

Seacam S2 Housing Review

By James Wiseman

The first time I saw the new Seacam housing for the Fuji S2pro was at DEMA in Sept. 2003. Fortunately, a fellow HUPS member Shan Hodges bought the housing and pro viewfinder, and graciously lent it to me for this review. Stephen Frink of Seacamusa.com also sent me the S-180 viewfinder, macroport, small dome, and the appropriate extension rings and gears to try out the 105, 12-24DX, and the 16mm fisheye.

Size and Construction

The Seacam is the smallest and lightest housing for the S2 that I have handled yet. It is larger than the Seacam housing for the Nikon D100 but is a bit smaller than the D1X housing. The following photograph shows the back of the Seacam compared to my Aquatica housing. You can also see in this photo that the



handles on the Seacam are contoured and are not made to accept strobe arm mounts.

The Seacam S2 housing is constructed of cast and machined aluminum which is contoured to fit the camera like a glove. The inside is flocked with a moisture absorbent black material designed to control small droplets of water than can enter housings either after a small flood or when the housing is open and water drips in.

One of the more novel features of Seacam housing is

the special Eloxal Process external coating called Seacam Silver. This is an electroplating process for aluminum which uses an oxalic acid bath to deposit a super-hard coating on the aluminum surface. The coating finish is silver and slightly rough to the touch. Seacam users report that the Eloxal coating is so tough that the housing can be dragged across reef rock without scratching – and I believe it. You can see a closeup of the Seacam Silver finish in one of the following photos.



The 12-24DX with zoom gear, the 105mm with focus and AF/MF Shift collar, and the flat port with extension ring. Unlike other manufacturers, Seacam puts the focus and AF/MF shift controls on the housing





Functions

The following photos are pretty self explanatory. They show the layout of the controls for the S2 camera. Every camera control is available and placed in the

optimum location for the photographer. Seacam went to great pains to design gears, shafts, and levers into the housing so that external controls can be placed at the photographers fingertips. A good example of Seacam's



The buttons on the top and rear of the housing are plastic or plastic coated, rather than stainless steel. This eliminates contact of dissimilar metals which can result in corrosion.

incredible attention to detail is the rear command dial. Other housing manufacturers put a control for this dial on the back of the housing - that requires the user to take his or her hand off the handle to turn the control. With the Seacam, the control is mounted on the right side and the dial can be easily rolled with the thumb without taking your hand off the handle. The AE/AF Lock button is just as easy to operate and can be depressed with the thumb, leaving the index finger to control the shutter release.

Functions accessible

from the photographers fingertips are:

Zoom
AF/MF Shift
Shutterspeed
Aperture
Shutter
AE/AF Lock

Port and Lens Combinations

I received a flat port, a small dome port and two extension rings. Larger domes are available and the Superdome is recommended

for use with the Nikkor 12-24DX lens. Other housings I have used locate the manual focus control on the port. Seacam brings the focus control back to the left-hand side of the housing - so again - you don't need to take your hand off the handle to operate the manual focus. This also makes the ports simpler and more reliable as there are no through port holes.

Workability

This unit was designed specifically for use with the Fuji S2 and no other camera. The camera mounts to the front tray of the housing so the back can be easily removed by opening the locking lid snaps. There are only two snaps, one on each side of the housing and recesses in the aluminum make the snaps easy to open and close.

Out of the water, the camera is very easy to service. Since the camera is mounted to the front of the housing, it's not necessary to disconnect it from the tray for servicing. This is good, because an Allen key is required to unscrew the tripod



The Seacam and Aquatica housings, showing the size. Both units are set up for shooting the 60mm Micro.



The Flash and Exposure Compensation control, outside the housing. Note the Seacam Silver eloxal coating.



The housing front, showing the mounting tray.



Seacam uses an ingenious double-wiper system to access two buttons from one control. The photo above shows the control inside the housing for the Flash and Exposure Compensation.

mount. I believe that the housing leaves no room underneath the tray for a thumbscrew.

By opening the back, the memory card can be easily removed and changed. The

battery tray slides out from the left side of the camera, for a quick change of the AA batteries. Note that the CR123 Lithium batteries are NOT required for underwater shooting.

Seacam ports are threaded, as opposed to bayonet mount. The ports are gnurled to make them easy to grip for port changes. Because there are no gears on the ports, changing lenses is

especially quick as nothing comes away with the port or needs to be “meshed up” when the port is put back on. Note that Seacam does not provide a lens release button, so keep a small utensil handy

for pressing this button through the large port opening.

