

Sea and Sea YSD130R strobe

by Mike Bartick

Sea and Sea introduced their new flagship strobe at the DEMA-2025 show, the YS-D130R Pro. Built on decades of experience, the YS-D130R Pro offers customizable options that are innovative in both design and function for the Sea and Sea lineup, providing more tools for the shooting experience.

The design improvements over their predecessors are immediately noticeable when inspecting the strobes, with key enhancements that distinguish them from the previous lineup.

Sea and Sea strobe users will be pleased to learn that the engineers have been listening and have addressed key components to ensure high performance throughout its lifespan while keeping a manageable size and weight for travel.

At first glance:

The YS-D130R Pro is a mid-sized strobe, slightly larger than the YS D3 Lightning and Duo series. Optional mounts are standard and let the user attach YS or ball mounts to either the top or bottom of the strobes.

The strobes are lightweight, weighing 760 grams when empty and 1100 grams with the L-ion battery (according to my gram scale), and only 30 grams submerged (as specified).

The YS-D130R Pro features a straightforward user interface on the back of the strobe, with dual knobs and a color-coded digital display that indicates four different flash modes. These modes are Manual, RC, HSS, and TTL, each highlighted with intuitive color indicators. The digital display also shows battery level and exposure values, which can be customized in various ways. For example, power settings can be adjusted in 0.3 EV, 0.5 EV, or 1.0 EV stop increments with each click.

Frogfish-Dual strobes with domed diffusers @ -3.5EV & -4.5EV

Nikon Z8, Nikonos RS-13mm

ISO320, f/9 @ 1/100

WAM shots are super simple with these strobes and easy to adjust power levels allow for creating textures with shadow and light.





Blue Ribbon Eel - Single strobe with snoot - Full, to -2.0EV. Nikon Z8, Z105mm. ISO 160. f/11 @ 1/160 Safety stop depth with the sun above us. In this condition, shooting this transitioning Ribbon Eel was challenging at the higher power ranges (Full to -2.0EV). I'm using the AA Eneloop Pros and did notice a difference in recycling times compared to the L-ion battery. I pushed the strobe to full, trying to bring out the blacks and subtle colors while trying to beat the intensity of the sun.

A built-in focus light defaults to 30%, but it can be adjusted up to 100%, with a maximum output of 300 lumens. The focus light is centered on the strobe head, making it highly effective for targeting your strobe flash or for use with a snoot.

The new dual-battery system changes how the strobe stores power while preventing water intrusion. The design also adds flexibility by

*Sunball and Anenome fish - Single strobe, Dome Diffuser -1.5 EV
Nikon Z8, f/105 + EMWL
160°
ISO 250
f/11 @1/200
Shooting portrait, using focus tracking and frame bursts, I was able to capture the Anenomefish as it passed through the sun overhead. With very little editing, this image nearly looks oversaturated.*

allowing the user to choose the best power source: a proprietary Lithium-ion battery or four AA batteries loaded into their battery caddy. The batteries click and lock into place to ensure a secure connection and prevent contact issues on the battery door. The battery door design is also new to the YS D130, which pushes down over the back and locks into place to keep water out, representing an improved and practical design.

The most notable design change, and the one that caught my attention at the DEMA show, is the use of a circular flash tube instead of a straight one. Yes, they finally brought it back! Reminiscent of the past, the circular flash tube creates a pleasing pattern at a warm, sunlike Kelvin temperature of 5600K. After seeing that at the booth, I really wanted to get them in the water and start shooting with them immediately.



Shooting experience:

One of the first things you'll notice is how bright the strobes are, true to form. The second is the beam angle and coverage. According to the specs, the flash cone is approximately 80-82° without diffusers and 102x102° with the included flat diffuser. The optional dome diffusers further expand the angle to about 120° or more, making it perfect for reef scenes, everyday shooting, or single-



Mauled by a Mototi - Single strobe, Dome Diffuser -3.5 EV. Nikon Z8, f/105 + EMWL 160°. ISO 250. f/13 @1/50

A photogenic Mototi octopus mauls my lens. I held the shutter down and captured a series of evenly exposed images. I'm shooting 5 frames per second, using the Li-ion battery pack, and the strobe performed well. Frame after frame, the foreground and background show nice colors and a natural gradient all the way to the furthest edge of the beam throw.



