

Recovering Split Shots with AI

By Steve Miller

Split shots – where your dome port is half-in, half-out of the water – can be challenging to capture. For one, everything is moving. The water, your camera, the subject, and your whole body gets tossed in the swell. This results in lots of misses. But before you start deleting files, make sure you have explored the possibilities of recovering them in the editing room.

Balancing Over- and Under-Exposure

A photographer shooting split shots for the first time recently reached out with the question: “I managed to over expose and under expose the same frame! How is that even possible?”

It's not just possible, it's probable. The tonal range of a 50/50 image can be many, many f/stops. Maybe even more than your camera sensor is capable of recording, though probably not. Mirrorless cameras sold today have an incredible dynamic range.

There are techniques for minimizing tonal range, for example

keeping the sun at your back. But often with big animals we have to take what we get.

The trick is to capture as many pixels as you can by avoiding pure white or pure black sections in the image. This leaves you a choice. If you let your light meter read the sky, your water may be almost black. If you let the meter read the water, your sky may go pure white. If the sky looks pure white, there may be no color or clouds to find. I prefer to skew towards dark water and make up for it in the edit.

Exposure Adjustments in Lightroom

Make your edits local, not global. Local brushes and filters allow you to play with the saturation, contrast, and even the white balance for a specific region in the image.

Use linear gradient masks in Adobe Lightroom to handle the portions of the image above the water separately from the portions below the waterline. The gradient mask tool has markers that allow you to control exactly how gradual or abrupt you want the edge line to be. And that



At first glance, this image is a wreck (actually, a shark ha,ha). The only saving grace is that the highlights are not blown out. It becomes a dynamic capture after editing exposure and adding a crop in Lightroom. Check out the video to see how. © Steve Miller

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSRGt2yuQZU>

will be dependent on how clean the capture of the waterline was.

Once your exposure is balanced, you'll probably need to go through the image with the Heal tool to remove stray water droplets.

Photoshop AI to the Rescue?

Everything we have described so far can be done in Lightroom. But it may be worth jumping over to Photoshop for a newer feature called Sky Replacement. In fact this feature might even change the way you shoot



Steve is a great presenter and educator who engages, informs and encourages.

splits.

Photoshop has always had the ability to merge two images into a composite, and the results are often nice... as long as you don't look too close for the merge. But the process



(Top)) This whale shark image was brought back from the darkness with Lightroom. But it was shot on a cloudless day so it still lacks any interest in the upper portion of the image. © Steve Miller
 (Above) This is the same image as before run through Photoshop's Sky Replacement tool. Adding clouds balances out the image and directs the viewer's attention to the whale shark. © Steve Miller

is pretty advanced for some of us.

Sky Replacement is an AI-generation tool that will find the horizon line in an image and insert a sky of your choice with a single click. They provide some stock cloudy skies and sunsets to use, or you can add your images and create your own library of skies.

Conclusion

Remember, photography is an art form and anything goes (except in photojournalism and some competitions). The tools exist to recover lackluster over-unders at the touch of a button, without becoming a Photoshop expert.

Next time you're in a challenging environment, try focusing on getting the best "under" possible for your split shot. Then dry off and shoot some sunsets at happy hour with an eye towards blending later.

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Ikelite Ambassador Steve Miller has been a passionate teacher of underwater photography since 1980. In addition to creating aspirational photos as an ambassador, he leads the Ikelite Photo School, conducts equipment testing, contributes content and photography, represents us at dive shows and events, provides one-on-one photo advice to customers, and participates in product research and development. Steve also works as a Guest Experience Manager

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