picked up a tripod to see if it tasted good!

Patrice was able to converse with the horse riders from each farm who drove the horses into and through the water, so that their locations were changed to suit us photographers gathered in or alongside the water.

After trial runs they entered and

...stop Peter Karry risking his gear in the salt marshes and windblown sand of the Camargue. But, as the pictures show, it's the photo expedition of a lifetime.



left the water at spots that ensured that they came close enough to us. At one location we were in the edge of a marsh bordering the sea, and at another we were on sand at the edge of the sea. At both locations the horses were herded back and forth many times, so we could try different techniques such as varying shutter speeds, focal length, panning, and change from horizontal to portrait format. In between runs, the horses had to be gathered together by the riders and were given time to catch their breath. Believe me, these horses move at speed, and make an exhilarating and exciting subject, so unless you keep your finger on the shutter for rapid firing (not a technique I favour), you will only manage a small number of exposures for each run.

As they come very close at the end of each run, we needed to take avoiding action from the splashes of muddy water from the horses' hooves. Even so, sometimes lens tissues were essential to wipe off the resulting drops of water on the lens filter.

One thing I could not decide on was whether to use film or digital



– so having used a recent trip with Quest Photography to Glencoe as a test run I took both. I took my Alpha A100, and two Minolta 9xi bodies. One change I made from the test run was to decide to take one lens, the Sony 18-250mm, for the A100, to avoid having to change it in watery conditions, and used cards with 2GB and 8GB capacity.

The 9xi's were accompanied by 24-105mm and 100-300mm lenses, and I took slide film with a variety of 100 and 400 ISO canisters.

As the weather turned out to be very changeable the main part of my photography was taken with the digital system, with its advantage of easy change of White Balance and ISO. On the first day I started with ISO 200, but did move to 100 when I wanted to use a slow shutter speed. After one of John's evening sessions looking at our shots on his computer, he advocated that I try using ISO 400 to get some pin sharp action shots. You will find some of the results shown here – but not from the slides as they were not processed before I was asked to write this article.

We had been advised to take a

tripod, and most of the others used them exhaustively, but I found that I had more flexibility of position if I did not use mine. The one time I did find the tripod of great use was when I wanted to change lenses on the 9xi body in the middle of the water – and rather than try to balance and rather clumsily fumble with a body and two lenses, I put one lens on the body located firmly on the tripod and the other lens went into my vest pocket.

Of course I had the advantage of being able to use Super Steady Shot on the A100, when not on the tripod. I suppose the others, using Nikon and Canon systems, had heavier systems that had to be supported – especially those using prime 300mm and 500mm lenses. One other item I took that elicited interest from the others was a small Incident Light Meter – one photographer thought it was a Russian Spy camera! Yes, because of the white subjects, I wanted to have a check on the exposure besides just using the camera's histogram.

However, it was a different story when we visited the Pont de Gau Bird park that adjoined the hotel. The weather for the visit to this park

was some of the best we had – for the rest of the time we experienced weather ranging from showery to sea fog – and so I was able to set the ISO down to 100, and the colours of the plumage were much brighter than the horses. I did watch the histogram on the A100 carefully, as I did not want to burn out any of the light coloured feathers, and accordingly was happy to set the compensation to -0.7.

Flamingo panorama

Here I wanted to try some other techniques, including double exposure when I find it best to use the same composition for both shots, which is most easily achieved using a tripod. I had done a dry run of building a panoramic image with pictures of Glencoe, and wanted to try this with the flamingos as the subject. So I took several overlapping shots on the tripod, and hoped for little change in the birds' positions between frames – allowing about 20 % overlap between successive exposures – and used a sequence of 4 or 5 to build the panorama (above). *Photomerge* in *Photoshop CS2* was the tool I

used, and found it extremely good and accurate at creating a successful result – usually after using the Crop tool to make an image that cut out some extra portions that appeared after the initial panoramic build.

So I have fulfilled a lifetime ambition and simultaneously completed one of the challenges of surviving clouds of large biting mosquitos – and no, I did not photograph them as suggested by a colleague!



Free range Eigg

There are around 750 Scottish islands and everyone has their own favourite for a variety of reasons. One that has risen in popularity and become a real attraction for photographers is the Isle of Eigg. Together with Rum, Canna and Muck they form a group known as The Small Isles, part of the Inner Hebrides. Lying just to the south of Skye, they are easily accessed by ferry from Mallaig and Arisaig on the mainland.

Although I have been a regular day visitor to Eigg for over 30 years, I had never stayed on the island until 6 years ago due the lack of accommodation. Following the community buyout of the island in 1997 things started to change and recent years have seen the gradual development of facilities geared to attract visitors – a new pier, shop, tearoom, mains electricity as well as self catering, B&B and hostel accommodation. Published images by many of the UK's leading landscape photographers have undoubtedly enhanced Eigg's appeal for photographers.

Accessible variety

So what does a small island measuring only five miles by three have to offer? Top of the list is the one mile stretch of coastline between Laig and Camus Sgiotaig (the Singing Sands) which has few equals anywhere in the UK. For sheer variety and spectacular geology, this section of coast can keep the serious photographer fully occupied from dawn till dusk for several days. Being on the west side of the island, there are many ideal locations for sunset pictures and during May and September the sun sets directly behind the mountains of Rum, forming an impressive background.

