

photoworld



2008/#3



Our cover photo is a symmetrical, centered macro composition of a clematis flower taken by garden photographer Tony Jones.

It's exactly the kind of photo opportunity you can find from now well into October, regardless of the weather – and your garden does not need to be a showpiece to yield a perfect single bloom.

Tony used his Sony Alpha 100 with 90mm Tamron macro lens, at ISO 200, exposing for 1/2 second at f8.

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Photoworld magazine is an independent quarterly from Icon Publications Ltd which provides free membership of the Photoworld Club UK/Photoclubalpha. 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, and the brands mentioned. The logo typeface is 'Minolta Classic' designed by Justin Bailey.

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 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. Letters can not be answered by post.

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

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

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

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 Photoshore, where Bernard Petticrew also hosts an advice forum:

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

MINOLTA REPAIRS

by specialist workshop in Milton Keynes

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

They have obtained many of the spare parts and KM's stocks of older 'cannibalisation cameras' like 7000 and 8000i. Their proprietor is David Boyle, and his two technicians are Minolta trained. As an independent repairer they will specialise in film and digital, and hold parts going back to models like the XM. The Dynax 9 is an exception, previously serviced by a special European centre, and must be sent to JP (see 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

Sony rolls out ACE dealer network



LONDON CAMERA EXCHANGE Colchester sent us these pictures of their new Sony 'Alpha Centre of Excellence' display which showcases most of the whole system. Sony ACE status will indicate dealers with a strong commitment to the Alpha system, good stock levels and staff knowledge.



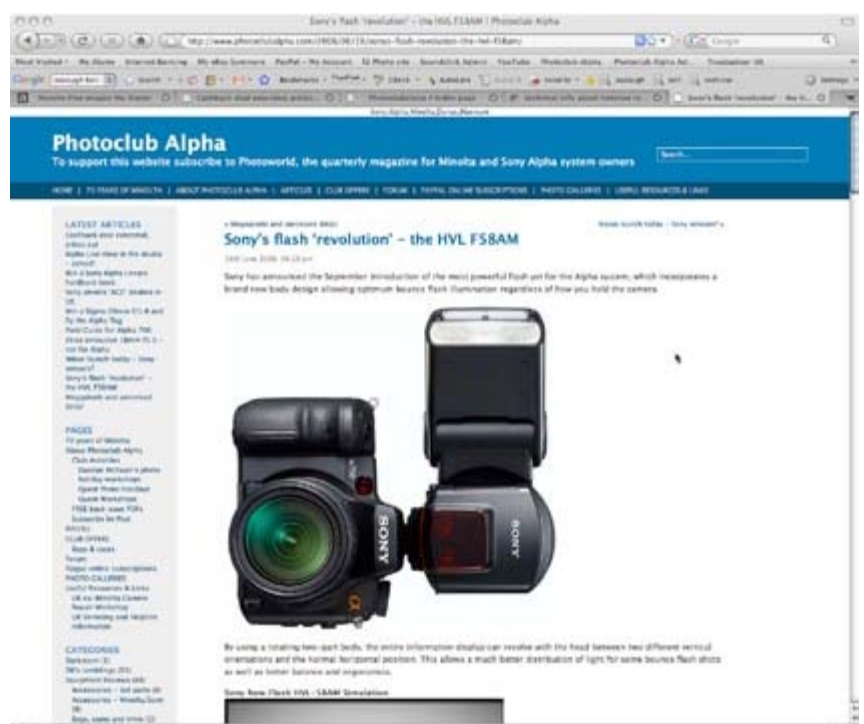
Photoclubalpha website gains momentum – join in!

The Photoworld website, www.photoclubalpha.com, has really taken off since it was launched just over one year ago. In that time a million article pages have been read and the site, as we went to press, had 148 pages (each one a separate article or feature) which you can search for topics and read free of charge.

Since it was launched on June 21st 2007, 530,000 visits have been made to the site by 257,000 people reading 990,000 pages, spending an average time of 2 minutes looking at 1.87 pages per visit. Over 1,150 people read the site every day.

There is also a Forum which now has over 2,250 messages covering 521 topics, discussions or questions from almost 900 members. There is a Gallery where you can upload and show your pictures. It's a great community – international in make-up – following in the footsteps of the Minolta Club (founded 1966) and taking it into a new worldwide dimension.

Visit: <http://www.photoclubalpha.com> and register!

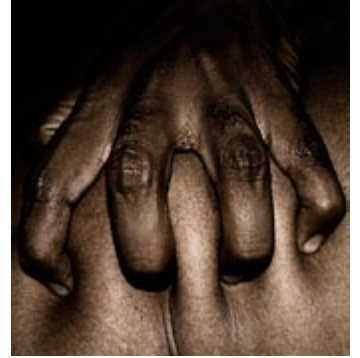


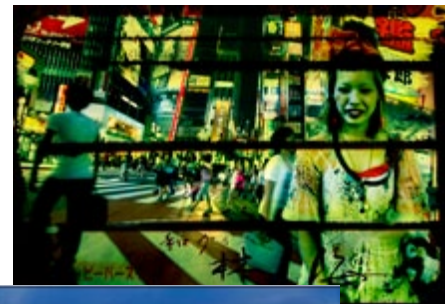
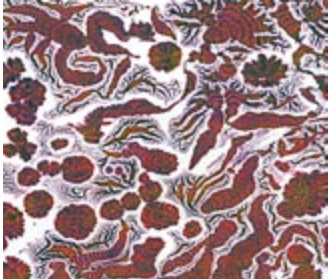
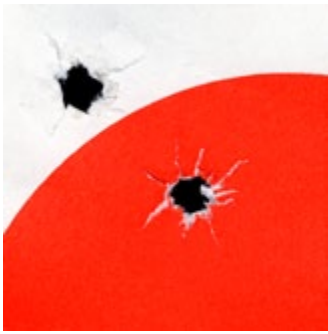
Sony World Photo Awards winners



THE Sony World Photography Awards were presented in Cannes earlier this year.

Amateur winners, clockwise from top right: Martin Kharumwa, 'Itch' (Abstract); Emil von Arx, 'Last Light' (Science); Kerry Grainger, 'Dancing' (Performance); Nimai Chandra Gosh, 'Winning Team' (Sport); Tommaso Awerbuch, 'Tre Civette sul Sofa' (Fashion); Emil José Mariel, 'Caracol' (Architecture).





Professional winners, clockwise from above: Vanessa Winslip, 'Sweet Nothings' (Portraiture and overall grand prize); Valeska Achenbach & Isabela Pacini, 'Daspu' (Fashion); Natalie Bothur, 'Rueksicht'; Fabio Cestari, 'Made in Japan' (Advertising); Robin Utrecht, 'Soccer Team' (Sport); Moises Saman, 'The Gangs of El Salvador' (Photojournalism); Eduard Meltzer, 'In Concert' (Music & Performance); Livia Corona, 'Urban Aberration' (Architectural); Giacomo Brunelli, untitled (Nature); Thomas Deerinck, 'Life Saving Drug' (Science); Anita Cruz Eberhard, 'Targets' (Abstract).



Sony SAL 70-300mm f4.5-5.6 G SSM tele zoom

When the Sony 70-300mm arrived, the box which emerged looked large enough to hold a 600mm f4. Inside this impressive packaging the new tele-zoom, which replaces the tiny 100-300mm Minolta APO design, turned out to be big enough but given equal space was its separately protected huge lens hood.

This lens is not just expensive at a street price of £599, it is also rare as yet (generally on back order for every retailer) and may leave you feeling unable to sell any previous tele zoom to make way for it.

It is very large indeed for a lens of this specification, and the lens hood emphasises it. While it is not overweight at 795g (most 70-300mm lenses are under 500g) the attention it attracts is something I found unwelcome. There was no problem in places where large lenses are common, but out and about in city or village this lens has consisted broken the ice. Complete strangers will call out a joke from the other side of the road or approach to ask what such a lens is for.

Given Austin Mitchell's Early Day Motion in the Commons about the rights of amateur photographers to take pictures in public without being stopped by police, community officers, park keepers, traffic wardens or security staff this type of lens is only going to mark the user out as not a typical amateur.

At zoos, in safari parks, in wildlife reserves, at sports events and so on it doesn't get a second glance. Everyone knows that big lenses are used by bird watchers or to shoot football. The problem for me is that it does not really replace the neat, small 100-300mm which has provided so many good candids and long-shots without ever drawing crowds.

The upside

The dilemma is not that simple. The 70-300mm f4.5-5.6 G SSM is a true G lens in terms of image quality. It is head and shoulders above the 100-300mm APO (D) latest version issued by Minolta, and better than any 70/100 to 300mm tele zoom I have ever used.

It has closer focusing (though the image reproduction ratio is no



better than the 100-300mm) much higher contrast and resistance to flare, better colour saturation and neutrality, higher resolution, considerably faster silent focusing, and less distortion/vignetting.

The focus field appears to be flatter at the close 1.2m distance than the earlier lens is at 1.5m, build quality is improved, and the massive barrel holds the relative slim optical train in such a way that no interior surfaces can reflect stray light easily. It takes 62mm filters but the lens hood fits with a bayonet closer to 67mm, and is 95mm in diameter by 98mm long.

What actually emerges from the new 70-300mm is a much better picture, looking even at 300mm as if a 50mm lens has been used. There is no trace of chromatic aberration or purple fringe present. It's simply a state of the art 70-300mm tele.

The downside

Because the 70-300mm is so large, it is not practical to sling it round your neck with the camera and walk through crowds, and it is not pocketable. The 100-300mm is pocketable, the Tamron 70-300mm is almost so, and the basic Sony kit-lens 75-300mm really is not as it's longer.

Given the superb quality of results, apparent from the first day the lens was tried out, I abandoned using the 100-300mm. But instead of using the 70-300mm in every situation where the 100-300mm used to be there and ready, I found I just stopped shooting with this range. This really showed up during a week in Spain where test shots from this lens were part of the objective.

