

Sea & Sea DX-D200 housing

By JP Trenque

In the good ol' days of film photography, one could purchase a camera, a housing and a set of ports and expect a good few years' enjoyment with it before having to consider upgrading the system. And candidly enough, I expected the same when I purchased my D100 and Sea & Sea housing in May 2003. Then the D70 came about, shortly followed by the D2X and now the D200.

The first reviews I read about the D200 camera were so enthusiastic that my right brain pushed me to take the plunge while my left brain tried to make up excuses like "upgrading now will avoid too much depreciation on the D100 set-up". Yeah, right ! So in January this year, I purchased the new camera body. In the following review, I will try to resist temptation to delve too much on the qualities of the D200. Anyway, you've probably heard them all by now.

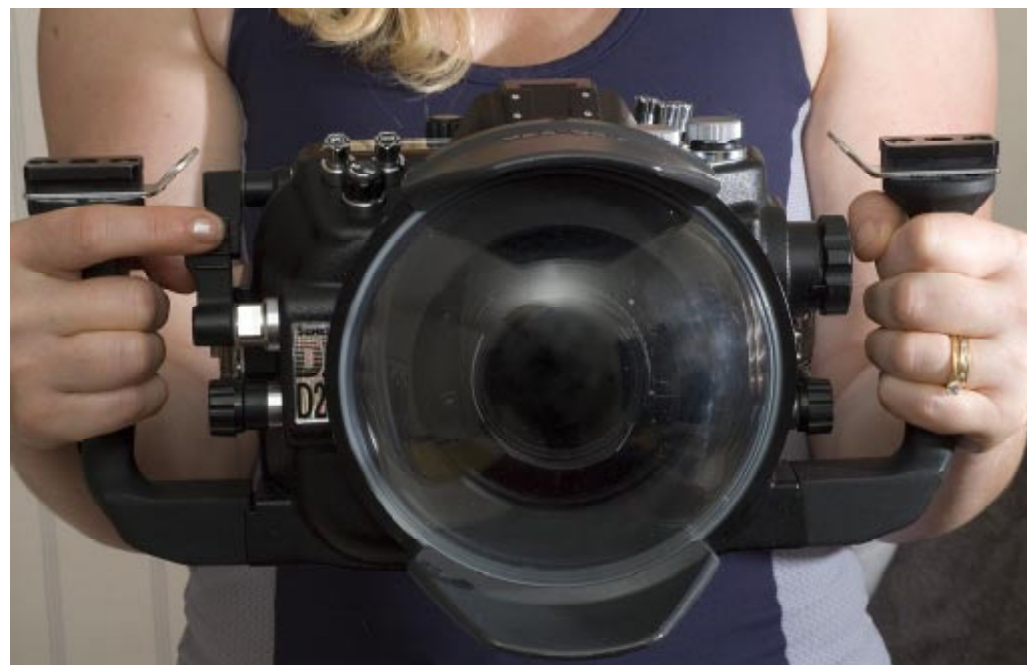
To me, the choice of housings was quite obvious. As a previous owner of Sea & Sea equipment, I would stick to Sea & Sea, or any manufacturer that would offer compatibility with my NX ports. Standardisation? Surely not! When Bristol-based distributor Alan James

called me early spring to say there was a waiting list, his powers of persuasion landed me on that list. Several friends opted for different brands and we all had a race over who would get their housing on the market first. I didn't win, but in hindsight, I am very glad I had to wait a little for my new toy.

I have now played with it in UK waters and have taken it out on a Red Sea trip, so here are my first impressions.

My initial reaction when the parcel arrived was how light and compact the unit was. Sea & Sea have done away with the big metal base plate that featured on the previous DSLR housings and the handles are now attached directly to the main aluminium body. Yes, aluminium, coated with hard alumite. No more resin housing with a translucent back.

Unlike the DX-D100 which looked like a one-size-fits-all square plastic box, the DX-D200 is built so that the camera fits snugly inside. In fact, its shape is very similar to that of the F90x and F100 housings. Having such a compact unit makes it easier to travel, especially as the combined camera + housing weight is 1.3kg



The D200 handles and controls make it easy to use even with small hands.

