

Marelux 180 degree Smart Viewfinder

by Phil Rudin

Marelux Precision Inc. is headquartered in California, USA selling U/W photography products manufactured in China. One of the latests product releases is the 180 degree Smart Viewfinder. This is an optical viewfinder designed only for underwater use with the cameras LCD screen. Marelux also has a 45 degree viewfinder made for use with the EVF.

The 180 degree Smart Viewfinder is made from anodized aluminum alloy and optical grade glass. It weights in at 300 grams (10.58oz) and is depth rated to 100 meters.

One of the things that makes this viewfinder interesting is the built-in on screen indicator that displays current depth, diving time, ascent rate, ascent speed alert, battery status and water temperature. For Blackwater divers, night divers, cave divers or other areas where gauging a frame of reference is a bit difficult this viewfinder will add a degree of safety to your dive. On several blackwater dives I have been looking into the viewfinder following a subject without realizing that I had dropped deeper than I realized. With this viewfinder that information is available while following your subject.

The viewfinder is powered by two CR2032 batteries that fit into a compartment on the right side with a cap sealed by two O-rings. The cap can easily be removed without tools by simply unthreading and rethreading with your thumb and forefinger.

On the left side are two push buttons that control power and mode on the bottom button and

unit switch and depth reset at the top button.

The small display can be set to metric or imperial systems of measurement with ease.

To power on the viewfinder display you push and hold the bottom button for one second. Before diving you press the bottom button for the depth display and then press the top button to reset the depth to zero. At the top of the display is an arrow that indicates ascent rate and a too rapid ascent alert.

The bottom button has a round marking and the top has a square marking if you prefer to look at those.

The viewfinder also has a diopter adjustment that is set once underwater by simply rotating the eye piece in or out until it provides the sharpest view of the LCD for the users vision.

The optical lens has a large 0.8X magnification underwater. The optical glass element is large and has a nice molded rubber sunshade that virtually eliminates problems seeing the LCD in bright overhead sunlight.

The view into the Marelux viewfinder was a bit more than I had expected having used LCD viewfinders in the past that tended to highlight pixels in the display. With the Marelux viewfinder the LCD screen looked large and very sharply in focus all the way into the corners of the frame. Another thing I found useful are the mounting points on top of the viewfinder for the included ball head to support equipment and arms. It is a perfect place to mount a focusing light and many other useful tools like the





sending unit for my ring flash.

The LCD window on Marelux housings has a metal frame around it held in place by four small Allen bolts. To use the Smart Finder you need to remove the frame with the provided Allen tool and replace with one of the several included new frames that have the rails to secure the viewfinder. The included frames are different depending on camera in use.

On the Marelux Sony A1 and Sony A7R V housings I was able to replace the frames on both of the housings with the included frames. This allows me to quickly move the viewfinder between the two housings without additional work. Be aware that the LCD viewfinder will not fit on the housing if you already have a viewfinder mounted for the EVF.

On the left top of the viewfinder is a small lock that lifts up allowing you to slide the viewfinder into place on the provided rails. Once in place over the



LCD you can hear the lock snap into place securing the viewfinder onto the housing. The locking device pushes up to avoid accidentally hitting it on something while diving. If it pushed down it would allow the viewfinder to fall off the housing if the lock was bumped.

If you use the ball mount on top of the viewfinder a simple safety cord can be attached to prevent loss if the viewfinder comes off for some reason. I have used the unsecured viewfinder on several dives where I jumped off the back of a dive boat without any problems as part of my review process. My recommendation would always be to add a line as a backup just in case.

Field testing the Smart Viewfinder

The first thing you notice when entering the water is that the viewfinder is open on the bottom and closed on top. The viewfinder needs to flood between the rear of the glass optic and the LCD

window to work properly. This is most easily done by turning the housing upside down insuring that all bubbles are off the glass and LCD window. The bubbles won't effect the image quality but may reduce your quality of view into the LCD.

If you intend to take split images just be aware that this viewfinder will not work until totally submerged. If you look into the viewfinder while it is not flooded the image in the LCD will be completely out of focus. This takes a bit of getting use too when first using the viewfinder. If you want to make adjustments to camera settings at the surface you will not be able to see the LCD screen the way you do with a through mounted EVF viewfinder. With the ball head installed you will not be able to see into the EVF at all.

Once underwater this viewfinder is great for fast pans while holding the camera away from your mask. With the diopter adjusted for my vision I was holding the housing several inches from my eyes for both macro and wide angle while still being able to see into the corners of the frame.

If you are coming from a compact or just prefer the LCD to the EVF when judging focus and composition this may be the tool you have been looking for. With excellent sharpness and image size this viewfinder is a winner.

The Marelux 180 degree Smart Finder is available from your authorized Marelux dealer and lists for \$680.00 US, £522.72, €598.47.

Thank you to marelux.co for the loan of the Smart Viewfinder for this review.

Phil Rudin
Instagram

Don't settle for 2nd best



Film - No Filter,
No White Balance



Digital - No Filter,
Manual White Balance



Digital - Magic Filter, Manual
White Balance

Digital cameras have opened up new possibilities to underwater photographers. For available light photography manual white balance is an invaluable tool for restoring colours. But when you use it without a filter you are not making the most of the technique. You're doing all the hard work without reaping the full rewards.

These three photos are all taken of the same wreck in the Red Sea. The left hand image was taken on slide film, which rendered the scene completely blue. The middle image is taken with a digital SLR without a filter, using manual white balance. The white balance has brought out some of the colour of the wreck, but it has also sucked all the blue out of the water behind the wreck, making it almost grey. The right hand image is taken with the same digital camera and lens, but this time using an original Magic Filter. The filter attenuates blue light meaning that the colours of the wreck are brought out and it stands out from the background water, which is recorded as an accurate blue.

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