Nature photographers will also find that Eigg is very rich in a wide variety of subjects – golden eagle, raven, corncrake and many songbirds and shorebirds. Otters are regularly seen, while dolphins and Minke whales can often be spotted off-shore. During summer, insect life is abundant, including dragonflies and 18 species of butterflies. Eigg has been called the island of flowers due to its rich flora that includes 500 higher plant species and over 300 lower plants. In spring, bluebells and wild garlic are abundant throughout the hazel scrub and in the more

It's pronounced 'egg' and has fewer visitors than it deserves. Duncan McEwan has been able to stay on Eigg following the opening up of new tourism facilities.



Sunset over Rum: Crepuscular rays add drama to this evening image. A carefully chosen viewpoint ensured that the large rock was not touching the edges of the pool. Alpha 100 with 11-18mm lens at 15mm, 1/5 at f14 (+1), ISO 100. 2 stop (4X) Neutral Density graduated filter.



Top: Cliffs, Edge of Laig Bay. The natural rock colour is enhanced by late evening light and the slow shutter speed creates a sense of movement in the water. Alpha 100, 16-80mm CZ lens at 16mm, 0.8 at f22, ISO 200. Above: Pitchstone Lava, An Sgurr, showing the contorted rocks. Alpha 100, 16-80 CZ lens at 24mm, 1/40 at f9, ISO 100. Polarising filter. Below: Wet Rock Reflections. These wet black rocks were in deep shade and by standing some distance back, reflections of blue sky and bracken covered hillside could be seen in the wet surface. Alpha 900, 70-400mm SSM G lens at 400mm, 1/4 at f32 (-0.7), ISO 200.



dominant woodland in the grounds of Eigg Lodge. In more open meadows, primroses and wild orchids catch the eye. So a long telephoto and a macro lens should be added to the camera kit to be taken, but remember that having to walk everywhere, it may not be possible to carry all equipment, all of the time. On occasions, a minibus/taxi service may operate but it is safer to plan to get around on foot.

The fascinating geology of Eigg stems from the volcanic activity that occurred on Rum and Ardnamurchan followed by glaciations that have resulted in the island features we see today. Hexagonal pitchstone rock formations similar to Staffa and the Giant's Causeway can be seen in several places, but most spectacularly on An Sgurr or the Sgurr of Eigg as it is more commonly called. It takes just over an hour to walk on to the Sgurr ridge and the views are well worth the effort – this can quite comfortably be done on one of the day trips from Arisaig. From the summit, Skye, Muck, Coll, Tiree, Mull and the Treshnish Isles as well as the mainland give land in nearly 360 degrees. The rocks on the ridge make interesting and unusual foregrounds for landscape images.

Striking sands

The main attraction at the Bay of Laig lies in the sand. The beach is very flat, with the sand consisting of a mixture of black and light grains which become distributed differently to create patterns as the tide ebbs (see the cover photograph for this issue). These are never the same from one tide to the next, which adds to the fascination. Due to the flatness of the beach, and the fact that water is slow to drain as the tide recedes, the surface is left with a layer of water that picks up reflections in a dramatic way – particularly at sunset the effect can be spectacular. Unfortunately, if high tide coincides with sunset, this opportunity is denied.



Top: Algal Flow. The green alga appears to be flowing out of the orifice but in fact it is fixed to where the rock is kept sufficiently wet. Alpha 900, 24-70mm f2.8 CZ SSM lens at 50mm, 1/50 at f13, ISO 200.

Centre: Rock Face. One of many interesting rocks at Camus Sgiotaig. The sands shift markedly after stormy weather, covering or unmasking rocks to the extent that you are never sure what you will find until you get there. Alpha 900, 24-70mm f2.8 CZ SSM lens at 35mm, 1/25 at f22, ISO 400.

Bottom: Concretions in Evening Light. Measuring up to a metre in diameter, concretions like these are scattered along parts the shore. Oblique lighting has been used to emphasise their shape. Alpha 900, 24-70mm f2.8 CZ SSM lens at 60mm, 1/3 at f20 (-0.3), ISO 200. Polarising filter.

At Camus Sgiotaig, interesting rocks protrude through the sand which, when dry, has the curious property of squeaking or 'singing' as you shuffle your feet on dry areas of sand. Between here and Bay of Laig, it is mainly about the nature of the rocks – different types and a wealth of shapes. Long rock spurs leading to the edge of the sea can be used to enhance the feeling of depth as can the many volcanic dykes. Other rocks called concretions look like large cannonballs scattered around the shore, and some can be seen embedded in the cliffs above. There are flat slabs of rock with interesting surface characteristics while others are sculptured into unusual shapes. Highly reflective smooth rocks contrast well with those that have a rougher textured surface. Seaweeds, including vivid green species, adorn many of the rocks and will be at their freshest when left wet by a falling tide. As with any rock, the colour is very much dependent on the colour of the light falling on it, the most dramatic being when lit by a setting sun.

With the Isle of Rum as a backdrop, variety provided by high and low tides and different times of day, there are endless picture opportunities in this small area. It is all too easy to get 'hung up' at this location forgetting that there are so many other interesting aspects to the island.

