

Smartphone housings round up

by Peter Rowlands

Back in Issue UwP103 Jul/Aug 2018 I wrote a Parting Shot about the amazing capability of the iPhone Pano function and I illustrated it with a straight out of the camera, far from perfect, image of a diver in British waters.

The housing I used was a LenzO from Canada for my iPhone 6s which, at the time, was a great improvement camera-wise over the 5. Fast forward and the 6 became 7 then 8, they missed out 9 followed by X and now 11. In addition each model had at least two screen sizes to suit all requirements.

I jumped from 6 to X but decided that Apple's miserly part ex offer wasn't worth it as the old 6 would be ideal as a housed 'camera'. And I think that is one of the main reasons we haven't seen many serious shooters using their iPhones; they don't want to risk their current iPhone because, if there was a flood, they'd lose all of their data etc etc. True we should all have back ups in the clouds or on our desktops but the loss of one's current iPhone would be just too bad to contemplate.

However the iPhone is a great camera with several modes, some of which could almost have been developed with underwater photography in mind so I'm going to try and persuade you to consider buying a used iPhone and thinking of it as a camera.

As I banged on in UwP103 I think that the Pano capability of the iPhone is a greatly underused technique underwater and one of the main reasons for it's lack of use is that the big majority of housings do not offer control over this capability. The reason, as far as I can gather, is because Apple won't release the 'code' to allow developers to build it into their 'apps' which are invariably used to control the iPhone in a housing and that, as far as I'm concerned, is short sighted.

So keen was I to be able to use the Pano function that I thought I'd do some research and 'invest' in a selection of housings which are, compared to higher end metal housings, surprisingly inexpensive.

What I have found is that, for my particular desires, there is no one



housing which ticks all the boxes. Some tick most and some only a few so it has become a 'that's the best you can get' result.

Let me start by listing my main criteria. In order of priority - the ability to shoot Panos, the availability of a vacuum leak detection system and finally the ability to turn the 'camera' on and off. The ultimate dream would be to fully control the camera functions, have a vacuum and on/off facility.

In no particular order I'll go through each housing and start with the LenzO because that was the first one I used.

Lenzo 6s

The LenzO housing I have is for the iPhone 6s but they do make newer housings for models up to the X and XS. They are at the top end of the price range at \$550 but, albeit rather awkwardly, they do allow full control of all the camera functions by using physical push buttons and levers. It



also has a dome port which would be very useful if they make an iPhone 11 housing with it's extra wide angle lens. Dual colour filters and an On/Off button complete an impressive package. Unfortunately there is no vacuum system available.

Pulux X



This basic housing uses physical push buttons and can control all of the camera functions together with

an on/off control. Unfortunately it has no vacuum system which is important because this housing failed the pressure test without the camera and until I can establish the cause of the problem I'm not going to trust my iPhone 10 which is a real shame because it works really well.

Price approx \$80

Diveroid



This is a universal housing with an app which is under development but I'm told that should be finalised by February. What is being promised is

1. Real time color correction
2. Free diving mode
3. Power saving improvement
4. High resolution video(4k)
5. Multi lens support (ultra wide/wide/zoom)
6. Dive information tagged picture sharing

There is the added bonus of the Diveroid Mini dive computer but unfortunately no vacuum system.

Price TBA

Kraken Universal



As the name implies this will take several models of smartphone and is the only aluminium housing so it scores highly on robustness. It can also take external wide and macro lenses and/or filters.

The controlling app is the very impressive Dive+ with the added bonus of a dive computer and vacuum system. The app allows an impressive zoom in and out function.

The housing is the only housing which is powered by 2xAAA batteries but unfortunately there is no On/Off switch so you have to remove the batteries after a dive otherwise they will most likely be flat next time you want to use it.

If this housing could only allow control of the Pano function it would top my list.

Base price approx \$325

Seafrogs 6/7/8/X & Xr



To my mind this has the most potential as it has an optional vacuum system, dome port, dual filters and zoom in and out capability as well as being able to take several models of iPhone with removable inserts. Whilst the app does not control the Pano function I did stumble across the fact that if you set the iPhone to Camera mode and Pano, it will. Bingo! You obviously can't switch underwater but I'm happy with that so this makes this my first choice. The only slight downside is that there is no On/Off control.

Base price approx €170

DiveVolk

This is the most interesting housing which has been thoroughly reviewed by Christian Baki in this issue of UwP. It is unique in that it has a touch sensitive membrane panel so you can use it just as you would on land. There are no through housing O ring controls and there is a very clever pressure compensation device in the handgrip. Having read Christian's



review I am keen to put this housing through it's paces in the future. There is also a range of accessory wide and macro lenses and/or filters.

This housing offers the best user experience with total control of not just the camera function but also control of any other apps you have on your phone. The other significant advantage of this housing is that you can open previously shot images full screen and that's something none of the other housings will allow.

Price approx \$200

This round up is very much a work in progress and, as UwP owns all of these housings, we will have an opportunity to continue using them during the coming dive season and produce a return review later in the year.

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