

Olympus 5050 system

Anyone who has considered buying an entry level underwater camera recently cannot fail to have noticed the amazing moulded polycarbonate housings coming out of Japan, mainly for Olympus digital cameras but also some for Sony and Canon models.

The Olympus range have been particularly impressive, arriving on the market at the same time as the camera. This timing was unheard of traditionally as manufacturers had to wait for the camera and then design and produce the housing.

Olympus have joined forces with an independent Japanese housing manufacturer and they provide the finance for the moulding costs as well as working with them as the cameras begin their design and development. The result is a co-operation which all other housing manufacturers must envy and it has enabled Olympus to capture nearly all of this lucrative market.

The Olympus 5050 housing follows in their traditional footsteps with a high quality of design, construction and performance at an amazingly low price.

The camera slots snugly into the housing, is held positively and there are push button and rotary controls for all the camera's functions. The ingenious design provides both piston and compression seals on the rear section of the housing which should prove virtually foolproof from flooding.

Being see-through, it is very easy to see the controls and the LCD screen area is shrouded



with a rubber hood to improve viewing in bright conditions.

Also being see-through allows the internal flash to be used to light close up subjects.

Traditionally this would have been contrary to conventional theories but in practice the built in flash works amazingly up to surprising distances. The result is

a very versatile, basic housing which will have beginners producing shots which will be the envy of many more seasoned underwater photographers.

The front port of the 5050 incorporates an aluminium ring with 67mm filter threads for attaching colour correcting filters and macro and wide angle lenses. This capability makes the 5050 even more versatile and there are very few shots which this camera could not take.

The one facility which the housing lacks is a connector to fire an external flash and, until recently, this lack has kept the housing in the “Beginners” category. However those clever people at Inon in Japan have come up with a very nice strobe which can be triggered by the internal flash on the camera. In fact you could even fire two or more strobes if you so desired. The strobes are triggered by a fibre optic cable which attaches to the flash diffuser on the housing. You have to make sure the camera is set to fire external slave flashes otherwise the system will be out of sync.

The Inon mounting arm and bracket are agricultural to say the least but once assembled everything functions and handles well. “Caddies” are available to attach to the arms so you can dive with standard, macro and wide angle lenses so there should not be a shot you can’t take.

The advent of the strobe and accessory lenses elevates these housings to compete with other system cameras such as the Sea & Sea Motormarine 11 at a very similar price but with the added advantage of digital capability.

I used such a system in the Red Sea recently and was amazed by the simplicity and boggled by the capability. On



The UN wide angle adaptor increases coverage to 100°. Inon also make a similar lens.



The 5050 system with UN wide angle on the camera, macro lens in the caddy and Inon Z220 slave strobe

one dive at Ras Mohamed for example I attached the wide angle lens for shots of batfish schools, removed it and used the standard lens for some shots of a turtle and single fish then

switched to the macro lens for coral close ups. However I found the macro lens the least impressive as the camera already focuses very close and the extra power of the macro lens with its



(Above) Olympus 5050, Inon domed wide angle, Z220 slave strobe. 1/125th F8 Manual

(Right) Olympus 5050, UN wide angle, URPro filter. 1/200th F1.8. Aperture priority Auto. Putting the URPro filter between the housing and wide angle lens gives a very small amount of cut off.

(Below) A glass dome port can be added to the Inon wide angle adaptor to give 130° coverage. It's not a cheap lens but it is very sharp. Also it is nose heavy in the water but I think of it as the Nikonos 15mm of the digital word.





(Above) Olympus 5050, standard lens, built in flash. 1/100th F2.8. Aperture priority Auto

*(Below) Olympus 5050, UN Macro lens,
1/100th F8. Aperture priority Auto*



minimal depth of field proved a bit frustrating.

Whilst the built in flash on the camera was ideal for reasonably close up shots, the addition of the Inon Z220 slave helped light wide angle scenes albeit with manual flash exposure, However in practice with all of the manual power settings available on the Z220, I found exposures extremely easy and very effective.

The advent of digital still cameras has revolutionised underwater photography. The availability of accessory lenses and filters and now the Z220 slave have elevated this humble and inexpensive housing into a truly system outfit.

It is capable of producing shots which will delight beginners and will have experienced underwater photographers thinking “do they really need all that expensive and heavy 35mm film camera equipment?” when this system is capable of producing similar, if not even better results.

**Peter Rowlands, peter@uwpmag.com
dealer: www.oceanbrite.com**

30^e FESTIVAL MONDIAL

DE L'IMAGE SOUS-MARINE



Œuvre collective - École maternelle du Cap d'Antibes - France



ANTIBES JUAN-LES-PINS
29 octobre au 2 novembre 2003



PALAIS DES CONGRÈS

Sous le patronage de Jean Léonetti, député-maire d'Antibes



Festival : 62, avenue des Pins du Cap - 06160 Antibes Juan-Les-Pins. France. Tél +33 (0)4 93 61 45 45 - Fax +33 (0)4 93 67 34 93
spondyle@Wanadoo.fr - www.underwater-festival.com