

Panasonic GH5M2

by Massimo Franzese

In June this year I received one of the first Panasonic GH5M2 in pre-order and I was very pleased to find out that the physical body and controls are identical to the original GH5 and the camera worked with my first generation NA-GH5 housing. There are a few quirks that are worth noting:

1. The DMW-FL70 mini flash no longer works so you need to acquire a strobe trigger
2. The LCD is slightly smaller however much brighter

I purchased the Nauticam LED store trigger and tested on land with my Sea and Sea YD-D2J and all worked fine. To avoid issues, I also procured Nauticam multicore fiber cable although the strobe seemed to work fine with my old cables I did not want to take chances.

The next step was to find a destination preferably not in UK where to dive.

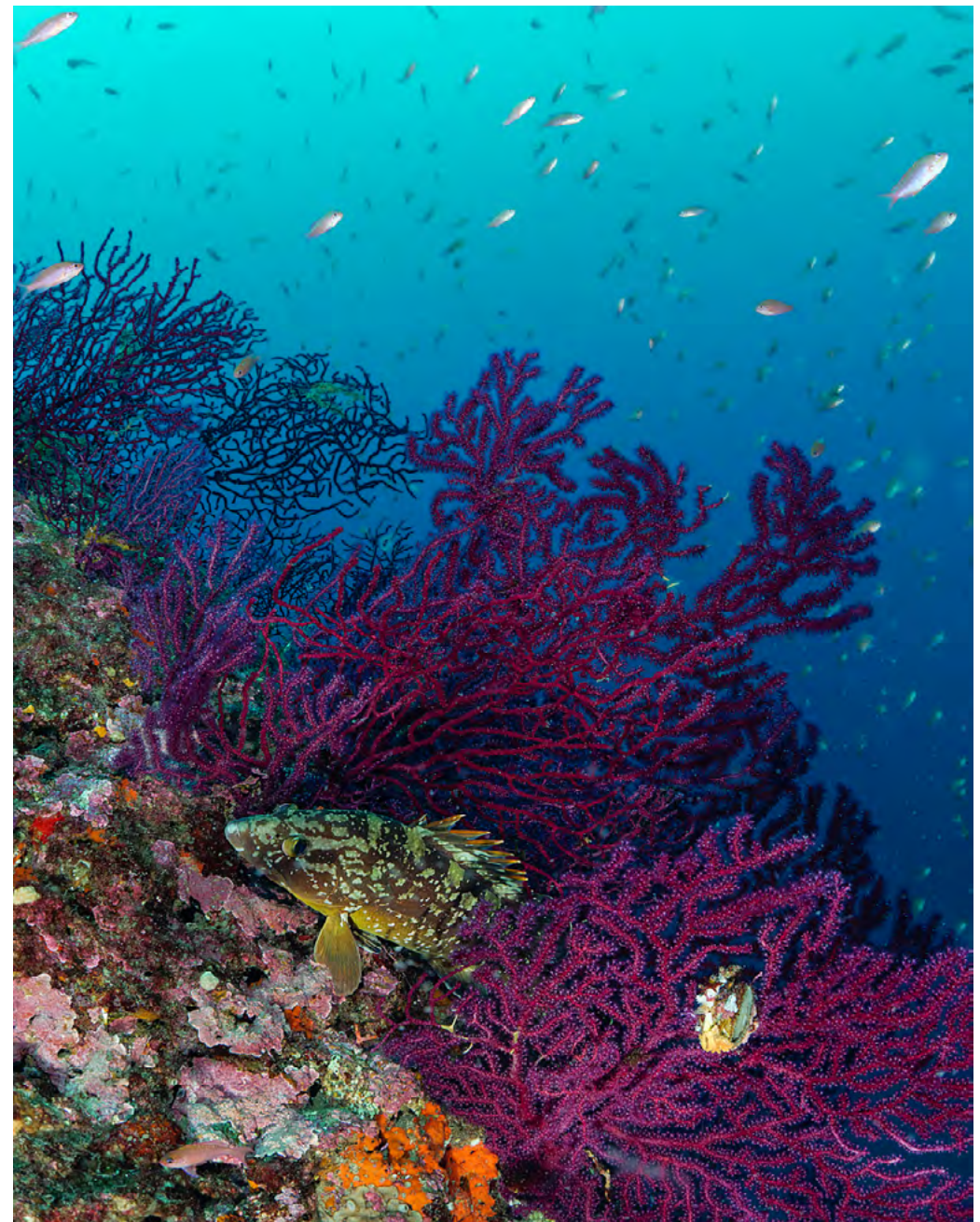
Whilst COVID-19 restrictions are easing at time of writing many South East Asia destinations are still banned from UK and during the summer there was very little choice where to go other than staying in UK.