Getting in and out of the water the housing is lighter than any I have ever used. For macro shooting, strobes



The Seacam viewfinders are interchangeable and very easy to remove and replace with no tools required. Shown in-hand is the Pro viewfinder, with the S-180 alongside.

Some photographers prefer mounting the strobe arms to the housing handles. This is not possible with the handles Seacam provided, so a separate tray should be mounted to the housing base.

can be mounted directly to the dovetails on the top of the housing. The balance is good when set up this way and underwater, the rig weighs just ounces. One of the finest features of this setup is the S-180 viewfinder. It presents a very big and bright view of 100% of the viewfinder. This is an absolute dream for macro shooting with the S2 as it's easy to achieve critical focus. When you think about it, the S2's 1.5x crop factor, the S180 viewfinder, TTL strobe control, and perfect balance make this system what I'd deem the ultimate digital macro setup.

Conclusion

It's easy for me to say that this is by-far the finest housing I have ever used. The construction



The interior of the housing is flocked with a water absorbent material. The gears and control arms are precisely machined and fitted. Note the visual red moisture alarm light which also emits a loud beep.

and quality is superb, the design is extremely well thought-out, the housing balance and weight is perfect underwater, and the unit is just "dead-sexy" looking with the Seacam Silver finish. The strobe mounts and interchangeable viewfinders make it easy to set up for your style of shooting. Of course, all of this comes at a price that is out of reach for many underwater photographers. I would strongly recommend this setup for shooters that use their housing day-in and day out, as part of their living, and for folks that demand the very best.



A photo by Shan Hodges using the 16mm fisheye

James Wiseman
www.wetpixel.com



wetpixel.com

News, Reviews, and Forums for Digital Divers

Reviews:
Check out our most recent housing reviews for the Nikon D100, Canon D60, and Fuji S2 Pro digital SLR's.

Features:
Read articles about digital workflow, natural-light shooting, and more.

Community:
Share your photographs and interact with knowledgeable digital photographers in our 1200+ member discussion forum, where you will find the most up-to-the-minute information on underwater photography with digital cameras anywhere on the web!



<http://www.wetpixel.com>

Think Digital



NEW Digital SLR Housing

For
Canon Digital Rebel
Canon 10D
Canon D60
Nikon D100



To extend the capabilities of these cameras Ikelite has designed a new underwater housing. This new housing was specifically designed for the smaller digital SLR cameras. Injection molded of clear polycarbonate for strength, visual access to the camera, lcd screens and camera controls. The ergonomic design places camera functionality at your fingertips for the ultimate in creative control. The interchangeable port system accommodates a wide variety of lenses from super-wide angle to super-macro. The rubber handles offer excellent grip and a quick release system for Ikelite's new SA-100 Arm system. An external Ikelite connector is provided to connect single or dual Ikelite Substrobes.

Digital SLR Housing features:

- Clear Molded Polycarbonate
- Corrosion Free
- Interchangeable Port System
- Clear View of Info Window
- Clear View of LCD screen
- Most Camera Functions Available
- Weighted for Neutral Buoyancy
- Quick-Release Strobe Mounts
- Rubber Hand Grips
- External Connector for Substrobes
- Super-eye Magnifier for Enhanced Viewing with a Dive Mask.
- Weight 6.6lbs. (2.9k)
- Dimensions 7.5"L x 4.75"W x 7.25"H (19cm x 12cm x 18cm)



Ikelite also offers a full line of housings for Non-SLR digital cameras. Beginner, amateur, or pro, simply get an Ikelite housing for your favorite digital land camera. Choose from Canon, Kodak, Nikon, Olympus or Sony, Ikelite makes housings for several camera models from each of these manufacturers.

Ikelite supports their underwater digital housings with a full line of accessories. Choose from trays with single or dual handle and quick release of strobes. The DS50 Substrobe is ideal for cameras with zoom lenses or choose the DS125 for use with wide-angle lenses. The DS Sensor duplicates the camera's internal flash for full TTL automation, or use our new EV Controller that gives 10 power settings in 1/2 stop increments for complete lighting control. Ikelite also offers a choice in versatile arm systems to meet your needs and budget.

New digital cameras are being introduced at a rapid pace. For the latest information on new digital housing models visit our web site.

www.ikelite.com



Underwater Systems
50 W 33rd Street
Indianapolis, IN 46208
317-923-4523