Eigg's cover has been well and truly broken, so go before it gets overrun. If you love rocks, you will love Eigg.

For more details visit:
www.isleofeigg.com



For details of Duncan McEwan's 2010 series of photo workshops and holidays, visit:
www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk



Above: Afterglow over Rum. Graduated ND filters (equivalent to 5 stops) were required to balance exposure for sky and land. Alpha 900, 24-70mm f2.8 CZ SSM lens at 27mm. 1/13 at f22 (+0.7), ISO 200.

Below: Rum from Camus Sgiotaig. This demonstrates that appealing images can be taken even in the midday sun. Alpha 900, 24-70mm f2.8 CZ SSM lens at 35mm, 1/50 at f13 (+0.3), ISO 200. Polarising filter.



PMA 2010

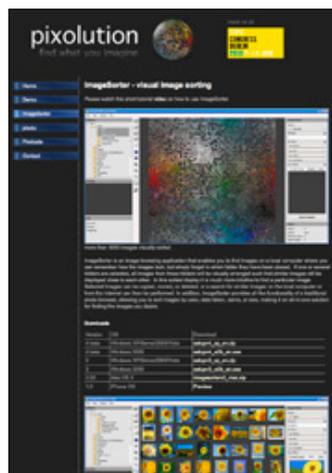
Gary Friedman reports on some of the brilliant
a visit to the Anaheim, CA, trade show for the
Focus on Imaging, more

That's right; this is the stuff you don't normally read about because it wasn't heralded by an army of press agents... the small entrepreneurs, the obscure products, and the products that just don't stand a chance!

Pixolution GmbH
www.pixolution.de

Let's start with what I thought was the most original idea I've seen in a long time. It's image categorizing and searching software that organizes pictures according to their visual similarity. If you know in your mind the image you're searching for on your hard drive but don't remember where it is, this software will show you thousands of tiny thumbnails from some or all of your directories at one time and literally let you zero in on the image you were thinking about in about 10 seconds. This is really amazing.

This company offers free evaluation software, plus free access to a beta software which lets you do an image search on Flickr and Yahoo. It starts out the same as a conventional image search, but then you can select an image and say "Show me images that are visually similar to this one" and it goes ahead and does so.



Aputure – the Gigtube
www.aputure.com

This isn't the only device of its type, but it did catch my eye. In addition to making radio flash triggers and wireless remotes, Aputure makes the Gigtube Wireless Digital Viewfinder. My favorite is the GWIS, it is a transmitter-and-receiver combination designed to take advantage of your camera's Live View capability. Just plug the transmitter into the HDMI



output port and watch your viewfinder on the wireless remote PDA-like device, from about 100m away. Press the button on top and you can focus and take the picture. Very cool!

A tethered version called the Gigtube DSLR Digital Viewfinder is available too.

NiZn Batteries
www.PowerGenix.com

The latest battery craze is a form of nickel-zinc AA batteries with higher-than-normal voltage and low internal resistance. Put into your accessory flash, and it will recycle as quickly as if an external battery were attached (a little less than a second). There is one caveat though. I first learned about these fast-recycling batteries at the wireless flash website, www.strobist.com, and in addition to describing the fast recycling time, some YouTube videos were shown of just how quickly a flash will overheat when shooting about 20 shots in a row at full power.

This demo is not in any way a typical use of a wireless flash (and if it is you should be using monolights anyway). You won't get as many flashes per charge, and that the batteries won't hold their charge as long when sitting on a shelf.

I took home two sets of batteries and absolutely love using them in my Alpha remote flashes in conjunction with diffusing umbrellas and softboxes. Highly recommended!

LensPen SensorKlear Loupe
www.lenspen.com

Cleaning dust off my sensor has always been a 20-minute ordeal. You've been there: Stop down your lens, take a test shot, move it to your computer to examine for dust, and

if you find some, good luck being able to target it accurately. I'd use all sorts of wet wipes, vacuums, blowers, and even my trusty LensPen, but no matter how hard I tried to provide good light I could never actually see the dust particles on the sensor.

That changed forever when I found the new SensorKlear Loupe from Lenspen. It has four bright LEDs pointing downward to illuminate the dust, which you can remove with whatever tool you please. This simple device REALLY makes a difference!

PhotoScramble
Photo Contest Software
www.PhotoScramble.com

Michael Connors wrote this software and is positioning it as the world's easiest to use photo contest software. How easy is it to use? Well, they host everything and make it look like your website – all you have to do is provide links to it. It handles the registration, photo upload, voting, and print sales.

Because this is software-as-a-service (rather than software that you buy and install in your webhost), they charge per contest – anywhere between \$100 and \$275 USD per event.

Click elite camera bags
www.clickelite.com

Yes, there were a gazillion camera bag makers at PMA, but this company actually had one product I had not seen before: They make something called a ClickStand which is a metal frame with a tripod screw on top that is embedded within several of the company's backpacks. Put the backpack down, extend the clickstand, and you have a handy tripod-like device with a heavy base for stability. Or compress the clickstand, wear the backpack on your front, and you are now wearing a camera-stabilizing brace.