Hunting Sea Snake-Dual strobes with domed diffusers @ -3.5EV, burst at 5 frames per second . Nikon Z8, Nikonos RS-13mm. ISO 320, f/7.1 @ 1/160

A large Sea Snake emerged from the coral head with a buddy close behind. Moving quickly and hunting downslope, I adjusted to 5 frames per second and confidently held the shutter.

A Male Argonaut. Nikon D850, 60mm. ISO 400, f/14 @ 1/250

Male Argonauts often occur in salp chains and mimic the perfectly cloned salps. A close look will reveal the eye and the occy, riding in safety through the dark.

strobe use.

One thing I came to respect when shooting is the decision and design of the strobes electronics that prevents circuit damage from overheating. A design that further draws from Sea and Sea's vast experience, aimed at protecting the consumer's investment.



Batfish Blur -Single strobe w/domed diffuser @ -2.5EV. Nikon Z8, F105 + MFO-3. ISO 100. f/6.3 @ 1/13

Capturing the motion of a frantic batfish that panicked when I started flashing. I liked the water color and natural hue of the fish, even at slow shutter speeds.

Recycle speeds:

This is always a controversial topic because various factors can affect performance. Nearly any strobe can be used at high speed on a workbench. The real test is how reliably the strobes perform underwater.

I used both the L-ion battery and the AA-Eneloop Pro while shooting to compare the power source and performance. Even though the strobes did well with the Eneloop

Pros, I prefer the quick-charging L-ion battery over the AA batteries for higher performance and longer battery life. I went six dives without any problems. This means spending less time fiddling with your strobes and batteries when traveling.

Note: Battery life and performance are also affected when using the target light.



Settling Wunderpus Dual strobes, Domed diffusers, -3.5EV. Nikon D850, 60mm. ISO-400. f/14 @ 1/250

An Anilao icon, the settling phase of the Wunderpus photogenicus is remarkable. Transparent with flecks of colored pigmentation and a large, bulbous head, this common octopus looks like a character from the movie Mars Attacks. I use a domed diffuser to prevent burning out the reflective details when shooting blackwater. I also prefer a lightweight strobe for quick movement when needed and for trimming out in the water column.

Pro Tip:

For optimal performance of this strobe, I preferred the 5-frame shooting rate and used the L-ion battery at -2.5 EV or -3.0 EV.

When shooting at -3.0 EV, I kept the shutter steady and didn't miss any frames in each 10-frame burst. This

shows I can confidently photograph a yawning frogfish or a brooding cardinalfish, knowing the exposures will be precise.

Note: The flash trigger used is the Nauticam manual flash trigger. I did not test TTL or HSS recycle speeds.



Leaf fish-Single strobe, with snoot -1.5EV. Nikon Z8, Z105. ISO-160. f/13 @ 1/160 I created a makeshift snoot to test the target light and hard flashing. The strobe held up with single flashes fired according to the specs at about 1.5-2 seconds apart as the fish prepared to move. I'm using the L-ion battery pack, and the strobe performed as expected.

Post:

Color temps: If you have ever used a Sea and Sea strobe in the past, then you will know how accurate the kelvin temperatures are. The light produced by these strobes is superb. They have a bright, warm feel that holds its values in single frames or rapid bursts of frames.

Ultimately, the YS-D130R Pro is a well-engineered and durable strobe. It's travel-friendly, powerful, and provides sunlike color temperatures, a wide beam flash, and 130 watts of output. The strobes proved versatile for reef photography, macro shots, blackwater dives, and CFWA shooting. Compact and Olympus users will



Nembrotha- Single strobe w/domed diffuser @ -2.5EV. Nikon Z8, F105, ISO 320, f/14 at 1/40.

Keeping the water blue with a slow shutter and the warm kelvin temps are a snap. Vibrant colors, great single strobe coverage, smooth contrast and gradient.

appreciate the TTL and RC modes, while HSS can also be used in shallow, sunny environments or when shooting into the sun.

I hope Sea and Sea further develops a quality snoot and restrictors for this strobe as it's easy and enjoyable to use.

More info can be found on the Sea and Sea website:

www.seaandsea.jp

Test disclaimer and methods:

I'm not a scientist, nor am I shooting in a controlled environment. The report here reflects how they performed during a series of everyday shoots. I'm not being paid for this review, but I did receive a pair of the strobes to test and keep.

Mike Bartick
www.DiveCBR.com