Shirley, in the meantime, had traded up from a Tamron 18-250mm to a Sony 18-250mm and the results



from this lens across much of its range were not so far off the 100-300mm. I found myself often equipped with just my 16-80mm, and borrowing Shirley's lens for long shots. Sometimes I even borrowed the camera, preferring to grab the A200 with 18-250mm quickly from the back of the car rather than go through the process of mounting the 70-300mm on my A700.

While the 100-300mm is easily held in one hand while changing lenses, even allowing fingers to do button-presses, the 70-300mm is just too big as well as too valuable. I had to be sitting down, with a table or a car seat. The lens had to be put down, not juggled. As a result I spent longer changing lenses and the camera was open for longer, and I collected annoying sensor dust in a wildlife park. Shirley, with her single 18-250mm permanently fitted, never got any sensor dust.

Although the 70-300mm claims a similar close focus subject scale to the 18-250mm, butterflies and flower shot as close as possible with the 18-250mm seems easier to focus and to end up larger in the frame.

You might think that working aperture would be a big plus point of the $f4.5-5.6$ lens compared to the 18-250mm with its $f6.3$ long end. In fact, despite the big lens barrel and generous 62mm lens thread, the new lens turns out to have smaller maximum apertures than the 100-300mm and offers no big gain over the superzoom.

It may be $f4.5$ at 70mm, but it's dropped to $f5$ by 85mm and reaches a constant $f5.6$ from 130mm to 300mm. What you get is really an $f5.6$ lens with a small bonus at the short end. The 100-300mm is $f4.5$ from 100 to 120mm, $f5$ to 140mm, then $f5.6$. The 18-250mm is $f5.6$ from 70mm to 150mm, then $f6.3$.

So, at worst the superzoom is 1/3rd stop slower than the 70-300mm G across the G's range and around 130-150mm it's just as fast.

What can counter the arguments against the new lens?

Wide open

Fortunately, the answer is easy. The G lens at its widest $f5.6$ – fully open – appears to be as good the 70-200mm $f2.8$ SSM G APO when used at $f5.6$, across the same 70-200mm range. The 100-300mm APO needs stopped down to $f8$, and the 18-250mm needs to be stopped down to $f11$ to come close.

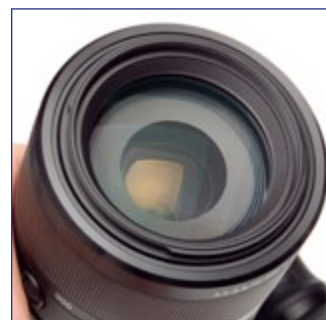
There is a hint of softening beyond 200mm, and at 300mm the old 100-300mm APO and new



The 70-300mm G SSM shown next to the Minolta 100-300mm APO (D)



The 70-300mm features focus range limiter, AF Hold/Custom button, a real metal mount, superb construction, and comes with a padded soft pouch as well as its deep reversible lens hood.



G are close rivals. But here, the 100-300mm still benefits from being stopped down at least half a stop, and it has much lower contrast plus visible vignetting (fall off to a dimmer image in the corners).

The whole point of the new 70-300mm SSM is that it's so good, it absolutely does not matter what setting you use. Wide open on this lens feels as if a much faster design has been cut down. It's like getting an $f4$ lens permanently fixed one stop down and with the excess glass cut off, but the lens barrel left.

Also, as many new owners have found, the oversized lens hood may be perfection but the lens without any hood at all is impervious to stray light flare. It's 90 per cent perfection without the hood. Take that off, and the 70-300mm no longer attracts rubberneckers.

In the studio, where 70mm is a typical focal length to use for a portrait, it does not look daunting.

So despite all the negative aspects, this £599 tele zoom really is the answer for anyone wanting superlative sharpness, contrast and detail without any need for special raw file processing to remove fringes or vignetting.

The future

Just around the corner is an even higher specification 70-400mm $f4.5-5.6$ G SSM Sony lens. This is expected to be in a grey or white pro finish though it was shown as a prototype in the same black as the 70-300mm. It is likely to be over £1,000 and once again a very substantial design with a deep lens shade.

Both these lenses are also designed for full-frame digital. We have not really seen the difference between the old 100-300mm and the new 70-300mm, and will not do so until the Alpha 900 full frame 24.6 megapixel camera appears. My guess is that on this new camera, there will be no choice; the old lens designed from film simply won't have the coverage and will show very strong vignetting and colour fringes. Hopefully the new lens will extend its good 1.5X format coverage to full frame but may need stopping down to $f8$ to do so.

We forget that a 70-300mm lens on a 1.5X body is like a 105-450mm zoom would have been on film. Imagine what that would have been to carry around. We regularly shoot at an angle of view equal to a 450mm, something which would have been a highly specialised lens when the Minolta AF system was launched in 1985. The 70-210mm was then the standard tele zoom, and 75-300mm was an expensive



luxury – big and heavy with it.

Compare what this sonic motor focusing, brilliantly designed bit of glass does now and you will realise we have it pretty good.

As for specifications, the Sony SAL 70-300mm $f4.5-5.6$ G SSM lens weighs a little over 800g with the lens hood fitted and measures 135mm by 82mm diameter. It uses internal focus (rear ring) down to 1.2m with a focus range limiter enabling infinity to 3m as an alternative range. Zooming is not internal and it extends to 185mm excluding the hood, at 300mm.

At 1.2m focus, the subject is shown one-quarter life size (0.25X) and the true focal length is actually under 200mm, a result of the IF design. The filter thread is 62mm and the front ring is non-rotating.

The lens is not compatible with Minolta AF cameras prior to the Dynax 7 or SSM-converted Dynax 9, since it has no mechanical focus drive. The SSM focusing is almost totally silent; from near to far, full range, it does not travel rapidly but once focused it makes small adjustments extremely quickly and silently. Tracking moving subjects is much improved.

Verdict? If you want the best everyday telephoto results you have ever had, it's worth the outlay. Mine has me thinking that even the 70-200mm SSM $f2.8$ might get little use with this lens around.

– DK

Shots with the 70-300mm SSM G: above, Forth Rail Bridge and cruise ship crisply focused on the bridge at $f10$, 90mm. Facing page: Whipsnade elephant and calf with biting crisp skin textures, at 300mm, $f8$. Right: at full $f5.6$ aperture focused detail is pin sharp and bokeh is smooth at 300mm. Below: minimum focus at 300mm just covers a cactus 50mm high – tungsten light, $f10$.





Sea views – photo friendly modern cruising

We didn't specifically decide on a cruise at several thousand feet over the Atlantic, crammed in to one of Sir Richard's finest jumbos with what seemed like several thousand others, but we did agree, having just endured the nightmare of air travel from Las Vegas to Mexico, via Miami, that there must be a better way to have a holiday.

We eventually chose the biggest British cruise ship ever to be built, the *Ventura*, and the P&O website kept us interactively informed of its construction progress during the following year before it was launched. We had chosen the Baltic cruise, which was to be the third voyage in *Ventura*'s maiden season. On our arrival at Southampton it looked gigantic resembling a massive floating block of white flats from the quay, however joining the ship was a hassle free delight and we were thrilled with our cabin, and home for two weeks.

First day at sea, which was OK with so much to explore on board; we awoke on the second day to look out and see the coast of Norway slipping slowly past, very close, as we travelled up river to Oslo. It took a couple of hours to reach the port and I virtually filled a 2GB card rattling off shots of the distinctive Norwegian colourful chalets and forests in my enthusiasm to photograph pastures new. However, as we were only to be alongside for half a day, a Sunday, and it bucketed with rain we decided to stay on board and plan our tours for the future destinations, using the in-cabin interactive TV system.

En route to Copenhagen we were told that the wind strength had increased making a ship of our size too hazardous to enter the Danish harbour! So we didn't step ashore on Norway, by choice, and now we weren't going to in Denmark, which we had hoped to photograph with a vengeance. Much muttering about the captain's competence buzzed about the ship from the seasoned cruisers during dinner, but better to be heading for Sweden rather than imbedded in the harbour wall in Copenhagen I always say.

One final sting in the tail was as we approached Stockholm was the captain, not now the most popular person on board, decided not to risk the Swedish port either

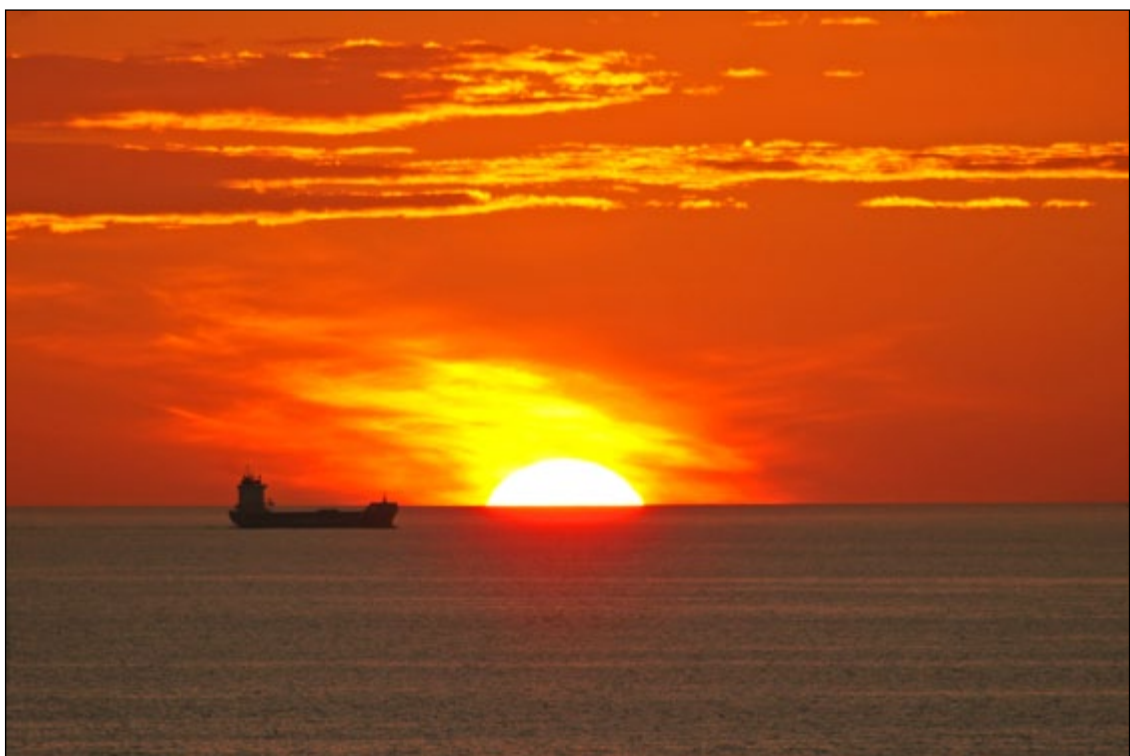
Brian Young, like most keen photographers, had doubts about days at sea and too little time ashore but enjoyed a 21st century cruise

but anchor offshore and ferry the 3,500 passengers ashore in the ship's tenders to a small port about an hour's drive from Stockholm.