Puzzleshots
www.hasbro.com/puzzleshots

PMA was absolutely filled with turnkey systems for putting photos on to various items such as coffee cups, wooden bowls (via laser), iPod skins, etc. Hasbro, the US toy company, has licensed many popular children's characters to allow them to be "included" in kids' portraits. They were giving away free jigsaw puzzle samples of you taken with the character of your choice, and so here is a picture of me and Spiderman.



– or weird! – innovations he uncovered during the USA. It's a very different kind of show than one like a mini-photokina.



At PMA Sony showed the prototype Alpha 700 replacement with video – and, below right, a new 500mm f4 G SSM super telephoto.



Sony USA's stand

This was the first time I had seen a Sony USA exhibition stand, and I actually thought it was nicer and more involving than Nikon's. Everything they made was on display, including photo printers, the Sony Bloggie™, a thousand similarly-spec'd point-and-shoots, and that interesting party-shot dock which will take party pictures for you so you can actually participate in your own party. Say what you want about Sony; they are a company that takes risks!

They had a stage where professional photographers would extol the virtues of the A900 and Zeiss glass.

And, under glass, they showed off two prototypes of the next Alpha DSLRs; one of which is to be the A700 replacement and will be able to shoot HD movies. Technically, since the shutter must remain open for movies to be made a Live View mode is most definitely possible (done the way Canon has been doing it for awhile – kludgy but accurate), but there were no obvious controls for Live View or a moveable rear screen. This prototype or mock-up has been debated to death on dpreview.com.

I've been writing books on the Sony cameras for a few years now, but nobody at Sony knew about me. Prior emails and phone calls went unanswered. So I figured this might be a good opportunity to change that. I went over to the Alpha DSLR

counter, took off my backpack, and took out two of my books and said: "These books are referred to as 'The Bible' online and really help users become enthusiastic about the camera choice they made".

The reaction was somewhere between surprise and incredibly mild interest. The one exception to that was Mark Weir, the Senior Technical Marketing Manager for the States. He really took a liking to the A700 book I showed him, and after thumbing through it he gave me a very enthusiastic "Can I keep this?".

Being a color print-on-demand book, it was not a cheap book to produce – it cost me over \$100, and I'm the author! – but I figured if this is what it takes to buy access to the inside, then it's a low-risk, high-payoff investment. I said "Absolutely!" and then we talked about the Alpha line and the new prototype being shown.

"Do you know anything more about the prototype than what's been disclosed to the press?", I asked. "Yes", he said, and ended the conversation there...

A few days after the show I sent him an email, re-introducing myself, saying I hope he is enjoying the book, and please let me know what I can do to help make you successful." (I'll bet nobody ever says that.) So far there has been no response.



Sigma – from the UK!

I also spent a considerable amount of time at the Sigma booth, and met with Graham Armitage, the managing director of Sigma (UK) Limited which is Sigma's 'oldest' and most respected subsidiary.

Sigma introduced three new lenses at PMA, and apparently has more products in the pipeline for future release. I spent some time talking with Graham and I learned quite a few things:

Sigma prided itself on having *happy* lens designers. "When you're an optical engineer and you go to work for Sigma, you know you're going to be working on these great lenses. That's a great motivator", said Graham. "Going to work for those other guys means you might get stuck making optics for copiers".

The just-announced 85mm f/1.4 did not have a price, but it "could be more than other OEM's version of the same lens". Their lens has HSM focusing – the Sony Zeiss design doesn't.

Back in the old days (like the 1970's), companies like Canon would make some high-end lenses with an expensive and hard to produce fluorite element. Sigma (along with Hoya) developed "FLD Glass" which is very fluorite-like in performance but has none of its drawbacks, like heavy weight and high thermal expansion. The new 85mm f1.4, the 70-200mm f2.8, and the 8-16mm f4-5.6 lenses all have this new glass. The 8-16mm lens was inspired by the success of the 12-24mm f4.5-5.6 lens, and had the same designer as the equally-popular 10-20mm f4-5.6 lens.

The 50-500 "Bigma" lens doesn't focus as closely as the old lens – 1.4m as opposed to 1.0m – but has the new FLD glass which more than makes up for it. They also will make available an APS-C lens hood (deeper than the standard lens hood so it will be more effective at improving contrast and reducing flare) and will include an 86mm APS-C step-down filter ring because large front-element filters are expensive, and why pay the money if your APS-C camera can't see into its corners?

Sigma also had their \$38,000 200-500mm f2.8 EX APO DG lens on display. I think the popular term "Bigma" was applied to the wrong lens!

The new 17-50mm f2.8 OS lens is designed to replace the standard kit lens that comes bundled with most entry-level DSLRs. It also is a more compact replacement for Sigma's earlier 18-50mm, and also includes image stabilization. This lens will ship in May.

He says that Japanese housewives really are into the great bokeh of these f2.8 lenses.

And of course Sigma is very proud of their new cameras, the SD-15 DSLR and the DP-1x and DP2s compact cameras, all of which use the new Foveon APS-C-sized sensor. The new sensors produce less heat, have a bigger and faster buffer, and handle high ISO better than before. The giant enlargements on the outside of their booth sure looked impressive!



www.friedmanarchives.com

Photoworld Product Tests

Sigma EX DG Macro 70mm f2.8

MODERN macro lenses are nothing like yesterday's designs. While my vintage 1985 50mm f2.8 and 100mm f2.8 Minolta AF macros were well made and had lasted their quarter-century with excellent results, both suffered from low contrast and internal reflections with digital SLRs. In addition, the stopped-down performance was softened by diffraction effects to an unacceptable degree. This meant that any shots at f16 – let alone f22 or f32 – lacked pixel-sharp crispness.