The aluminium housing is coated with black alumite.



lighter than the D100 package despite the heavier camera body. When I recently flew to Sharm el Sheikh, the whole set-up fitted easily in the rucksack I carried as hand-luggage. Compactness comes at a price though and the guys from Sea & Sea haven't managed to fool old Archimedes, as we'll see in a moment. As a final point about general aspect, the shiny silver colour has given way to a stealthy matt black, probably in an effort to appeal to technical divers.

When I bought the DX-D100, I liked the idea of seeing through the case to check for any water leakage. Now, a water detector with a red flashing light does that for me. The 2 pins are encased in a tube which traps water, thus ensuring a continuous alert even if the amount of water is minimal.

Loading the camera is easy, thanks to the same locking mechanism that featured on the previous Sea & Sea housings. A base plate containing a cog to control the M/S/C focus modes is attached to the camera tripod mount to secure the camera in the housing. The cog looks more robust than the D100 version. In the past, I always removed it when using the camera on land for fear of breaking it, but the new version can be left in place, especially as it does not prevent battery changes.

The back of the D200 sticks out of the open housing for easy access to the CF card slot and cable connectors located on the side. A port locking pin mechanism can be found underneath the camera. Although it prevents lens changes without opening the back of the housing, I know a photographer who regretted lacking this feature on a different brand of D200 housing recently when his flat port came loose!

The back of the housing is secured via 2 double-action locking cams, rather than the 4 that



Unlike its predecessors for Nikon DSLRs, the DX-D200 is extremely compact.

were found on the DX-D100 and DX-D70, which makes opening the housing easier. 2 small pins prevent accidental misalignment of the back. If anything, it feels like good engineering.

The handles are adequately positioned for easy operation of the shutter and AF-Lock controls, even for small hands. They also hold the strobe arm shoes and feature 2 rings to clip the camera onto you. Unlike other brands, there is no third strobe-arm shoe for shooting in portrait. While on the subject of strobes, it is worth mentioning that the DX-D200 comes with 2 wired-in strobe connectors as standard, unlike some of its predecessors. Mine came with both 5-pin connectors, although Sea & Sea Japan announced it with one 5-pin and one 2-pin. It is also possible to mount an optional TTL adaptor.

Controls are available for almost all camera functions: Power switch, Shutter, Main command dial, Sub-command dial, Exposure compensation button, Exposure mode / Format button, Focus



A locking mechanism located underneath the hotshoe can be used to prevent accidental removal of the port.

/ Zoom dial, Focus mode dial, White balance button, QUAL (image quality/size) / Reset button, ISO sensitivity button, Bracketing button, Delete / Format button, Playback button, Menu button, Thumbnail button, Protect / Help button, Enter button, AF-area mode dial, Multi selector buttons, AF-ON lock button, AE/AF lock lever, Metering selector dial.

The following controls are not accessible:

- The infamous rear curtain synch button, which is placed in an awkward position on the camera, on the left-hand side of the viewfinder. That's a shame.
- The user-assignable function button next to the lens. It could have been handy.



Some push-buttons can be locked in a down position. A useful feature when using a combination of button + dial on the D200.

- The multiple exposure / timer function which is operated by a push button + dial. Oh well...
- It is not possible to lock the multi-selector. Big deal.

All the buttons are precise and Sea & Sea has provided a facility to lock some of them on a down position. I found this feature extremely useful, as a number of camera operations require a button to be pushed while the control dial is turned. For example, to change the ISO setting, you can press and lock the ISO button and then turn the control dial with one hand while the other hand is holding the housing. The downside of this is that it is easy to lock the buttons accidentally, which can prevent the camera from firing. I was less pleased with some of the dial knobs, like the aperture control on the bottom right hand-side of the housing which sometimes failed to grip the dial on the camera



It is possible to change the card (loading sideways) while the camera is locked in the housing. 2 Pins prevent accidental misalignment of the back when closing the housing.