Despite the sea being glassy calm, which added strength to the moans of the seasoned dissenters, I was delighted because it gave me a very



The ship at anchor off the coast of Sweden, about an hour coach ride to Stockholm. The ship's lifeboat tenders were used to ferry the 3500 passengers ashore. Below: Sunset over the Baltic, at about 11pm local time, midsummer.





Above: up river en route to Oslo. Right: Stockholm – the village built for the Swedish unsuccessful bid for the Olympics. The ski slope is in regular winter use. Bottom: Helsinki, Finland, Church in a rock face.



opportunune chance to photograph *Ventura* at sea, from the outside. There is something very impressive in passing under the bow of a colossal cruise ship in one of its rescue craft, without a care in the world and snapping away with my trusty A700.

We hadn't booked any tours in Stockholm but we took a water tour around the city and again there were dozens of good photo opportunities. In one of the locks our large tour boat was swinging about considerably and we crushed a small motor cruiser. I had pole position at the stern and as I captured the scene it occurred to me that the authorities might want to confiscate my camera for evidence. However, when the water level equalised we drove off as if nothing had occurred!

The bus home

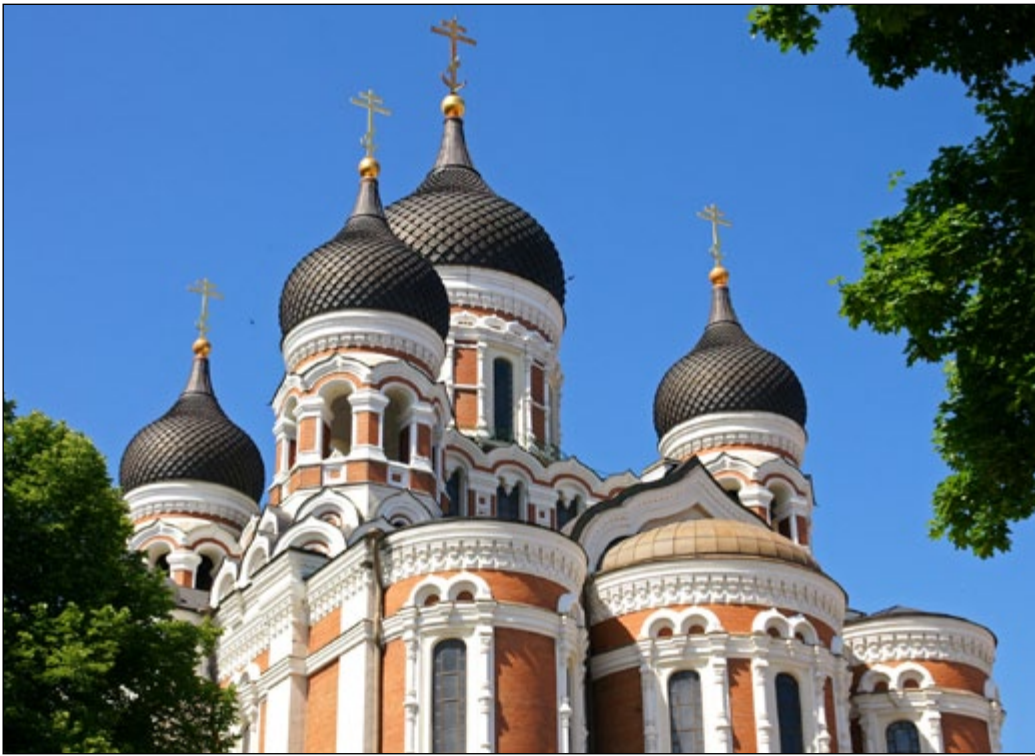
Next stop Helsinki, Finland. Again no pre-arranged tour but when we got off the courtesy coach from the ship into the city centre we gave in to the offers from the tourist agents and bought tickets for a city bus tour. It wasn't for over an hour so we wandered around





Russia: above, the exterior of St Catherine's Palace; below, an interior. St Petersburg. Facing page, top: Tallin, Estonia, Cathedral on the Hill. Centre, Warnemunde, Germany. Bottom, Brugge, Belgian mini Venice in rather less wonderful weather.





their market snapping the sights. When we returned we found our tour bus was a refurbished London Routemaster! Since we were the first to buy tickets we had prime position at the front upstairs, and many good shots were taken throughout the city, while the guide gave a never ending commentary with lots of photo stops.

The evening sunsets in the Baltic were outstanding as we headed to St Petersburg in Russia. We were there for two days, with essential organised tours on each day. First was a tour of the city, with obligatory continuous propaganda commentary, but included several good stops for photographs, including the Hermitage square. The second day was to St Catherine's Palace which was photographically amazing and made particularly special by our guide with his amusing anecdotes and off the wall observations of life as a Russian.

Another day, another country, and this time Estonia and the utterly charming town of Tallin. After the usual bus ride into the town we strolled into, and photographed the old town with its markets and cobbled streets, climbing high to the castle and church with fabulous views of the town.

The former East Germany was next, and Warnemunde proved to be the jewel in the crown for us – a beautiful little fishing port with friendly people who were fascinated by our ship, and the views and photo opportunities from the top of the old lighthouse were spectacular. When we departed we were escorted by a flotilla of craft, which brought all the passengers to their balconies waving and cheering. We were so moved I brought out the little Sony compact to shoot a video.

After our final full day at sea, during which I was able to capture a German barque in full sail, hand held with the Minolta 300 f4 before it disappeared over the horizon, we docked at Zebrugge for our final stop. A tour of the Venice-like canals throughout Bruges completed 1,507 images taken throughout the holiday.

My Alpha 700 performed faultlessly throughout and I didn't need my backup Alpha 100. The Baltic was our first cruise but it will not be our last, and from a photographic perspective it was full of wonderful opportunities. If you have ever thought about taking your camera on a cruise – do it, you'll love it.



www.brianyoungphotography.co.uk



gallery

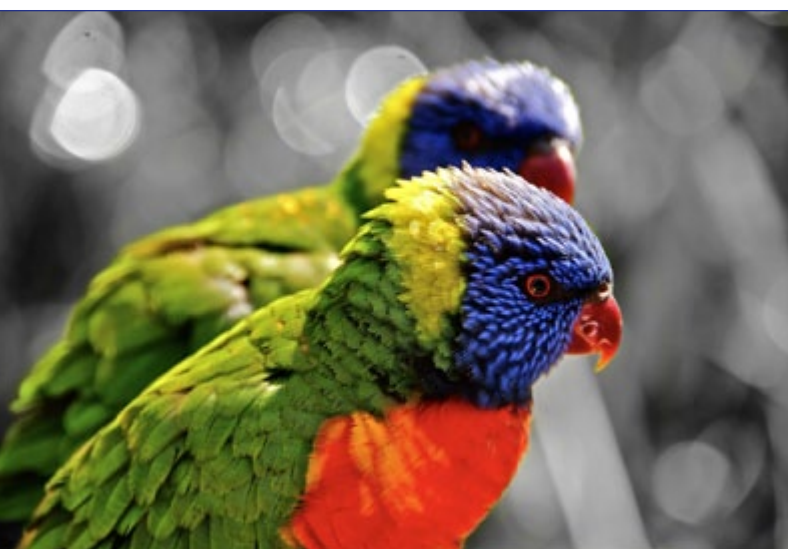
To enter your own pictures for future *Gallery* pages, just send digital files (full resolution – 6 megapixels from a 6 megapixel camera, and so on) in RGB JPEG high quality form by email to david@photoclubalpha.com, or by post on CD (TIFFs may be used on CDs only, not by email, no layers, no 16-bit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