However, being native of

Campania region in Italy, I am fortunate to have access to wonderful diving destinations near Sorrento, Ischia and also down to Cilento coast. Whilst those locations are more famous as primary tourism hot spots not many people know that the diving is also great, although the Mediterranean Sea is not as warm as tropical destinations. I decided to travel to Italy by car as I was staying there for 6 weeks with my family and therefore, I had no issue of luggage weight but I nearly overloaded the car.

I decided to do the diving towards the end of August after the Italian Ferragosto and avoiding weekends so that there would be less traffic and this paid back.

It was the second time diving in the location so I used again Punta Campanella diving run by the experienced Gianluigi De Maio. The diving has as resident guest Mimmo Roscigno, I invite you to check his social media images: they are sensational. The images that I have taken are pretty decent considering I only do 18 dives per year there but if you see what someone that is diving daily can pull out you get a real feel for the potential of the location.



Panasonic GH5M2, Nauticam housing, Canon 8-15mm zoom fisheye with a metabones smart adapter. Sea & Sea strobes. 15mm, ISO 200, f/5.6, 1/60



Diving is done from RIBs and journey are 10 to 30 minutes with double tank and surface interval on the boat. Considering the views of the coast and the island of Capri this is not as bad as it seems. Temperatures are warm with always a nice breeze so this makes it perfectly tolerable to wear you 7mm semi dry suit. Proper exposure is necessary for photography as the water can drop to 16 C after the thermocline.

There are over 20 dives sites reachable by RIB and more are being mapped. The area is closed to fishing and this has resulted in a significant population of groupers as well as a school of 1000+ barracudas.

There are many wide-angle opportunities but also macro and super-macro options. One thing to take into account is that diving is done using 15 litres steel tanks and that the dive themselves have deeper

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Top right: Panasonic GH5M2, Nauticam housing, Canon 8-15mm zoom fisheye with a metabones smart adapter. Sea & Sea strobes. 8mm, ISO 400, f/5.6, 1/100

Right: Panasonic GH5M2, Nauticam housing, Panasonic 45mm 2.8. Sea & Sea strobes. ISO 200, f/10, 1/400





Panasonic GH5M2, Nauticam housing, Canon 8-15mm zoom fisheye with a metabones smart adapter. Sea & Sea strobes. 11mm, ISO 200, f/8, 1/125

profile than your tropical destination so artificial lighting is essential especially because in the site where fish is more abundant visibility can drop below 10 meters after rainfall. Another characteristic is that visibility may improve at depth after the first 15 meters with less suspended particles and clearer but colder waters.

In terms of performance the GH5M2 did not disappoint, Panasonic has designed a new higher capacity battery pack that extends useful life for another 18% and is compatible

with the older chargers. Using the flash trigger, I have taken around 700 shots and typically I would not need to change battery for the 3 dives of the day. With the original GH5 I would typically do two dives or around 400-500 shots. The improved performance is of course given by the use of the trigger not just the extra battery power.

I do not use a viewfinder underwater and I did not have issues with the smaller LCD (from 3.2" to 3") diagonal. One thing worth noting



Panasonic GH5M2, Nauticam housing, Panasonic 45mm 2.8. Sea & Sea strobes. ISO 200, f/5.6, 1/250



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is that the GH5M2 has a completely redesigned autofocus that includes subject detection. Using it underwater gives excellent results for divers (the human detection works including faces) however for shooting fish I recommend turning it off as it may decide to focus on something different. I used continuous autofocus with single middle size area. Due to the somewhat dark waters a focus light is required for macro work at small aperture as mirrorless cameras

do not focus with the lens wide open.

In terms of lenses and ports I used a Canon 8-15mm zoom fisheye with a metabones smart adapter as prime lens. This gives me the option of going from 180 to 70 degrees field of view with outstanding optical quality using the Nauticam 140mm glass dome. As macro lens I used a Panasonic 45mm 2.8 native MFT lens. Last year I found the 60mm too long and I was glad to have a shorter optic this year. The camera focussed fine in



Panasonic GH5M2, Nauticam housing, Canon 8-15mm zoom fisheye with a metabones smart adapter. Sea & Sea strobes. 8mm, ISO 200, f/11, 1/250

all circumstances with very few shots out of focus mostly due to user error (forgot the lever on manual focus or had subject detection engaged).

