

Acquapazza APPA-GH5

housing for the Panasonic GH5

by Peter Rowlands

I think it's fair to say that you can judge the popularity of a camera for underwater use by the number of manufacturers making housings for it and a prime example of this is the Panasonic GH5.

The traditional dominance of Nikon and Canon in the pro/semi-pro market is now under threat like never before with serious competition from Sony and Panasonic as they either produce full frame game changers like the Sony A series or the 4/3rds benefits of the Panasonic GH series.

The 2017 DEMA Show saw the wraps being taken off several Panasonic GH5 housings and I was able to spend some time with one in particular from Japanese manufacturer Acquapazza. They first came to my attention at DEMA 2010 when I saw their revolutionary (as far as I'm concerned) Sony NEX-5 housing which incorporated the ability to tilt the rear LCD screen up to 45°. This would make shooting video and low level stills shots much more ergonomic and therefore productive to shoot.

No other manufacturers at the

time were offering that capability and I spent the next three years using their APSO NEX-5 housing. It performed faultlessly with its combination of simple mechanics backed up by double O rings and aluminium strength. The Sony NEX-5 manual white balance was legendarily poor but nothing a simple Magic filter couldn't solve :-)

As a primarily video shooter I got tempted away by Panasonic whose white balance was a breath of fresh air and their video processing was gaining them an enviable reputation in both the professional and semi-pro world. Acquapazza were concentrating on the emerging and impressive Sony RX and 6000 range so our paths drifted apart save for enjoyable conversations at DEMA between owner Toshiki Yamamoto and myself ably assisted by Miki Kurimoto who runs www.scubafreedom.com in the Yucatan Peninsula when she is not translating at DEMA.

Toshiki Yamamoto is an underwater photographer and technical diver who was drawn into





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housing manufacture, like several others have been, because they couldn't find the housing they wanted but, as engineers, they knew how to make a better one. His main market is in Japan but every year for the past eight years he has exhibited his expanding range at DEMA and is gaining a wider reputation with his innovative designs.

The Acquapazza APPA-GH5 is machined from a solid block of aluminium which is then anodised for durability and is available in a choice

of no less than 16 colours. Quite how this affects their stock control I do not know but this offering does set Acquapazza apart from all other manufacturers who only offer their single choice of colour.

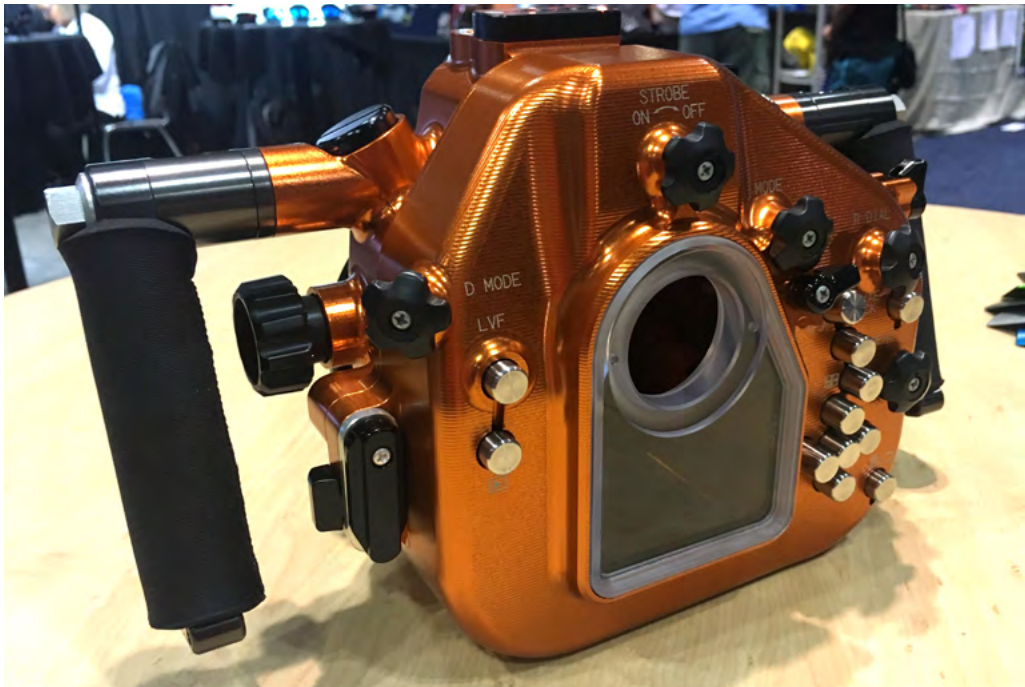
Picking up the APPA-GH5 I was immediately taken by the soft grip handles but also by its light weight. Opening the housing is via two turn key levers with safety locks and the main double O ring seal looks very reassuring and easy to access for maintenance.

The camera is mounted onto a baseplate which slides into the front of the housing and provides secure and precise positioning. Internally the APPA-GH5 looks positively minimalist but that does not mean there are fewer controls. In fact the opposite is true. For example there is a very clever control of the rear menu wheel which some other housings don't offer but the APPA-GH5 still provides push buttons for the four "up, down, left and right" controls.

Speaking of push buttons, the

APPA-GH5's are significantly larger in diameter making them much more comfortable to push especially if you are blessed to be able to dive without gloves in warm water :-). This larger diameter will still be appreciated by those wearing even thick gloves but they don't feel cluttered.

Rotary controls are via Acquapazza's proprietary deep scalloped knobs which are a variation of the traditional 'holed wheel' but with the outer diameter removed. The result is a smaller profile without



Externally the overall look is cleverly uncluttered without cutting back on the number of controls or the ergonomics.

reducing effective control either with two fingers or just one in a rocking motion.

t; speaking of which leads me to one very distinctive feature and this is the ability to adjust the angle of the left and right grips individually to place them exactly to suit your preference. In my case, for example, I can tilt the right handle up towards me to give perfect positioning on the Video Stop/Start lever yet this does not affect access to the shutter release lever should I also want to take a still image for whatever reason. It is details like these that tell me that

the designer is genuinely interested in how the housing feels as well as performs.

The rear perspex window has the provision to fit Inon optical viewfinders to suit all needs. Selfishly as a video shooter I want to look at the LCD screen most of the time so that provision is a visual intrusion I could do without.

Front ports are easily fitted and removed with a single, sprung loaded push button and there are port and extension ring combinations to take the following lenses:
Panasonic's 8mm F3.5,



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7-14mm F4,
8-18 F2.8-4,
12-60mm F2.8-4,
30mm and 45mm F2.8 as well as Olympus 8mm F1.8 and 7-14mm F2.8. There is also the possible development for the Panasonic 12-35mm F2.8. In addition, the following extensions are under development:

L818 extension SB, L1260 extension SB and O714 extension SB.

Acquapazza are often overshadowed by other high profile housings but if you are in the market for a Panasonic GH5 you would



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be well advised to check out this housing. It competes very favourably and in some cases outshines the competition.

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