Photoworld Gallery, Icon Publications Ltd,

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

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

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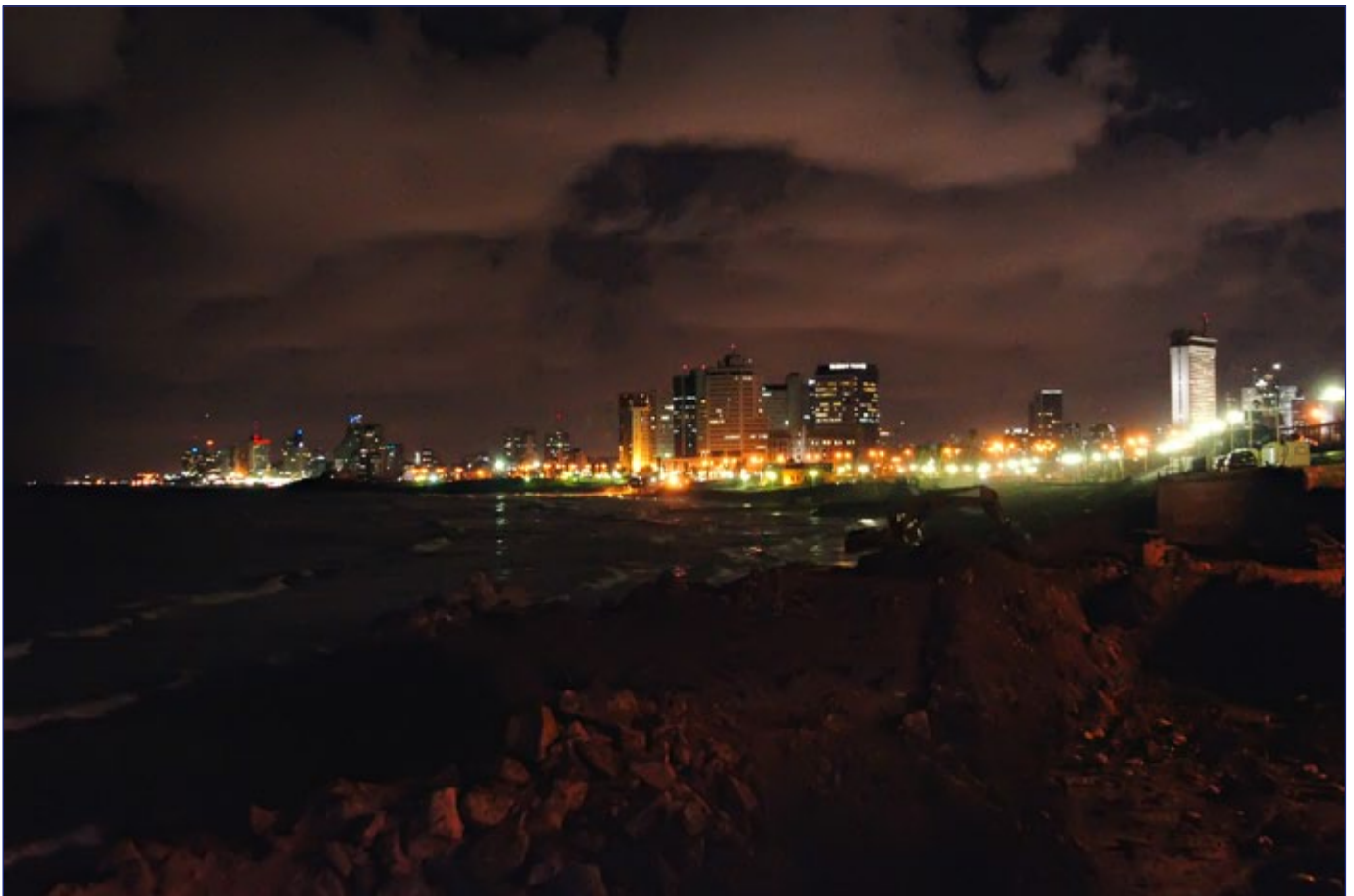
The world of animals always remains a most popular subject, but few manage to get as close as Mark van Bergh has for his two well-matched wildlife studies above – a lynx kitten, left, and a leaping timber wolf, right. Mark, from Arlington, VA, took the shots on a trip to Montana where he visited a wildlife reserve area. This is an increasingly popular alternative to visiting zoos; expert guides and trackers know where the animals are, and how to approach them safely. The lynx was photographed on Konica Minolta Dynax 7D with 300mm f2.8 lens, 1/300th at f5.6, ISO 200. The wolf is on the same camera and lens, 1/500th at f3.5 at ISO 400 in very low sunshine. Processed using Adobe Lightroom from raw files.

Keith Lancaster photographed colourful Australian birdlife and converted the background to monochrome – effectively boosting the colour impact, left.



Above: a seasonal picture – burning off stubble in the fields. This is not Britain, however, it is Serbia and the shot is by Aleksandar Cule of Novi Sad. You can see Aleks's work at – <https://psc.photosbelter.com/user/acule>. He used an Alpha 100 with kit lens set to 28mm, 1/400th at f13, ISO 200.

Below is a contrasting but similar – in a way – view of Tel Aviv at night taken hand-held by Howard Katz, using the maximum ISO 6400 capability of his Alpha 700 to catch lighting and colour conditions rarely seen without a tripod. He used a 28-75mm f2.8 lens set to 28mm and f5.6, with an exposure of 1/10th. The image has been processed using Noiseware.



gallery

On this spread you can see how the term 'sepia toning' can mean two very different effects – both controlled perfectly to suit the subjects. Below, an old tractor in Belgium with floral setting, by Rob Asnong. You can see more of Rob's work at <http://picasaweb.google.be/alphamember>. He used an Alpha 700 with zoom set to 26mm, 1/30th at f11, ISO 200 and says he very rarely post-processes his images.



Below: Dunluce Castle, County Antrim, by Brian Curran. Brian used the 18-70mm kit lens at 26mm on the Alpha 100.





Above: Bob Parrish took this strong sports portrait with his Alpha 700 using the Carl Zeiss 135mm f1.8 lens at f11, exposure 1/250th at ISO 160. Below: by Andrew Woodhouse of Corby. KM5D, 18-70mm at 18mm, suction mount, BMW 335 CI. Stopped down to the minimum f18, the exposure was 2 seconds auto.



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Fuelling the action down under – Chris Horne

Chris Horne is an Australian motorsport shooter who, defying the common wisdom that only Canon and Nikon are suitable for this macho activity, is fiercely loyal to his Alpha system gear and frequently outshoots his friendly opposition to get his spreads into magazines.

"I got a Kodak Brownie Holiday as a birthday gift when I was in primary school", he tells us. "I thought that the gift was a way of parting with all my pocket money for film, development, and prints... and getting me into doing more chores to raise more money for more photos. Little did I know that this was the start of a long lifetime process of keeping the image capture companies in business!"

Chris landed in Australia in his late teens and bought his first real camera, a Minolta Himatic 9. "It cost a small fortune – Australia had huge tariff barriers for imported goods,



and cameras were considered a luxury good and taxed at the highest tax rate", he said. "That a camera cost about two and a half times what it would have cost in America or Europe or the UK. I saved for ages to get it, took tens of thousands of photos with it over the years and my Dad still uses it to this day!"

"It started me on the road to moving from snaps to trying to compose settings. I set up a darkroom in the bathroom and persevered in trying to master printing but I didn't have the patience to spend hours a week. In my early twenties started to get a bit more serious and saved up and got a Pentax Spotmatic II – I lashed out and got the SMC 1.4 50 mm lens which I immediately fell in love with. I still consider it one of the great lenses of the past century.

"I ended up in Adelaide and went to uni, took up SCUBA diving



Some of Chris's most dramatic shots are of motorbikes



Top: it does rain in Australia! Centre: powering out of a bend at 110mph. Bottom right: Lauren Densley, sprintcar driver, in the pits... ISO 1250, f2.8, 1/60, A700 with Milmolka 70-200 G SSM at 200 mm, hand held by available light, no flash.





and proceeded to get a Nikonos II. I made my own flash unit since store bought ones were beyond reach. I took lots of underwater photos and started to sell the odd photo here and there, had a few published in diving magazines, and started to sell a few images of local bands to their record companies and music magazines.

"Life got in the way for a few years and then I noticed that digital cameras were becoming affordable in the new century and got a Canon A60. I kept updating Canon's A series - 70, 80, 95 and took on a Kodak as a second digital camera since the Canon was too slow when you pushed the shutter. About this time Canon came out with the first affordable DSLR, the 300D. The revolution had arrived!

"I looked at all the DSLR offerings of the time and spent about three months using all of them. I guess I was one of the few people that actually used the Nikon, Canon, and KM side by side taking lots of images and comparing them side by side on the screen. In the end the Minolta lenses and the KM colours won and I settled into a KM 7D system and proceeded to put over 100,000 frames through

Above: this series was taken in Perth on Nov 9 2007 with A700 and Minolta 70-200 G SSM – this incident occurred during time trials/qualifying. The car/driver touched the wall at about 120 mph and started to roll and flip down the track. I would have liked 10 fps from Sony R&D but you work with what you have. The chassis was junked and the drive train rescued.



Sprintcar – ISO 800, 1/160, f2.8, Minolta 70-200 G SSM at 120 mm using Sony 56 flash with Sony external battery pack. The flash is set to quarter power to allow faster recycling times (about 6 shots in a row at 5fps).

the shutter in the first year... and another 100,000 in the second year.

"I got a KM 5D when it came out and hammered that as well – different personality but same great colours and better focusing. By this time I was

becoming deeply involved in shooting motorsports and selling photos to drivers, teams, sponsors, and magazines. This led on to doing corporate portraits with people requesting I do weddings which I

have said no to – way too stressful!

"I was really glad when Sony picked up the Alpha mount – Minolta would live on in the body of a Sony – I knew it was a good move since I also shoot video with Sony pro cameras and the systems they have are all good. About a year and a half ago Canon offered me a Canon EOS 1D MK3 to try, to see if I would care to use one (it is really flattering to be considered like that by a camera company). I tried it side by side with my KM 7D and gave it back to the local Canon rep a few weeks later saying it didn't focus correctly and I thought the images looked too plasticky.

"All hell broke loose! The chain of command went all the way back to Japan and I spoke to management all the way back to head office – how could this be so? Five months later Rob Galbraith let his bomb off about the focusing.

"Then Sony released the A700. I got the first one in the country and put about 4,000 frames through it in the first week. I absolutely fell in love with it and have put about 100,000 more frames through it in the last ten months. I think Sony have got it really right putting in



place the manufacturing bedrocks before releasing new models; three intro models plus the A700 with the new A900 to come in a few months, and then more...