The already good ergonomics of the GH5 remain the same but the new menu options and offer small but significant improvements for video and still shooting. One new useful feature is the ability measure the IRE % of a single point on the screen so you can easily calibrate your exposure on a grey card when you shoot with

ambient light.

I split the trip into two 3 days / 2 nights chunk and I have to confess the first part was quite challenging due to new diving equipment but by day 2 I was pretty much set. We had some rain so I took out the macro lens also on a site that would be usually wide angle but the results were rewarding. Typically, the routine is double tank wide angle in the morning and macro in the afternoon. Night dives are epic but rare and, in this occasion, there



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was none scheduled.

After a relaxing weekend I was back for part 2 of the trip even less divers and better conditions made for some great wide-angle shots. Scoglio a Penna delivered the usual 1000+ barracudas however different to tropical ones those struggle to get in formation, it must be an Italian version of the fish with less discipline! La grotta dell'Isca is another amazing dive site. Looking outside in you can see two eyes like a mask, going further back with a fisheye lens you can fit three entrances and going back again a fourth that looks a bit like a Halloween pumpkin silhouette. Inside

sea breams swim creating a nice contrast while on the rocks you can see some substantial sea slugs. You could probably take millions of shots as the entrance is shallow and makes for a perfect photography training site.

The cave continues all the way to the surface underwater where you can see stalactites and stalagmites. From underwater you can see those typical sea tomatoes with bright red colours.

One of the highlights of the area is 'Il banco di Santa Croce' which is a set of submerged pinnacles that host large groupers, eagle rays, scorpion fish. The dive is quite deep and can end up in decompression however the



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red gorgonians are impressive.

My favourite site however is Punta Campanella itself because it offers a very interesting topology and in the shallow area there are some small caves that may remind you of a red sea scene, although of course it is not.

If you are a GH5 owner you are asking yourself If it is worth upgrading especially as you can use your existing housing. In terms of improvements the GH5M2 has a completely new software stack that is inherited from the S series and in terms of RAW still performance has a small dynamic range improvement



and a higher performance at high ISO values. The still image quality is almost identical to the Panasonic G9 a fairly popular camera for land shooters that has not really been so widespread for underwater use.

If you are a video shooter the camera can now record 50/60 fps at 10 bits with 4:2:0 chroma subsampling. The results are pretty decent to the point an external recorder in my opinion is no longer required if you need double frame rate however a monitor is probably useful if you shoot macro to ensure your shots are in focus. The HDMI 1.4 bulkhead of the original NA-GH5 works well for that purpose. My conclusion is that for an underwater shooter if you want to squeeze the best performance for

*Panasonic GH5M2,
Nauticam housing,
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& Sea strobes. ISO 200, f/8,
1/400*

*Far right: Panasonic
GH5M2, Nauticam
housing, Panasonic 45mm
2.8. Sea & Sea strobes. ISO
200, f/8, 1/250*



photos and videos this is a worthy upgrade that will further leverage your housing investment. The camera is now at launch price so when the price will drop it will be a viable option if you are not interested in the upcoming GH6 that is going to cost much more.

All in all the GH5M2 performed very well during the trip and I am pleased with the upgrade and I will be taking it again on this same itinerary towards the end of August next year. In this short article I have omitted the underwater sculpture park of Baia di Napoli which is near Naples and I visited last year. If this was your only trip in the area that has definitely

to be combined and there is a sister dive centre that arranges transfers. Images of the beautiful mosaics and statues (the latter are reproductions with originals stored in museum) can be found on my flickr under the user Interceptor121. For additional details about this trip and other organised itineraries also check my blog interceptor121.com.

Final point is that as a short haul destination this is just amazing as the dive base is 15' from Sorrento and half hour drive from the Amalfi coast so it is a location where you can take your family and health and safety standards are high with COVID-19

protocols in place in each hotel or restaurant.

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Massimo Franzese is a management consultant specialising in IT in mergers and acquisitions. He is a PADI instructor and keen videographers, since his wife Helen stopped diving in 2014 he has also started taking photos underwater. Massimo is programme manager for New City Photographic Society in Milton Keynes and keen land wildlife and nightscape photographer.

