

UR Pro Shallow Water CY Filter

by Alexander Mustard

A quick click on the UR Pro website will tell you that UR Pro's Colour Correction filters are not only well used but also well loved by underwater cameramen and filmmakers. The Stan Waterman's quote sums it up really "URPRO filters provided dependable color balance to an otherwise monochromatic blue world...I depend on them". More recently photographers have discovered that UR Pro's filters can work similar wonders when combined with digital still cameras. I am a big fan of their CY filter, designed for clear, tropical water and when I heard that they were releasing a new product, the shallow water CY filter (SW-CY), I had to try it.

UR Pro's justification for the SW-CY is to provide a filter suited to work between the surface at 8m (25ft), the standard CY filter is designed for an overlapping but deeper range of 3-20m (10-60ft). The two filters look identical, but have quite distinct filtration characteristics.

Most still photographers find that the most pleasing filtered images come from shallow depths (<10m/30ft). In deeper water (>10m/30ft), although filters improve significantly on reality, the shots can still look a

bit drab. Furthermore filters work by subtraction of light so at depth we are forced to use higher ISOs to compensate for the ever-decreasing illumination, which introduces noise. Videographers can get away with these compromises because movement enlivens their images, but drab colours in a still image just leave the viewer wishing for flash! So the new SW-CY promises to be well suited to the favoured filtration depth range of the still photographer.

I decided to test the SW-CY filter on two camera systems. First I did the fully automatic evaluation using an Olympus 5060 with an INON WAL using AUTO white balance and shooting JPGs. Then for those who like more control I tested it on a Nikon D70 with a 20mm lens shooting in RAW and custom white balancing using the dropper in Photoshop's Camera RAW Plug-in. On the same dive (I did a lot of popping back to the boat) I shot the D70 with a CC40 Red filter (on the 10.5mm lens) and a standard UR Pro CY filter on a 17-35mm lens. All these shots were taken in 3.5m (14ft) of water near Stingray City Sandbar.

The SW-CY worked very well on the Olympus 5060 and nearly all



Diver and stingrays. The UR Pro Shallow Water filter produced pleasing colours, including skin tones, in AUTO white balance. Olympus 5060 + Inon WAL + UR Pro SW-CY filter. No flash. 1/80 @ F5.6 ISO 100.

of the images looked fantastic straight from the camera. The colours of sand, stingrays and skin tones were all very pleasing. Human skin tones are notoriously tricky to get right but I thought that they were recorded with impressive accuracy. In short with the SW-CY the 5060 produced great colour with auto everything, point and shoot simplicity.

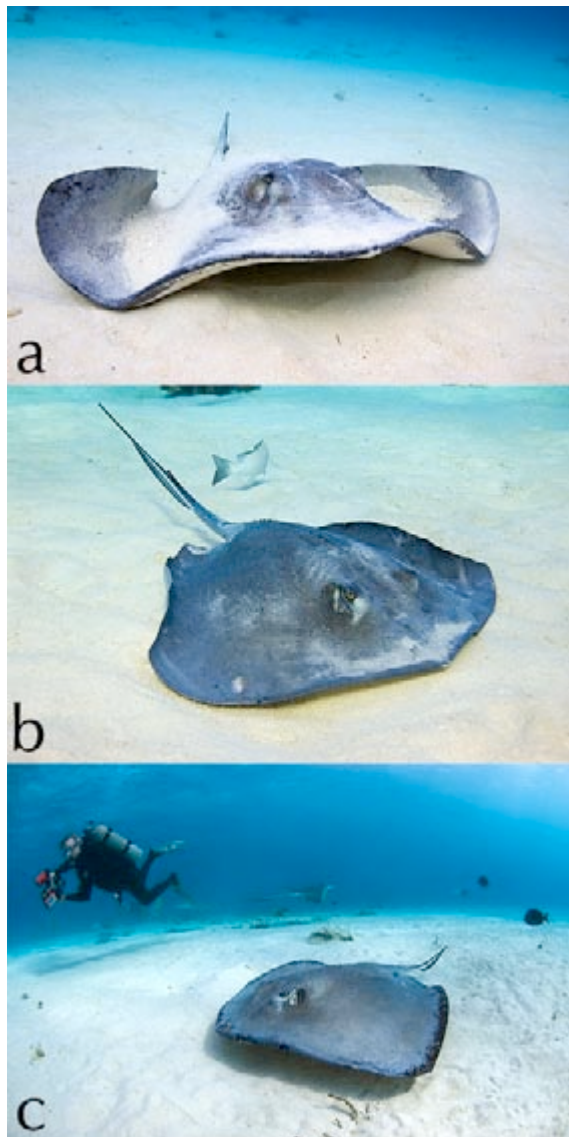
The only problem I encountered was the camera's AUTO white balance would get a bit confused