"Nikon have also put the D3 and D700 into my hands and I've sent them back – I just like the colour and feel of the Sony images and I love the ergonomics of the camera system plus the lenses. I can hardly wait to have the A900 to shoot with – an affordable 24 megapixel camera to use until the real sports shooter model comes along."

Chris says that the market he shoots for is changing rapidly. "I've been lucky to gain my credentials in shooting motorsport just before it swirls on to the net forever. I shoot for a motorcycle magazine, two speedway magazines, and a general motorsport magazine which has now become the first motorsport Ezine in the world... as well, I've also had a couple of exhibitions."



Right: a team shot very quickly grabbed using flash.

Sony HVL-F58AM flash

Sony has announced a replacement for the HVL-F56AM flashgun, which is now discontinued and out of stock in most retailers.

The new gun has a revolutionary bounce head design where the entire rear assembly rotates, placing the flash head above the lens axis even when using direct flash for a vertical shot. This design also means that the information display can always be normally oriented for reading.

The **HVL-F58AM** has a nominal guide number slightly higher than the former Minolta 5600 (HVL-56AM) model, and its extended range of bounce position echoes the changes made in the midrange HVL-42AM also introduced recently by Sony. Like the 42 model, the GN is quoted at 105mm, and must not be compared to traditional GN values for flashguns which have always been quoted at either 35mm or 50mm coverage (Metz, for example, use 35mm lens or 60° angle as their old standard for guns like the CT45 or CT60 ranges). The earlier Minolta and KM flashguns, which did not zoom to 105mm, give their GN for 85mm coverage.

We can expect the 58 to be more powerful than the 56 based on the tests published in our last issue, which showed that the 42 is genuinely higher in output than the 36.

The older 5600/56 model has limits to the bounce movement which prevent efficient use when a vertical grip is used with the camera – it was designed on the assumption the camera would be held the other way up, with the shutter release at the bottom.

The HVL-F58AM also allows the control of remote wireless flash groups from the camera position, acting as an alternative flash 'commander' to the built-in pop-up unit,

The HVL-F56AM is now discontinued but this new gun, the HVL-F58AM, is not expected in shops until the middle of August. It represents a significant step forward in wireless control and ergonomic design.



something which is not possible with existing models on current DSLRs (these use Channels, but the Channel can not be broken down into Groups). Grouping is enabled by activating **CTRL** or 'Controller' mode. Through the interface of the HVL-F58AM, the user can define three groups (and two channels) of remote flash units and assign a power ratio to each group, without having to adjust the remote flashes themselves. This sees the effective return of wireless power ratio setting, which has been missing from the Alpha mount system from the introduction of the KM 7D.

To use this function you must have more HVL-F58AM or HVL-F42AM guns. There is no provision on the older units (HVL-F36AM, HVL-F56AM, 3600HS-D, 5600HS-D) to define the flash in groups. It looks as if an on-camera HVL-F58M flash is classed as one group, with Remote and Remote2 as the other groups. The built-in pop up flash can not control the groups or ratios. To make full use of this system you are looking at a £1,000 investment in three flash heads.

Paul Genge of Sony UK confirms that although the HVL-F42AM manual makes no reference to functions enabled by the 58 model, it can be used in ratio setups



Front and rear views of the HVL-F58AM in bounce position for vertical compositions. The rear display rotates with the head for ease of reading.

with the 58 as controller.

Third-party flash units may be incompatible with the new functions of the 58, which have no direct equivalent in earlier Minolta, KM or Sony units. They should work in normal fixed ratio wireless mode. My solution to ratio lighting is easy; use one 36 and one 56!

Another noted improvement is that the wide diffuser extends direct flash coverage to 16mm (full frame) rather than the 17mm previously stated (without the diffuser, the wide angle limit is 24mm). This is a minor difference but indicates an intention to cover lenses as yet not announced, and was first seen in the HVL-F42AM.

The height of the flash-head above the body should also mean that lenses such as the 11-18mm will be usable without removing their lens hoods, for direct flash at the 16mm diffuser setting.

Sony states: "The HVL-F58AM flash unit features a maximum guide number of 58 at 105mm and ISO 100. It recycles (or recharges) in as little as five seconds, approximately 55% faster than the predecessor HVL-F56AM model, so you are ready to capture the next shot. And because it features a quiet recycle charge, there's no whine to distract you from your subject.

"It also has a large, easy-to-read LCD screen that is about 13% larger than its predecessor's. Its intuitive control layout makes it easy to control flash functions and configure the settings based on your shooting needs.

"This new flash features a new and innovative Quick Shift Bounce system. It offers more creative ways to achieve lighting, flash and bounce angles you may not have been able to experience before.

"The flash head can pivot 90° left and right on a horizontal axis in addition to the conventional up and down vertical adjustment. With this system, the camera and flash unit can keep the same orientation regardless of portrait or landscape shooting. This gives a higher degree of flexibility when arranging the direction of light.

"For example, you can take full advantage of the flash unit's built-in bounce card even during portrait shots since the flash head can maintain the same orientation as it would in the landscape position."

The September launch may also mean that by this date – and *photokina* in Germany – we will see both an Alpha 900 pro body and a 16-35mm full frame lens on the way. If not before then!

The price is the 58 is expected to be slightly higher than the 56 model.

Live view studio sync

If you want to use the Alpha 350 or 300 in a studio, or with any type of flashgun or trigger which uses a PC sync (coaxial) connection in place of the hot shoe, you may encounter that 'syncing feeling' when you realise the screen is going to be black in Live View mode.

Why should it be when you have plenty of room light, or modelling lights?

Easy to answer – for manual flash, you will normally set manual exposure and a typical studio setting would be 1/125 manual shutter speed plus an aperture of around f11. In Live View mode, the A350/300 link your manual settings to the metering of the LV CCD, so that you can set accurate exposure just by adjusting them and watching the image brightness and histogram on the rear screen.

A setting like 1/125 and f11 is about five or six stops under exposed even under bright studio flash modelling lights, so you get a black or very dark LV screen, and can not compose using LV.

This applies if you try to use manual settings for macro work with the 80PX or 1200AF Macro Lights made by Minolta, which require an FS-1100 adaptor between the camera and the old ISO type flash shoe. If you want to use a Wein infra red trigger, a Pocket Wizard, 'radio popper' or Elinchrom Skyport for cable-free triggering of flash again you are stuck with a dark LV screen.

If you set Manual exposure for a multi-head wireless set-up with Minolta, KM or Sony heads you will again get a dark screen unless the flash is just doing a supplementary job.

Use 'A' mode instead

However, there is a way round all this – use a Minolta 5600HS (D) or Sony HVL-F56AM flashgun as a trigger to fire studio flash via its slave cells, and set the Alpha 350 or 300 to **Aperture Priority (A)** instead of manual.

The other flashguns, including the new HVL-F42AM, are not suitable for this. We do not yet know whether the HVL-F58AM will work.

With the 5600/56 gun, it is possible to set Manual power on the flash itself. This disables the pre-flash TTL pulse, so you get just one clean single flash burst suitable for triggering slave cells. When the



5600/56 is attached to an A350/300, it remains set to manual power, and switches the shutter speed of the camera automatically to 1/60, 1/80, 1/125 or 1/160 depending on available light. The selected f-stop set using Aperture Priority is unaffected.

It also over-rides the link between the Live View gain and the resulting shutter-aperture combination – you get a full brightness, normal live view no matter what aperture you set.

The situation also applies to other flashguns such as the 3600 or the Macro lights, but you can't use the 3600/42 to trigger anything as neither can be set to manual when attached to the A350/300. The HVL-F42AM can be set to manual before you fit it, but the moment it attaches to a 350/300, it reverts to auto TTL mode. There is no menu setting on the camera to prevent this. The older Macro lights only fire at full power, and the very rare 1200AF-N with new type hot shoe only fires using TTL.

So the only option right now is the 5600/56 or a gun which behaves the same way when set to fractional manual power (Sigma or Metz).

To recap: set the A350/300 to A. Set the required f-stop for your manual or studio flash, triggered by a slave cell. Set flash or daylight fixed WB. Set the 5600/56 gun to Manual power, 1/32, and Lock the setting. Attach it to the camera. Compose studio shots using Live View and see a full brightness image.

The FA-ST1AM

Sony makes an adaptor for studio flash work costing £89.50, the FAST-1AM, which is a revision of the early Minolta PCT-100. Despite having a battery fitted, this unit turns out to require Manual setting on the camera and does *not* signal to set the shutter speed, if you use Aperture Priority instead.

Therefore, it can not be used to connect the A350/300 to studio flash. My thanks to Derek at London Camera Exchange Colchester for testing this out using a PC sync cable



flashgun, A350 and the FA-ST1AM.

Sony should revise the FA-ST1AM so that when the unit is switched on, it sends the required information to the camera. This is a serial data based communication with the camera, not a closed circuit or a voltage present across hotshoe pins. It can not be faked by soldering your own adaptor. Alternatively they should provide a firmware upgrade to the A350/300 allowing LV gain to be dissociated from Manual settings ('Use Auto LV Gain in Manual' is the required menu selection, and it exists for other LV DSLRs).

I have also tested several original and clone FS-1100 type adaptors, none of which use battery power. They do not alter the camera state either.

Conclusion

The Alpha 350 and 300 can be used with studio flash and live view if you own, or can obtain, a Minolta 5600HS (D) or a Sony HVL-F56AM flashgun to use as a trigger. Earlier flashguns with manual power settings, such as the 4000AF via an FS-1100 adaptor or the 5400HS, can probably also be used, as can third party units with manual power adjustment. The new HVL-F42AM can not because it has a new function which locks out manual power setting when attached to the 350/300.

Sony might argue that the Alpha 350 is not intended for users who might want to combine studio flash and live view. In the studio 14.2 megapixels at ISO 100 offers near medium-format quality and LV is a very convenient way to compose shots.