Sigma's 70mm f2.8 macro actually came to me with a package of camera and lenses I bought secondhand. It was not one of the lenses I wanted, so it was a bonus when on testing it I found that the contrast and sharpness far exceeded that of my old classic Minolta glass.

However, I did hold back for a few months before selling the 50mm and 100mm. The Sigma had to prove itself on both full frame Alpha 900 and APS-C models.

Because of the hybrid focusing method, the working distance at 1:1 is just under 26cm subject to image plane. Given that the lens unit itself has a few centimetres between front and rear nodes, this means it's really acting like the 60mm Tessar-type macro. The 50mm M-AF had a working distance of 20cm at 1:1, so I have gained only 5.7cm and actually lost a bit of space between lens and subject. The Sigma is 92mm long at infinity, and extends by 53mm to be 145mm long at 1:1 excluding the supplied



Compare this anemone flower with that on page 5. This is f11 with the 70mm, and the Delta ringflash reviewed opposite.

metal lens hood. Add that, and you have 178mm in front of your camera, 44.6mm from mount to sensor, eating up 22.26cm of the available 25.7cm.

That mere 3.44cm from lens-hood to subject is certainly no better than the 50mm M-AF and considerably worse than the 100mm.

For distant subjects, the Sigma is equally good optically and the 70mm length is ideal for portraits and studio product shots on the APS-C format. This lens is also compatible with older (non-HSM) Sigma EX DG teleconverters 1.4X or 2X, so if you happen to own one of these, it's a good choice.

While the aperture does not claim to be circular, it is very evenly shaped and positioned within the lens for attractive defocusing effects

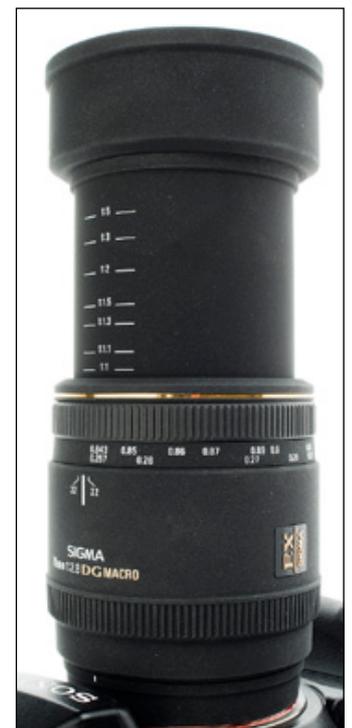
(bokeh). It becomes more circular as you approach the minimum f22 aperture. Though no f32 option is even provided, the performance of the Sigma on digital sensors between f11 and f22 is far better than the old lenses. Diffraction loss is minimised, no doubt due to the aperture position and design. I'd rather have a usable limit of f22 than an unusable f22 to f32 range.

The Sigma takes 62mm filters, which suits me well enough, and is a chunky metal-bodied design; even the screw in hood is metal. It is subjectively 'bigger' than the 100mm Minolta/Sony. It also comes with an

over-large lens case, and the hood does not invert elegantly for storage, either front or rear of the lens. These things I can live with, given the excellent performance on both formats.

It makes a good companion to the tiny 30mm Sony macro. All that would have been better would have been HSM focusing, as the screw drive focus is quite slow and deliberate. It does have a two-range focus limiter switch.

– DK



The Sigma 70mm is a substantial lens weighing 525g, a good match for the Alpha 900 body. The single extension focusing has limiter-switch ranges of infinity to 55cm, (Far) and 25.7 to 48cm (Close). The front rim does not rotate during focusing but the manual focus ring rotates during AF.



OK, you didn't want a shot of a rotten apple, but if you were a blackbird you would see this differently – a clearout of our pantry box in April kept them fed for days. Top, Delta ring flash at a practical f16. This shot is unpleasantly sharp when viewed at 100% from the Alpha 550. Below, existing light, 1/40th at f11. SSS or not, none of my handbeld attempts came anywhere near the ring flash quality.



The Delta (or Marumi) TTL-Auto Ring Flash

WE FIRST saw the Marumi ring flash at photokina 2008. The stand staff had a poster which showed an Alpha mount hot shoe. But to the best of my knowledge, it's only arrived in the UK in Canon and Nikon flavours (at around £110 from most dealers).

In Poland, the Sony Alpha system is the number one camera brand. Poland has taken to Sony like no other country. One of the biggest dealers and importer-distributors is Foto-Tip (www.foto-tip.pl) and their branding of this flash calls it Delta. Of course, it comes in Alpha fit, and it was only £77 including properly accounted-for VAT (21%) and shipping.

The packaging is primarily Polish but has full English translation as well, not that much information is needed. This is a simple GN14 TTL dedicated ringflash with a circular tube, no modelling lights, no manual power settings, and a permanent umbilical cord between the power pack and the ring head.

It comes in a native 52mm thread fit, with adaptors for 55/58/62/67 included (above right). The fitting method is crude, with a sharp-edged knurled disc to screw adaptor to head, head to lens. There is no quick release, but free rotation is possible once firmly fixed.