(right index finger when holding the D200) and could be a bit fiddly at times. But I think a minor adjustment will probably resolve this. The shutter control is very tactile even with gloves on and it is easy to feel when the camera focuses and when it will fire.

The viewfinder has improved over the D100, It has a 0.66x magnification, which Sea & Sea claim allows the photographer to see the whole camera viewfinder. In practise, I was disappointed to discover that I still needed to move my eye a little to see the whole frame. On the plus side, reviewing the picture is much easier on the D200 than on the D100 and D70, thanks to the large LCD screen. The housing is also obviously equipped with a large window.

I mentioned Archimedes earlier. Although the housing is very light, it is very compact and therefore quite heavy underwater. It is slightly

negatively buoyant with the camera, a 10.5mm lends and the fisheye port (no strobes) and will pull upwards a bit. Use it with the 105mm lens, the compact port and the extension ring and you could remove a kilo off your weightbelt! Hold it with one hand while you're stalking fish for a while and you will develop your forearm muscles! The weight underwater is comparable to that of the F90x housing. I never found it too uncomfortable even in a macro configuration, but a small floater attached to the strobe arms would not go amiss.

In all, I am extremely happy with my purchase. The Sea & Sea DX-D200 is not the perfect housing yet because of its viewfinder, lack of some controls and occasionally fiddly dial commands. However, it is extremely competitively priced compared to other metal housings and handles beautifully underwater. Oh, and it looks rather good and serious too!

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URPRO continues to be honored by many professional and amateur photographers from all corners of the globe who use our underwater correction filters to capture the full spectrum of color on their pictures. Many are just discovering the magic of underwater photography while others are veterans who have transitioned through film, video, and cine, and who are now avid digital enthusiasts.

Recently, we received a series of vibrant images along with a letter from Paul LeBourgeois, MD who has used the URPRO filters for many years. His enthusiasm for scuba diving and underwater photography is contagious. With his permission, we'd like to share part of the letter and some of his copyrighted images.

April, 2006

Dear URPRO

.....I was introduced to diving by my father in 1960. At this time the basic equipment was mask, snorkel, fins, and a hard plastic back-pack to which an enormously heavy tank was attached. It had the life-saving 'J-valve' which warned when the air was almost gone. I think my Dad and I had the first single-hose regulators made. At this time, there were no pressure gauges, no depth gauges, and no weights.....and we had absolutely no idea that "dive tables" existed. We relied solely on the notion that if we didn't ascend faster than our bubbles, we'd be OK....oh how times have changed!

In 1986 my wife and I took a trip to Bonaire where she rented a VHS underwater camera and housing. Initially, I thought that there would be no better way to waste time underwater than fooling around with this "gadget." Half-way through the dive, my wife handed me the camera to take some footage of her. Upon our return home, I became "motion-sick" sitting on the couch as I watched the footage captured by my unsteady camera movements. But it was too late—I was and still remain enamored at capturing underwater pictures.....

My profession as a pathologist allows me to travel the world and to pursue my passion of underwater photography. Recent travel destinations are focused on Indonesia and Papua New Guinea where I record the variety of colorful species found near the 'Wallace Line.' Through the years, I have used almost every video camera and housing that was labeled as "this year's sensation."

...My first URPRO filter was purchased in about 1990 for the Sony MPK-TRS which was the first housing I could get my hands on that shot 8mm video. Since that time I've tried almost every brand and variation of housing and camera, but I always purchased

the URPRO filter because it was the only one that really worked. If I purchased a system with a pre-supplied filter that looked like a washed out jelly-bean, I would immediately replace it with URPRO filter. I don't know how many custom URPRO filters I've had made for my systems, but the most recent is a huge filter that fits over the front of my HD FX1 housing so I can use the internal flip-in device for a diopter to get good macro.

I am humbled, gratified, and proud to experience the magic of the underwater world, and without URPRO filters on my cameras, I would probably have quit long ago, because for me, the devil is in the details, and color is king.

*Signed,
Paul LeBourgeois
24 April 2006*

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