We had to resolve this problem when a professional bought an Alpha 350 to use in a Ewa-Marine casing in a swimming pool, viewing the screen from above the water surface and firing studio flash via a radio slave. No other camera on the market could autofocus on swimming babies and provide a waist-level angled live view composition.

– DK



Which Alpha to choose – 200, 300, 350 or 700?

Now that there are five Sony Alpha DSLR bodies in circulation, with many owners of the original 2006 Alpha 100 and its Konica 7D/5D predecessors considering a replacement, the differences between this original Alpha and the 2007-8 generation of Alpha 700, 200, 300 and 350 need examining.

Price is one easy determining factor when choosing a DSLR, but even this has become muddled by exclusive deals, selected bodies available only with the 18-70mm kit lens, cashback offers and the whole gamut of retail promotions and packages. The Alpha 700 remains in a price-bracket of its own but the A200, 300 and 350 are clustered within a tight range. In the UK, you can spend between £230 and £400 and get whichever body you want, depending on whether you need a kit lens or not.

The Alpha 700

The Alpha 700 is simple to look at first. It is currently available in the UK for under £650 body only, including a £100 cash-back deal from Sony which has been extended to September 30th 2008, and includes 17.5% VAT. This pitches it £50 higher than the Canon 40D (which is only 10 megapixels compared to the A700's 12) and well below the Nikon D300.

It can be bought with the Carl Zeiss 16-80mm f3.5-5.6 zoom for £999 – and the zoom is normally discounted to no lower than £499, making the body bundled for just £500.

The 700 has a slightly larger body than the 200-350 series, largely based on the earlier Konica Minolta 7D. It is not just a matter of size; the camera is built using magnesium alloy shell components over a tempered aluminium framework, skinned in a durable and resilient polymer. It has a true glass pentaprism with a generous viewfinder magnification, giving both bright and comfortable focusing screen viewing. The rear LCD is the largest (3 inches) and highest resolution (930,000 pixels) of any fitted to any DSLR made (*it is shared with the Nikon D300, as is its 12.2 megapixel Sony CMOS sensor*).

These factors combine with what is probably the best user interface ever designed for a DSLR, Sony's



The 700 is now available body only for under £650. The A350 may be better priced as a kit.



Quick Navi. You might imagine that this extremely fast and clear GUI would have been used on the later 200-350, but that is not so. The more 'professional' Alpha 700 actually needs fewer button presses or user selection actions to make changes when shooting, and is more intuitive.

It's hard to describe the difference in the shooting experience between the earlier Alpha 100, new 200-350 series and the 700. It has nothing to do with automation or shortcuts as it is faster when working entirely manually as well, due to the use of twin control wheels front and rear (finger and thumb). It's a bit like opting for a generously sized and powered high end German car in place of a modest sized budget French runabout – as much to do with comfort, feel and tactile feedback as with the ability to do 180kph down the autobahn.

However, speed is one of the points of the Alpha 700. It will shoot sequences at a nominal 5 frames per second (tested by us at a practical 4.5-4.8fps), taking the fastest speed to 1/8,000th and flash sync up to 1/250th; it has ISO settings up to 6400, a focusing system with a special sensor to make full use

of lens faster than f2.8, and the fastest most accurate autofocus sensor and AF-motor assembly. It writes to CF cards making full use of UDMA specifications but also downloads via its USB 2.0 connection at higher speeds, and it is one of the few DSLRs made which will drive a 1080p HD-TV at full resolution.

To enable HD-TV playback it also comes with an infra-red remote hand controller, which further allows normal and 2-second self timer wireless shutter release with autofocus. This accessory would have a street price close to £50 and that should be considered when comparing the price with the 200-350 models, as they lack this controller or the ability to communicate with it.

Having graduated from the Alpha 100 first to the Alpha 700, and later acquired Alpha 200 and 350 models, the only thing which prevents us here at *Photoworld* disposing of the Alpha 200 and both earlier 100s to acquire a second 700 body is a need to write articles like this!

Without the earlier or lesser bodies to hand, comparisons are soon forgotten and all we have is an archive of images to study. Often I

need the cameras to hand to answer calls from Photoworld Club members.

There is no doubt after a reasonable period of using the Alpha 700, followed by some time with the later cameras, that it's the model to own if you can justify the outlay. One minor point which has even been criticised by some reviewers – the inclusion of a second memory slot accepting Sony/SanDisk Memory Stick Pro Duo cards – is important for any professional user. During testing the Alpha 350, and continuing to use the Alpha 700 as normal, I picked up what I thought was the 700, which I had just loaded with a new CF card. In fact I'd got the 350, which had no card in it at all!

Even if that happened with the 700, I have a 2GB card permanently in the second slot. It is never used, but the day I pick up the camera and forget to load a CF card, or run out of card space unexpectedly, I have a built-in standby to save my skin. It's in there. You just wouldn't know it!

Alpha 700 image quality

It is ten months since I acquired the Alpha 700. In the subsequent period, I have been bombarded with DSLRs to review for the *British Journal of Photography*. The Olympus E-3, Nikon D300, Nikon D3, Canon 40D (before the 700), Pentax K20D, Nikon D60, Canon 450D, Canon 1000D and Nikon D700 have all been through my hands.

There is only one of these cameras I would rather use than the Alpha 700, and that's the Nikon D3. There are two I would be equally happy with, the Pentax K20D and the Nikon D700 – and I would extend that to the Nikon D300, which is effectively an Alpha 700 in a Nikon body with a few enhancements, but for one missing feature. In-body image stabilisation! The Pentax has it, the Nikon is full-frame and that is a feature with its own merits.

My dilemma in writing up the image quality of the Alpha 700 is that theoretical image quality and real life quality are two different things. My normal IQ test, using studio flash and a top grade 50mm lens (macro, standard, or a premium zoom in the absence of a prime) always shows very small differences between cameras of similar pixel

count when used at minimum or optimum ISO. Most of this can be put down to focus calibration differences, which affect all makes and all levels of body from entry to top pro.

However, in the real world exposures are not made on a tripod with flash at 1/1,500th of a second. Nor are most of them made at borderline hand-holding speeds like 1/30th with a 50mm lens or 1/125th with a 300mm just to test SSS. Plenty are made with shutter speeds you do not think are marginal, say 1/250th with a lens set to 300mm. Safe? Not so. A 300mm lens on the 1.5X format matches using a 450mm on full frame 35mm, and that would call for 1/500th as the SLOWEST hand-holdable speed working on the old formula of one-over-the-focal length.

That formula was devised by the early users of Leica rangefinder cameras, Rollei 6 x 6 TRLs and similar kit. They were generally aiming to make a sharp 10 x 8 inch print, and even the depth of field tables were worked out on that basis. My 24 inch iMac screen is almost four times the size of the 6 x 9 inch image area I used to print on 10 x 8 paper. My Epson 3800 makes great 13 x 19 inch prints, or bigger. Once, a 20 x 16 print was something you made only from the best dozen images shot in a year – a special enlargement, for exhibition or entry into competitions. Today we view and print pictures this size casually.

I can not emphasise how useful it is to keep SSS (Super Steady Shot) active even when you know the shutter speed will be well into three figures (over 1/100th, which many shooters feel is 'safe' regardless of the lens in use). On a few occasions I have accidentally disabled SSS, failing to turn it back on after a studio shoot, and lost the 'edge' I am used to seeing from my Alpha 700 as a result.

You could mistake the difference for a poorer sensor, poor focusing or a cheap lens but the real cause will be the absence of the in-body stabilisation which gives *every single shot taken* an advantage, no matter what lens you are using. Now this applies across the entire Alpha range, and having used two alternative in-body systems, I believe the current Sony implementation is by far the best at those 'false sense of security' shutter speeds from 1/30th all the way up to 1/1000th.

Image quality with the Alpha 700 is down to two factors – your choice of lens, and the ISO/NR combination or related image processing. I always shoot raw even if also saving JPEGs for reference, and I process the files using a range of converters



The value of SSS

To get the right depth of field on this shot, it was worth stopping the 11-18mm lens down to f11 at 18mm – but that meant a hand-held tenth of a second. The 100 per cent scaled clip, left, shows how well the SSS has handled a hand-held exposure and the movement of the leaves confirms the exposure.



The details of these queen or king scallops with roe might have benefited from 14 megapixels, but the Alpha 700 was a natural choice using studio flash on location.

but mainly *Adobe Camera Raw* and *Lightroom*. These both share a core engine and a reputation for getting Alpha 700 files seriously wrong. The latest version (4.5 for ACR, 1.4.1 for LR) has fixed most of the problems with contrast and colour but noise levels are still higher, and with coarser 'grain', than they should be.

Processing Canon 450D and Alpha 700 raw files side by side, the 450D has a slight noise advantage from ISO 400 to 1600. Since the Canon is limited to 1600, comparisons at 3200 and 6400 are impossible. Where the Alpha 700 loses is in a certain type of midtone which is often found in defocused areas. It actually has better shadow noise than the 450D, and underexposed images shot at ISO 400-800 can be pushed in raw development. Present both cameras with a well-exposed lighter toned area full of detail, and both will show hardly any noise even at 800 in the light detail.

It seems that Sony has applied noise reduction most to the darker tones, leaving the fairly steep midtone curve to its own devices. The downside of this is that one particular set of tones – sky blues – fall right into the noisiest zone of the Alpha 700's response even at ISO 100-400. The red channel seems to suffer most from grainy noise

and the blue channel least. Skies in Alpha 700 pictures can be more noisy than you would want, and more noisy than other makes (*this noise is caused by the red and green channels, not by the blue itself*).

The worst comparison is with the Pentax K20D, which suppresses midtone noise most effectively. It does not have the same reserve of dynamic range into the shadows and highlights that the A700 does (this is also true of the Canon 450D) and here, I think, lies the answer to why Sony images seem to have more 'life' and also higher in midtone noise. If you reserve more of the available bit depth to handle highlight recovery (each stop at the highlight end uses half of any remaining data depth), and also try to recover the maximum shadow detail, you end up with fewer tone-steps available in the critical midrange. The images are also prone to banding, which is absent in the A700.