It retains a bounce head, rather like a vestigial tail – evidence of its ancestry and totally useless! The only other control is the on-off switch (centre right). Actually, the bounce head can be useful for pulling the spiral cable out of the way (lower right).

As for exposure, it uses pre-flash TTL only, not ADI, so it suits any vintage of lens. And it spreads light inwards as well as forwards, so it works with extremely close targets. You need to remember to turn it off – there is no auto-off. I did not and had to clean the battery compartment as a result.

Below is another imported accessory, this time made by Aputure, the painfully-named company which Gary Friedman encountered at PMA.



It is an Alpha electric cable release complete with programmable delay, long exposure, and time lapse multi shot interval timer. It operates AF and wakes up the camera correctly. It cost just £18.30 from Hong Kong vendor www.linkdelight.com and one day I'll find a task for it!

– DK



Ray-Flash Ring model RAC175-2



CONTINUING this issue's theme of macro and ring flash, the Czech designed Ray-Flash reappeared for test a couple of years after we tried a prototype. The light-pipe system which channels flash output from your regular camera-top gun into a supersized ring round the lens resulting in output which is as evenly balanced as a circular flash tube.

The model you need for Sony Alpha HVL-F58AM (or indeed, Minolta 5600HS-D/Sony HVL-F56AM) is actually the Canon Speedlit 580EX-II version. This is an absolutely perfect fit for the F58AM, which clearly has a flash-head assembly closely related to the Canon even if the rest of the gun is light years ahead in concept.

There are three different models, varying in the distance between the centre of the flash-head and the axis of the lens – 165mm, 170mm or 175mm. Initially we were sent a 170mm but this placed the ring too high up. Smaller lenses (55-62mm filter thread) would still fit but 77mm diameter lenses like the CZ 24-70mm f2.8 end up touching the Ray-Flash.

The 175mm model is close to perfect in alignment. My only complaint is that the front part never hangs vertically, due to the weight and the tolerances of the shoe, head and mounting. It's always a touch downward aimed. This makes no difference at all to the results, it's just



needed with this lighting.

You can see from the tiny ring reflection in our ancient surviving chicken's eye how even the light is. At f11 on the Alpha 900 this is a perfectly sharp result, and Aperture priority auto flash has worked well using pre-flash TTL (ADI should not be set when using adaptors like this).

Ray-Flash costs £149 from dealers like Speed Graphic – details from www.flaghead.co.uk. Be sure to specify the right model!

– DK



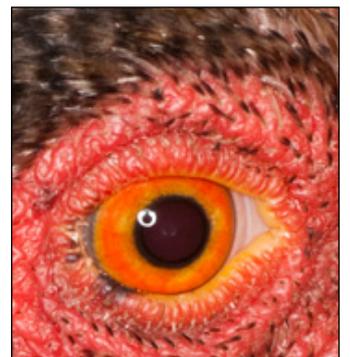
Ray-Flash fitted to Alpha 900 with Sigma 70mm, top. How it fits, above and below left; light pipe detail, below right. Outdoor daylight+flash shot, right.



annoying aesthetically (see above).

As for output and light quality, the combination of HVL-F58AM and Ray-Flash matches any ring flash you could buy and it is ideal for portraiture or fashion.

In the field, I found that its fixed position ended up far behind the front of a macro lens at 1:1 and the lens could cast some shadow on the subject. I could not use the lens hood on the Sigma 70mm for this reason, but a hood is hardly



GGG optical glass LCD screen protectors

ANOTHER product obtained from Foto-Tip (www.foto-tip.pl) in Poland, the GGS toughened glass adhesive protectors for LCD screens can also be found under other names and from UK vendors – though at well over twice the £6.95 plus shipping I paid for each of mine. Also, it's not so easy to find Alpha 350, 550, 700 and 900 custom made versions at home.

These laminated glass sheets use a 3M optically clear polymer gel adhesive which is uncannily perfect. You just clean your rear LCD screen carefully, peel off the protective films from front and rear (or just rear) of the GGS glass, and in a single action position it on the LCD. On the Alpha 550, the shaped glass and clear dot in the black outer frame helped perfect location. Then press firmly – no bubbles, no problems. It's as if the camera has had a glass



rear screen ex-factory. They work best with slightly recessed screens (A550) not proud ones (A350) but all four Alphas now look perfect!

–DK



The installation process is actually easier than fitting an adhesive plastic or cling-type film protector without bubbles. Above, the rear protective foil is still on the glass – right, removed. Viewing in daylight is improved, compared to the diffusing effect of plastic protectors. They do not scratch readily, but do show grease or handling marks and I polish mine as a result rather too often. But will they ever come off?



Call the Photostore



Adrian Paul at the Photostore can obtain almost any accessory you need for your Alpha system camera. Lost a flash shoe cover? Or just want to get one for your new camera which came without? Call Adrian – the same goes for lens caps, body caps, flash 'feet', AC adaptors, battery packs, lens hoods, cases, straps, LCD protectors, eyepiece magnifiers, LCD hoods, hand grips... If it's a Sony accessory Adrian can obtain it for you. He also has stocks of Minolta and Konica Minolta items. Photostore has its own web forum with former Minolta expert Bernard Petticrew as resident guru.

