

Subal ND80 housing for the Nikon D80

by Peter Rowlands

Having resisted the temptation to upgrade my Nikon D70 when the D200 arrived, I was rewarded, soon after, by the announcement of the Nikon D80 which 'ticked a lot of boxes' for me. It was time to consider an upgrade.

There were three main features about the Nikon D80 which attracted me. In the order of their priority they were much improved high ISO quality, larger (2.5") LDC screen and finally increased megapixels. Add the fact that the D80 was half the price of a D200 (at the time) and I could justify a second body as back up. I thought I'd achieved this rather cleverly by buying a second body (camera body, that is) for my long suffering wife, Debbie, as a Christmas present. She saw through me immediately.

Just under four months later my Subal housing arrived. How a small company can design and produce a housing from scratch so quickly amazes me. Arnold Stepanek, Subal's founder and designer has embraced computer design and aluminium block machining to perfection and his ND80 housing for the Nikon D80 is a testament to his talent.

For me picking up a new Subal housing is like greeting an old friend. The livery, the feel of the handles and smoothness of the controls are all there. The controls knobs and levers are round edged injection moulded plastic which are soft



The Subal ND80 follows the design philosophy of their Nikon D200 housing with two quicklock closures, two flash arm shoes and two flash sync sockets. All Subal bayonet ports are compatible



As usual with Subal the camera is a snug fit in the housing. The main O ring seal is 4mm in diameter providing a large sealing surface area. The push button controls on the rear of the housing are smoother to operate and work accurately.



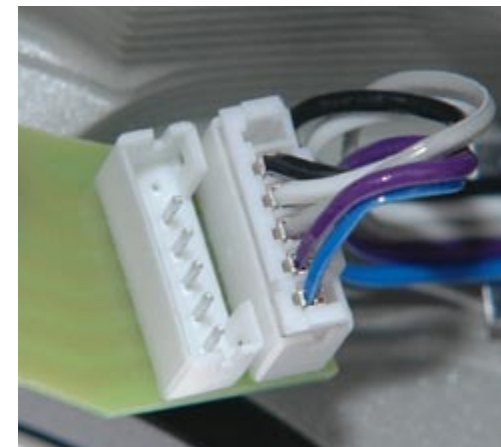
Subal's slotted basetray and locating guiderails are a design which other housing manufacturers have adopted.



The GS viewfinder protrudes from the back of the housing quite a way but the viewing image more than makes up for the extra bulk.



The LCD viewing port gives an undistorted view of the essential camera data.



Subal provide a choice of TTL or Manual flash connectors. The socket on the right is Manual with only 3 pins. If you want to use TTL with the Nikon SB800 in a housing, unplug the connector and push it into the 5 pin connector on the left.

The front command dial gearing has been improved with two larger, plastic/Delrin bevel gears. They provide a much smoother operation.



to the touch. The quality and detail of the machining is, to me, quite breathtaking. How a machine can produce such curves and contours is beyond me. I am reminded of a quote from Hugh Hefner (I think) when describing one of his newest playmates "She's got curves in places other girls haven't even got places". The same is true with Subal.

The Subal ND80 housing is very similar to the ND20 for the D200 in that there are two Quicklock levers as opposed to just one on the ND70 for the D70. Similarly there are two flash arm shoes as opposed to one on the D70. Following the ND20 design philosophy results in a slightly larger housing but without sacrificing facilities.

The important controls fall easily to hand - shutter release, aperture and AF lock are the most important to

me but I still maintain that the right handle position needs to be nearer the housing for even better handling.

I counted 24 separate controls giving total control over the camera including focus AF/MF and both flash compensation and type (rear curtain etc) which is achieved through the pop up flash control. All in all there are controls for Power On-Off, Display Light, Shutter Release, Front Main Dial, Manual Focus/Zoom, Mode, Lens Release, Focus Mode, Rear Main Dial, AF-Lock, Flash compensation. Push Buttons for: Metering, Exposure Compensation, Quality, White Balance, ISO, Delete, Playback, Menu, Thumbnail, AF, Protect, Ok, Multi Selector.

The front command wheel control has been improved with a larger plastic bevel gear rather than the previous small brass design.

This makes the operation much smoother and, despite its increased size, the LCD viewing port is totally unobstructed even when using the gorgeous GS viewfinder.

Every housing designer has one impossible conundrum to solve - where to split the housing. Splitting towards the front allows access to the flash card and battery door but limits flash shoe mounting and space for certain controls. Subal have chosen to slit the housing towards the rear which provides perfect positioning to view the top LCD window but at the



Even with the GS viewfinder the large rear LCD window provides an unobstructed view of the screen.



Prior to mounting or dismounting the camera you have to pull out the MF/AF lever control.



The lens release lever allows lenses to be changed without dismounting the camera.

I agree with Mark Webster in his ND20 review in UwP that the focus light shoe should ideally be threaded aluminium rather than helicoiled plastic but as I don't use focus lights it's not an issue for me.

As you've probably guessed by now this is what I call a 'dry' review as I have yet to immerse the housing in saltwater. Given time and fair weather I'll do that in the next issue of UwP.

expense of having to slide the camera out of the housing to access the flash card/USB socket or battery changing. I don't know of a perfect solution but the Subal baseplate design with guiding rails does make removing the camera very easy.

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