What I'm looking for in my Sony A700 images is the punch to survive in on-line photo libraries, display well on screen, and make great prints. This I get.

The result is part of the unique Sony 'look' – images which have a natural visual brightness and colour, but also have good scope for shadow adjustment and highlight recovery.

This type of contrast handling is vital for effective implementation of the DRO+ (Dynamic Range Optimizer) because without a reserve of image information at both ends of the tonal scale, DRO+ has nothing to work on. And if the image does not already have a good bright visual contrast, DRO+ will make it seem artificially compressed and flat.

Let's just say that while both the Pentax K20D and the Canon 450D bettered the noise-levels of the Alpha 700 across their ranges, both had muted and soft looking images to go with this. Flattening off the Sony image to resemble the Canon default immediately lowered the apparent noise; tweaking a Canon or Pentax image to have the same vibrant colour and contrast as the Sony default increased its noise.

You can avoid strong noise reduction in the Alpha 700 by shooting at ISO 1250 instead of 1600, just below the threshold at which mandatory NR starts to happen in-cameras.

The A200 and 350

Why would you want to choose either of the lower priced Alpha bodies?

With the Alpha 200, the price alone is a compelling reason. For £230, once a basic price even for a

film SLR, you get a very sturdy and reliable camera body which accepts all Minolta AF lenses back to 1985.

It has a decent viewfinder, an excellent 2.7 inch viewing screen, large well separated controls and a generally responsive, fast performance.

The strength of the 200 is the image quality on Auto ISO, which ranges from 100 to 400. Even if you plan to make 20 x 16 exhibition prints, you can leave the camera set on Auto ISO permanently.

Should you need to range up to 800 or 1600, the 200 is well ahead of the earlier 100 and matches the 7D/5D but with 60% more pixels. At 3200 it produces acceptable results in good light for action, and rather grainy but not unpleasant results in near darkness.

The Alpha 350 is almost double the body price, and has the benefit of a highly detailed 14.2 megapixels. Contrary to rumours, this does not mean a noisy image or restricted shadow to highlight range. It actually yields a very smooth looking image with plenty of detail in contrasty or difficult light.

The Live View is great for finding new ways of working. For example, you can set the camera to LV with a long telephoto aimed at a bird feeding

area, on a tripod, with a remote release. Change 'Power Save' from the default time (1 minute) to 15 or 30 minutes, sit back at a distance and watch until your subject appears on the LV screen before shooting.

The regular uses, for holding your camera overhead or positioning it on the ground without contortions, are well-known.

My reason for wanting an A350 as well as my A700 is a double one – LV and 14.2 megapixels.

The Alpha 300, available from Jessop only in the UK, has 10 megapixels like the A200, plus Live View. If this was the only model, I wouldn't want it to keep alongside my A700. And if there was a model with 14.2 megapixels but no live view, in a 200-type body, I probably wouldn't find the cost justified as the 700 is so good.

But give me a lightweight travel sized camera, a valuable backup body sharing the same battery type, usable Live View and an extra high resolution sensor – well, it's a no-brainer!

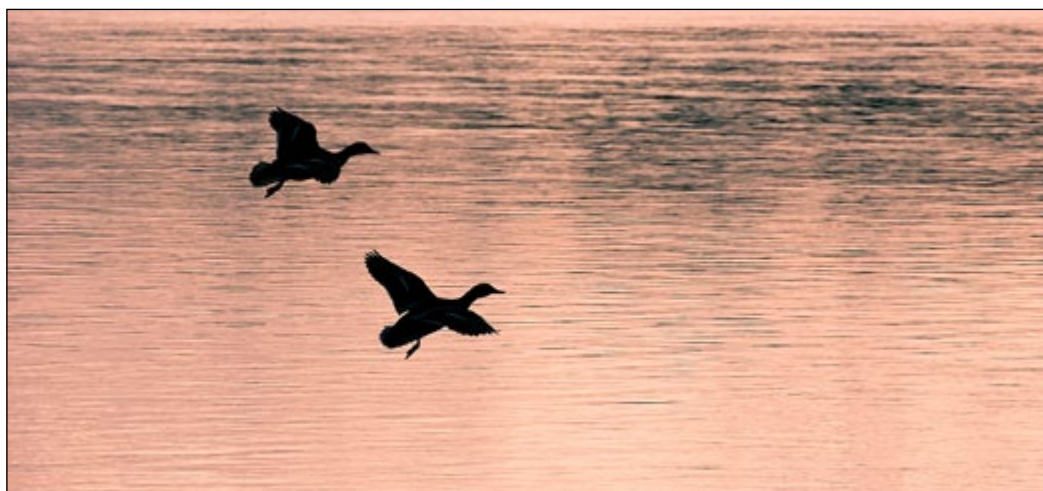
Imagine travelling with just one DSLR. If it goes wrong or even just gets a load of dust on the sensor calling for a pro cleaning job, you are stuck. Having a second body is almost vital, as it was in film days.

A second battery and a spare charger would cost you £70 or more. That reduces the real cost of the A350 body to a little over £300. By the same logic, the A200 body as a backup is really only costing you £150 because it also comes with a battery (£40-60) and charger (£50-£115, incredibly enough, just try to order a replacement from Currys Partsmaster and be amazed at the price!).

I am aware that the best pictures I've had from the Alpha 350 have been better than the best pictures from the Alpha 700 in terms of detail captured. But when confronted with a choice, I always pick the 700.

My final conclusion has been that I simply get better, more useful final images from the Alpha 700 over a wide range of conditions – even though in some situations other cameras produce a superior result. The dynamic range of the Alpha 700 raw file makes single exposures good enough for pseudo-HDR processing and almost eliminates the need to bracket, ever. I get a quality of tone and colour which works well on screen and in print, and is very saleable. I regret it every time I leave the Alpha 700 behind because another camera needs testing, and return to find I do not have the same satisfaction in the results.

– David Kilpatrick



Top two images: Shirley Kilpatrick set her Alpha 200 to Auto ISO and used the 18-250mm Sony lens and Program exposure to catch shots day and night during Alicante's Fogueres de San Juan festival.

Left: the Alpha 350 has no problem with dynamic range from detailed blacks to whites even in sunshine.

Below: the Alpha 350 tracked focus well with the 70-200mm f2.8 SSM when tested.

Hunting down the horse

Karen Miller has spent a decade and more documenting horses in action using the traditional medium of colour negative film





Karen Miller has featured before in *Photoworld* for her photographs from Twycross Zoo – readers may remember a cover with a very cute baby monkey.

That was before the ‘scene’ as we know it switched to digital. Karen has stuck firmly with her tried and tested film-based methods, using Minolta Dynax 700si and Dynax 9 bodies with the 100-400mm APO zoom and fast f2.8 200mm APO G for her action shots at equestrian events.

“I followed the eventing scene when a friend of mine was qualifying her horse for Burghley”, Karen explains. “I enjoyed photographing the horses so much that one event led to another.

“Living in the heart of fox-hunting country, I photographed various scenes before the grand finale parade in Melton Mowbray.”

Karen’s pictures here – delivered as 8 x 12” prints from the Fujicolor Superia 400 and Kodak Gold 400 films she prefers – are of indistinguishably equal high quality whether the shot dates from 1996 or 2007. In fact, seeing Karen’s print with their rich colours, excellent sharpness and no visible grain reminds us that digital has only just begun to match silver film and still lacks much of its character. If you were to take a range of digital work over a ten

Facing page: Melani Smith on Gemini Lad as Osberton, 1996.

This page, top: Zara Phillips riding Ard Magic Star, Burghley, 2007

Bottom: early Land Rover sponsorship of Burghley, 1996 – Bruce Davidson, USA, on Squelsh





Above: Shire Horse pair ploughing. The autumnal colours of the field go beautifully with the red and brass of the harnesses and plough, and the neutrality of the overcast sky. Below: the Cottesmore Hunt, Seaton meet, in January 1998. You can almost smell the January sunshine in this record of an era which is now passed.





year period, it is only in the last four years that an 8 x 12" print would approach these and earlier images would now be considered unusable.

Karen quotes this, written by Ronald Duncan for The Horse of the Year Show:

"The Horse"

"Where in this wide can man find nobility without pride, friendship without envy or beauty without vanity? Here, where grace is laced with muscle, and strength by gentleness confined.

"He serves without servility; he has fought without enmity. There is nothing so powerful, nothing less violent, there is nothing so quick, nothing more patient.

"England's past has been borne on his back. All our history is in his industry; we are his heirs, he our inheritance."

— DK



Left: Mare and Foal, 1998 – cropped from a picture which won Karen an RSPCS contest prize in 1999.

Below: Suffolk Punch pair, undated.



QUEST

Colin Westgate's QUEST workshops, sponsored by Photoworld, have moved to Coopers Cottage, 154 Coast Road, West Mersea, Mersea Island, Essex C05 8NX. Telephone 01206 384315. Mobile 07887 887101. email questphoto@btinternet.com. See the new website www.questphoto.co.uk for details of photo trips and the full 2008 programme.

Isle of Skye and Applecross (2 centre trip)

*9 nights, Guest House and Hotel based. (10 places);
Saturday 27 September to
Monday 6 October 2008*

Year after year, this is Quest's most popular Photoweeek; the "Misty Isle" is one of the most beautiful parts of the United Kingdom, full of mood and mountains, rivers, bays and lochs. There is all that the landscape photographer could want - but Skye does not give it up that easily, as it is well known for the fickleness of its weather. But the weather makes the mood, and magic moments are never far away - if only the photographer is in the right place at the right time. This year, instead of minibuss travel to and from the Skye, we will fly to Inverness and collect the vehicle locally. This saving of two days travelling time allows the trip to be extended to include the dramatic Applecross peninsula.