01132 448664
www.photostore-uk.com



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THE DARKROOM

with Colin Westgate

Complete course 7 days at West Mersea, Essex. Days may be booked on an individual basis – choose any day or combination of days to suit your requirements).

Max. 3 people any one day.

Sunday 4 July to Saturday 10 July 2010.

Other days by arrangement.

This very comprehensive, hands on, course will cover everything from basics through to advanced printing, to specialised techniques such as lith printing and alternative processes. It will also include toning and print presentation and mounting.

Colin Westgate is a very experienced printer, having worked in the darkroom for over 50 years. His tuition will enable you to get the best from your negatives, both technically and aesthetically. Any day or days can be booked separately.

Day 1. Beginners basics. Negative development, and the mechanism of making prints, using contrast grades and simple tonal controls.

Days 2 and 3. Advanced methods, including split grade printing, flashing for highlight recovery, difficult negatives etc. It is not essential to attend both days, but will be beneficial to do so.

Day 4. Lith printing. A specialised technique capable of creating beautiful tonal and graphic effects.

Day 5. Toning. Use of various toners, such as sepia, selenium, copper, blue etc.

Day 6. Alternative processes, such as cyanotype and argyrotpe, where papers are hand coated with the appropriate solution and the pictures are 'developed' by sunlight or U.V.lightbox

Day 7. Print mounting and presentation. It is amazing how a well presented print can transform a picture and make it look very special. Participants will cut their own window mount.

Price any single day £75 (deposit £25). Two or more days £60 per day (deposit £20 per day).

Complete course £350 (deposit £75)

TRADITIONAL OYSTER SMACKS AND WINKLE BRIGS

with Colin Westgate

1 day, at West Mersea, nr Colchester
Sunday 5 September 2010*
(provisional date)

Mersea native oysters are claimed to be amongst the finest in the world and this event marks the opening of the season when a multitude of traditional vessels dredge for them under sail. There is a contest for the biggest catches, and there is plenty of

action! The traditional vessels, known as smacks, together with the smaller winkle brigs, are often well over 100 years old, and are truly picturesque subjects for the camera. Quest will be chartering a small motor vessel in which we will be able to move amongst the smacks for the best views of the action as well as longer distance shots with the boats under sail.

We will be on the water from about 9.30am until 1pm, when the contest ends. We will then be taken to a small island in the estuary for the weigh in and a delicious seafood lunch, including optional oysters if you like them. Here there will be further opportunities for photographs of the fishermen and onlookers.

Price £79, includes seafood lunch. (deposit £25) 10 places

VENICE

New Quest destination!
5 nights, Guest House based.
(10 places)

Sunday 12 to Friday 17 September 2010

This exotic location is wonderful for photography, with picture opportunities everywhere. The light is great most of the time, and with an abundance of waterways, interesting buildings and colourful people, there is something for every taste.

This trip is designed for first time travellers to Venice, or for those who visited a long time ago, or perhaps for just a day. The aim is to introduce and explore Venice, taking in not only the landmark locations, but also some of the back streets and alleys, where the 'real' Venice is to be found.

We will be staying in a small but comfortable guest house and will travel around on foot and by 'vaporetto' (water bus). Quite a bit of walking will be involved. Sue Revill, who knows Venice well, will be our guide for the trip.

Price £750 (deposit £200).
Single supplement £200. (10 places). See website for full terms.

THE ARDECHE, FRANCE

with Experience Ardecche

7 nights, hotel based
Sunday 26 September to Sunday 3 October 2010

The Ardecche region is rich with photographic opportunities – dramatic landscapes, large rivers, ancient

forests, historical towns and villages. The variety of subject matter in the area will ensure a full and interesting week and of course we will enjoy the local ambience and French cuisine!

We will be staying at the Belvedere Hotel, close by the famous Pont d'Arc, at the head of the Ardecche Gorge. Situated only 6km from the town of Vallon-Pont-d'Arc along the gorge road, Le Belvedere is a popular destination for the French tourists who prefer the tranquillity away from the hustle and bustle.

This is a great opportunity to really enjoy this magical and welcoming part of France nestled right on the edge of the 'Réserve Naturelle'

Early autumn is an ideal time of year to visit, with soft light and plenty of atmosphere. Quest has teamed up with 'Experience Ardecche' for this event, a company specialising in 'activity holidays' and their knowledge of the area will guarantee us a full and interesting week.

Please enquire if you would like more information and advice on flights, ferry or rail travel.

Price £825 (deposit £200)
Single supplement £100.
Maximum 10 places.

Price includes Dinner B&B, and travel in France during the week. It is based on a shared en suite room, and a supplement is payable for a single occupancy. Cost of flights or other transportation to France is not included.

PICTURE FORUM (EAST SUSSEX)

1 day, at Seaford, East Sussex
Wednesday 6 October 2010

Will include the usual mix of mini presentations, a competition and a talk by a leading photographer. 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 the medium you wish

to use. 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. However, if you would prefer not to give a presentation, you are very welcome to simply attend and enjoy the pictures shown by others.

For practical reasons, the competition is open for prints only – not more than one per person. The judge (t.b.a.) will give a brief critique and appraisal on all entries. Prizes will be awarded for the best work, one to be chosen by our judge, 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.