occasionally and a few pictures came out slightly yellow. I am not sure what was causing this, but a simple post processing application of AUTO COLOUR in Photoshop solved this minor glitch.

Unsurprisingly, the SW-CY also yielded excellent results with the D70 again producing accurate skin tones and natural environmental colours. I tested the filter against a standard CY and a 40CC Red filter and, after custom white balancing, all



Diver and stingray. The UR Pro Shallow Water filter also worked well with the DSLR when shot in RAW and white balanced with the dropper tool (on white T shirt) in the Adobe Camera RAW Plug-In for Photoshop. Nikon D70 in Subal Housing, 20mm lens with UR Pro SW-CY filter. No flash. 1/100th @ F7.1 ISO 200.



Three images of stingrays. All three filters produced most satisfactory results after custom white balancing as before: a) UR Pro SW-CY filter on 20mm lens, b) UR Pro CY filter on 17-35mm lens, and c) Kodak Wratten 40CC Red gel on 10.5mm lens. All Nikon D70 in Subal Housing.

three produced excellent results. The SW-CY required the smallest white balance correction of the three relative to a “standard” daylight, but none required large white balance corrections. These corrections were small enough not to have a detectable effect on image quality (large white balance adjustments in RAW do degrade image quality).

One point of interest is that the camera’s AUTO white balance produced more pleasing colours straight from the camera with both the UR Pro filters than the 40CC Red. It is possible that the Colour Correcting (warming) UR Pro filters make it easier for the camera to AUTO white balance than the Colour Compensating (adding red) 40CC Red Gel.

On the negative side, my only frustration with the UR Pro filters is that these glass sandwich filters can only be fitted to lenses that accept screw filters. This notably excludes my two main wide angle lenses: the 10.5mm and 16mm fisheyes.

In conclusion the SW-CY is excellent and works well (as is clear from the images). I would expect most photographers would not want to buy both the CY and SW-CY given the large overlap in their operational depth ranges. Which filter to choose depends on what, where and why you shoot. If you want a versatile filter to use while diving then the standard CY is still your best choice. However if your reason for getting in the water is photography, and you are prepared to constrain your diving within the depth range of the filter, then the SW-CY used in the brighter light of the shallows is an excellent choice.

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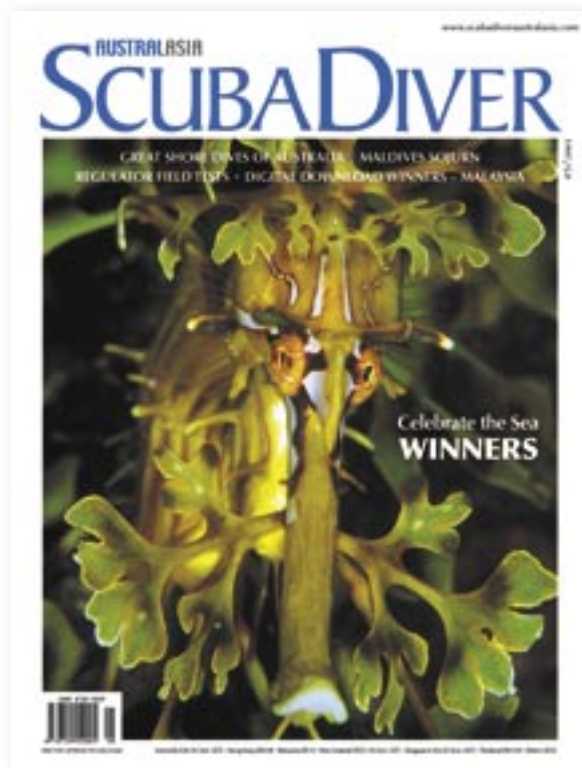


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