On Skye, we will, as usual, be based at The Skye Picture House, near Broadford, which is run by photographers Steve & Gill Terry. It is situated in a stunning location, at the edge of a

loch, with superb views, especially for the morning sunrise. Otters and seals are often seen. A talk by photographer Ken Bryan, who lives on Skye, will be arranged if he is available. Our second location will be at Lochcarron, with good access to Applecross.

Flights are available to Inverness from London airports and an overnight sleeper train from London is also available. Arrangements will be made to collect travellers from the airport or rail station on arrival and return at the end of the holiday. The cost of flights is not included in the price, but assistance will be available for booking if required.

**Price £845, (deposit £200)
(Single supplement £85)**

8 places; Price includes full board accommodation, based on a shared twin room, and minibuss travel on Skye and Applecross. It does not include cost of flights. A supplement is payable for single rooms.

Autumn in the Lakes

*7 nights, Hotel/Guest House based.
Free minibuss travel to from and at destination (8 places); Saturday 11- Saturday 18 October 2008*

A new Quest Photoweeek in one of England's best-loved landscape regions. We will be based in the Keswick area, from where we will explore the spectacular lakes and mountains of the renowned Lake District.

Most of these are in easy reach by road, although some walking may be involved. This will not be too strenuous and at this time of the year, the autumn colours should be appearing, to enhance the beauty of this lovely part of the country.

Travel will be by minibuss, leaving the south early on the Saturday, and pick ups will be arranged, where practicable, at or near to your home. Should this be significantly off the planned route, however, a small surcharge to cover costs may be payable.

**Price £595, (deposit £100)
(single supplement £105)**

8 places; Price includes B&B accommodation in a shared twin room. If you require a single room, this will be subject to availability and a supplement of £105 will be payable. The price also includes minibuss travel to, from and in the Lakes. It does not include evening meals.

Northumberland and the Borders
7 nights. Hotel based. Free minibuss travel to from and at destination. (8 places); Saturday 8 November to Saturday 15 November 2008

During this week we will explore the superb coastline and inland landscape of unspoilt Northumberland. The beaches on the north east coast are some of the loveliest in the U.K., but as well as these, there are the Cheviot Hills, Roughing Lynn waterfall and several castles. The week will include a visit across the causeway to Lindisfarne (Holy Island) and either Les Mclean, or David Lane will join us on one of the days, as well as giving an evening talk. There will be plenty of subject matter to photograph, and the evening social activity will, as with most Quest trips, include showing and sharing our own work.

The minibuss will leave the south early Saturday morning, and will collect passengers en route where this is practicable. This may be at your home or nearby, but if you live far off the route, a surcharge may be payable to cover costs.

**Price £735, (deposit £100)
(single supplement £70)**

8 places; Price includes full board en suite accommodation, with packed lunch and is based on sharing a twin room. Single room accommodation is available but a supplement of £70 is payable. If you require a single, you must make this clear when booking. Free minibuss travel is also included, with pick up and drop off at or near your home by arrangement. A surcharge to cover costs may be payable if this is far off route.

2008 AUTUMN LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY COURSES and HOLIDAYS

These are not connected with Quest.

All with Duncan McEwan, Scottish Regional Organiser for Photoworld Club.

Loch Lomond, Trossachs, Glen Coe (14-20 Sept).

This will be based at the Inversnaid Photography Centre within the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. There will be a trip to Glen Coe and Rannoch Moor with an overnight stay at the Kingshouse Hotel facing Buachaille Etive Mor. *Inversnaid: 01877-386254; info@inversnaidphoto.com; www.inversnaidphoto.com*

Isle of Eigg (25-29 Sept)

Eigg is one of the gems of the Inner Hebrides and offers fantastic photographic opportunities in a small area. Based in the Glebe Barn at the southern end of the island. *Photo Adventures: 01665-830523; info@leefrost.co.uk; www.photoadventures.co.uk*

Isle of Arran (20-25 Oct)

Arran lies in the Firth of Clyde and is often referred to as "Scotland in Miniature" on account of its varied terrain. Travel by minibuss. Based in the Kinloch Hotel at Blackwaterfoot on the West side of Arran. *Light and Land: 01432-839111; contactus@lightandland.co.uk; www.lightandland.co.uk*



Kintail, W. Ross (3-9 Oct) and (9-15 Oct)

Kintail is one of the finest mountain areas in Scotland and the Isle of Skye is only 20 minutes away from the Kintail Lodge Hotel where the trips will be based. A full day on Skye should be one of the highlights. Travel by minibuss.

Full details from Duncan McEwan (details below).

Torridon (27 Oct - 2 Nov)

Torridon has become a firm favourite with landscape photographers with wonderful mountains, glens, lochs and coast. There is no better time to see it than in late Autumn. The course will be based in Gairloch. Travel by minibuss. *Inversnaid: 01877-386254; info@inversnaidphoto.com; www.inversnaidphoto.com*

Details of all the courses can be had from the individual organisers or from: Duncan McEwan, Dunarden, Horwood Road, Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire PA11 3AT Tel/fax 01505-612673; mcewan@dunarden.fsnet.co.uk; www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk



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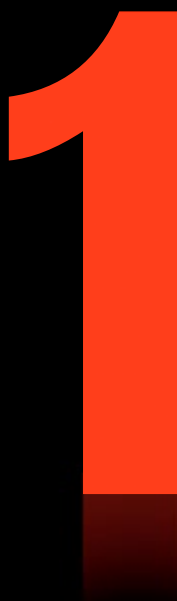
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You will learn about photo workshops and weekend breaks run by expert long-time Minolta users and sponsored by the Club... like the 'Quest' workshops (both digital and film based) organised by Colin Westgate based in South East England – and Duncan McEwan's Scottish Highland and Border gatherings.

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Watford Sony Centre	Hertfordshire	WD17 2RR	0845 634 0360	Merryhill Sony Centre	West Midlands	DY5 1SY	01384 486770
Welwyn Sony Centre	Hertfordshire	AL8 6HA	01707 391044	Solihull Sony Centre	West Midlands	B91 3AT	0121 711 4145
Inverness Sony Centre	Invernesshire	IV1 1QA	01463 222282	Sutton Coldfield Sony Centre	West Midlands	B72 1PA	0121 354 9646
Bluewater Sony Centre	Kent	DA9 9SG	01322 427101	Wolverhampton Sony Centre	West Midlands	WV1 3QD	01902 714415
Bromley Sony Centre	Kent	BR1 1HG	0845 634 0390	Crawley Sony Centre	West Sussex	RH10 1EG	01293 518786
Maidstone Sony Centre	Maidstone Kent	ME15 6AR	01622 754746	Worthing Sony Centre	West Sussex	BN11 1QN	01903 214030
Orpington Sony Centre	Kent	BR6 0LS	0845 634 0490	Huddersfield Sony Centre Galleria	West Yorkshire	HD1 2QT	01484 439 030
Tunbridge Wells Sony Centre	Kent	TN1 2SS	01892 522226	Leeds Sony Centre	West Yorkshire	LS1 6PJ	0113 242 2569
Glasgow Sony Centre	Lanarkshire	G1 2PW	0141 248 7077	Wakefield Sony Centre	West Yorkshire	WF1 1PQ	01924 372704
Bolton Sony Centre	Lancashire	BL1 1NB	01204 388111	Marlborough Sony Centre	Wiltshire	SN8 1HQ	01672 516444
Preston Sony Centre	Lancashire	PR1 2NR	01772 252783	Salisbury Sony Centre	Wiltshire	SP1 2NW	01722 349 490
Leicester Sony Centre	Leicestershire	LE1 6DN	0116 275 6015	Swindon Sony Centre	Wiltshire	SN1 1SD	01793 531039
Baker Street Sony Centre	London	W1U 6UB	0207 486 2526	Kidderminster Sony Centre	Worcestershire	DY10 1AA	01562 827100
Bayswater Sony Centre	London	W2 6LY	020 7229 9110	Worcester Sony Centre	Worcestershire	WR1 2RF	01905 613218
Chelsea Sony Centre	London	SW10 0LR	020 7795 0500	Redditch Sony Centre	Worcestershire	B97 4AD	01527 62683
Ealing Sony Centre	London	W5 5AH	020 8840 4442				

EEOE – all details current as of 22/10/07

SIGMA



OUR WORLD

Shadows and shapes on a New York beach.

ED KASHI: Born in 1957 in New York. Earned a degree in photojournalism at Syracuse University.

Photographed in more than 60 countries. Received numerous awards for a wide range of work.

Photographs appeared in National Geographic magazine, among many other publications.

Photo data: SIGMA 30mm F1.4 EX DC HSM, 1/1,000 second exposure at f7.1.

ED KASHI SHOOTS THE WORLD WITH A SIGMA LENS



Sigma has produced a super-fast, F1.4 max. aperture standard lens specifically designed for the digital age. The image circle of the lens is specially designed for digital SLRs with APS-C size sensors. The optical design incorporates Extraordinary Low Dispersion (ELD) and Special Low Dispersion (SLD) coated glass and aspheric lens elements to effectively correct aberrations and produce outstandingly bright, clear and distinctive images from infinity to minimum focusing distance of 40cm (15.7 inches). Finished to advanced EX standards and complete with a matched petal shaped lens hood, the 30mm F1.4 lens features a Hyper Sonic Motor (HSM) for silent and responsive autofocus with full-time manual override.

for
DIGITAL

A large-aperture standard lens sets the new benchmark for digital SLR cameras.

SIGMA 30mm F1.4 EX DC HSM

*Vignetting (a darkening of the corners of the image) will occur if the lens is used with digital SLR cameras with image sensors larger than APS-C size or 35mm SLRs, and APS SLRs



Available for: Sigma SA,
Canon EOS and Nikon-D
digital SLRs.