AUTUMN IMPRESSIONS

with Colin Westgate
1 day, at Sheffield Park, Sussex
Tuesday 2 November 2010

Learn how to produce beautiful impressionistic images of the superb autumn colour in the lovely Sheffield Park gardens, well known for the variety of its exotic trees and spectacular autumn colours. These are at their best at this time of the year and by the use of various diffusion methods, you are guaranteed to get some lovely pictures. After an initial discussion and demonstration of the techniques, the day will be spent photographing in the Park.

Price £58 (deposit £20).
10 places. Park entrance fees (where applicable) and refreshments on arrival included.

Autumn Holiday weeks:

ISLE OF SKYE
Saturday 9 October to Saturday 16 October 2010. 7 nights.
Guest House based. 8 places
Discount available if combined with Harris & Lewis trip – see below.
ISLES OF HARRIS AND LEWIS
Saturday 16 October to Saturday 23 October 2010.
Hotel based, 7 nights. 8 places



Quest Workshops 2010

Colin Westgate's QUEST workshops, sponsored by Photoworld, are based in Essex. Telephone 01206 384315 or email questphoto@btinternet.com.

Download a PDF programme for the full year from www.questphoto.co.uk

Club Diary

2010 LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY COURSES and HOLIDAYS with Duncan McEwan

Isle of Eigg (10-15 May 2010)

See last issue. Cost: £695.

Light and Land: 01432-839111
contactus@lightandland.co.uk
www.lightandland.co.uk

Far North West (23-29 May 2010)

Based in Scourie, Sutherland, this trip will allow exploration of one of the remotest parts of the Scottish mainland from the Assynt/Lochinver area all the way to the most northern coast at Durness. Cost: £682.
(D. McEwan)

Isle of Harris (11-17 June 2010)

Rather than being tacked on at the end of a trip to Lewis, this workshop will concentrate solely on the incredible beauty of this Hebridean gem, giving more time to explore it in depth. Based in Leverburgh, it is being co-led with Lee Frost. Cost: £720. (*Photo Adventures*)

Kintail and Skye (29 Aug-4 Sept 2010)

Kintail has all the features of the West Highlands – impressive mountains, wild glens, sea lochs, waterfalls, brochs and attractive villages such as Plockton and Duirinish, not to mention the famous Eilean Donan Castle. A full day will be spent on Skye with a visit to Elgol. It is based in the Kintail Lodge Hotel at the head of Loch Duich. On-site E-6 processing is available. Cost: £1035. (*Inversnaid*)

Isle of Mull (13-19 September 2010)

Mull has a great coastline and a rugged interior which will be at its best with early autumn colours in the moorlands. The Pennyghael Hotel is ideally situated for exploring the Ross of Mull. One full day will be spent on the Isle of Iona with the possibility of a visit to Staffa and Fingal's cave. Cost: £810. (D. McEwan)

Isle of Arran (20-24 September 2010)

Arran is the most southerly of the major Scottish islands and is often described as 'Scotland in Miniature' due to the varied nature of the terrain – rocky peaks, glens, woodland, standing stones, waterfalls, moorland and some great coastal locations. Base: Kinloch Hotel, Blackwaterfoot. Cost: £890. (*Light and Land*)

Ullapool & Assynt (24-30 Oct 2010)

Based in Ullapool, this trip will explore the areas of Coigach and Assynt where there are many distinctively shaped mountains including Stac Pollaidh and Suilven. Loch Assynt offers Ardvreck Castle and the tree-clad islands are great subjects. North of Lochinver is a wonderful coastline that includes fantastic sands and the rugged headland of Stoer Point. On-site E6 film processing. Cost: £985. (*Inversnaid*)

Torriddon (1-7 November 2010)

Torriddon has become a firm favourite with landscape photographers due to wonderful mountains, glens, lochs and coast. There is no better time to see the area than in late Autumn when, apart from the colours, wonderful atmospheric conditions can occur. Based in The Old Inn, Gairloch. Co-led with Lee Frost. Cost: £975. (*Photo Adventures*)

Details of all workshops:

www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk

For availability and bookings, contact the individual organiser directly:

Inversnaid Photography Centre:

www.inversnaidphoto.com

Light and Land:

www.lightandland.co.uk

Photo Adventures:

www.photoadventures.co.uk

PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS & OTHER TALKS BY CLIFF CARTER

ALPHA photographer Cliff Carter is lecturing at SE camera clubs in the autumn. Please telephone:- 01903 812579 or email Cliff at: cliff.ccd@mac.com, or refer to the Southern Photographic Federation Handbook 2009/10

Monday 13th September

Bexleybeath Photographic Society
Pixels & Art?

Wednesday 15th September

Horndean Camera Club
PixElation – techniques & demonstrations using Elements.

Friday 1st October

Seaford Photographic Society
An Elements Workshop.

Wednesday 13th October

Littlebampton C.C.
Aviation and Infra Red Workshop.

HELPLINES AND INFORMATION

Authorised & warranty repairs, assistance and enquiries

OUR website www.photoclubalpha.com is now packed with detailed features on the Minolta and Sony Alpha systems, has a busy discussion 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.

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@jps.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

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 Photostore, 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

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