

Modelling for the camera

by Mark Webster

Taking pictures of divers should be simple. There are always plenty around and they should be able to respond to instructions, unlike fish who seem determined to turn their backs on you. However, the reality is that whilst getting a picture of a diver may not be difficult, getting one which is acceptably composed and conveys the message you want is not so simple. Good diver photographs sell diving and to obtain good results you need a degree of planning and the co-operation of a patient model.

The 'model' need not necessarily be the classic female clad in matching kit and accessories, but the subject must be dedicated to your needs, understand your requirements and not be distracted by their own dive plan or interests. By following a few simple guidelines you can produce some stunning diver pictures instead of those which appear to have been snatched of passing diver.

Whatever your camera system you have a wide angle lens is essential to take good diver photographs. As a minimum a 20mm lens is required, as more often than not you are trying to illustrate the diver exploring the underwater world or perhaps performing some task. For this you need to get both the diver and the surroundings in the picture and remain as close as possible to your subject - so 20mm, 18mm and my favourite, the full frame fish eye are the best tools. You will normally be using fill flash at least and so a wide angle flash gun is the best choice. This will allow you to light most of the picture area if necessary, but narrower beamed strobes can be used to good effect for balanced light photographs, or consider two narrow beamed strobes (both connected or one on slave) to increase the lighting area.



Diver and table coral silhouette – Silhouettes are very effective and striking images. Try to include the sun and perhaps have the diver carry a torch. A good option if the viz is poor. Nikon F90X, 16mm fish eye, Subal housing, F8 @ 125th 100ASA.



Diver half and half – you don't always have to go under the water for your diver pictures. Try to think of different ways of introducing that sense of exploration underwater. Nikon F90X, 16mm fish eye, Subal housing, F8 @ 125th, 100ASA.

Effective communication with your model is essential for success. No matter how comprehensive your surface briefing, you may change your mind when you view the image through the viewfinder, conditions may be variable or an unexpected event means you must be able to direct your model. So

establish a few simple hand signals for basic body positions and postures, for example:- facing head on, vertical, side on (left/right), body angle, arms in/out, direction of gaze, breath held/breathe out, swim through picture, go up/down etc. Also, be prepared to show your model exactly the pose you require



Another example of combining marine life with your model. In this instance the model is the background interest and the image implies discovery of the lobster. Nikon F90X, 16mm fish eye, Subal housing, F8 @ 60th, YS120 flash. 100ASA.

in the position you require if communications break down.

Having the diver in the right place within the picture is also essential. As a general rule, try to ensure that the model is not swimming out of the frame, as this inevitably looks like a snatched shot. Look carefully at the location of the diver in the frame and try to balance the body position and shape with the other subject matter in the image. For example, the classic diver on a reef wall can be taken head on with the reef running vertically or diagonally through the frame, or you can look for a balance in a diagonal composition by positioning the diver to follow or mimic the angle of the reef. Try to balance the background space behind the diver with blue water or perhaps a sunburst. Other options include framing the diver in the entrance to a cave, between natural reef features or with marine growth or using shape of a wreck. Although you may have planned your shots don't forget to move about looking for alternative "negative space" which will compliment or support the model. Another important point to remember is that when your model's face



The rules of composition apply equally in diver photography. It often helps to try and get your model to follow the line of the main subject. Nikon F90X, 16mm



Divers doing something make interesting pictures, in this case using a camera, but you must make sure that the pose looks natural. Nikon F90X, 16mm fish eye, Subal housing,

dominates the frame, or can be clearly seen, ensure that the eyes are directed at an obvious subject - never at the camera. Use your signals to show the model where to look in the frame and also ensure that the position of arms and legs look natural. Try to avoid forced perspective when using wide angle lenses - for instance if a hand is too close to the lens then it can look massive



Nudibranch and diver – Including a diver in a double exposure is often difficult but can produce striking results. This type of shot requires practice especially to get the direction of gaze correct. Nikon F801, 60mm macro



Diver with jewel anemones – when working close to your model remember to direct his/her gaze towards the subject. Practice your signals to get this right. Nikon F90X, 16mm fish eye, Subal housing, F8 @ 60th, YS120 flash. 100ASA.

in comparison to the rest of the body - examine the image carefully through the viewfinder before releasing the shutter.

There is no doubt that the cliched shot of a female diver in colour co-ordinated kit does look attractive and has a universal appeal especially to publishers, manufacturers and training organisations. Despite this, excellent and appealing pictures can of course be taken of your average diver, and often will look far more realistic as

a result. However, an attempt should be made to make your model look tidy and wherever possible bright co-ordinating colours will add to the image, rather than plain black. Tuck hoses, gauges and straps away neatly and make sure there are no items of equipment that will float above the model. The choice of mask is also important and the classic oval full face plate mask is possibly most flattering, for a female model. Perhaps the easiest style of diver shot to set up features

the diver in silhouette which removes the worry of colour co-ordination or eye contact. The classic close focus wide angle shot is the best example of this where the foreground features a brightly coloured subject and the diver is seen in silhouette, perhaps against a sunburst, in the background. The exposure for these type of shots can be quite tricky as the foreground flash illumination must be balanced with the background natural light exposure to produce a good silhouette and it is often best to use manual flash exposure rather than rely on TTL.

If the location lacks a central point of interest, then consider adding a prop or tool to enhance the image. Adding a torch, camera, slave flash, lifting bag etc. can create a focal point of action round which you can build the image. A torch, for instance, says to the viewer that the diver may be looking for something as he/she swims through the image or could be peering into a hole seeking marine life. The ultimate prop of course can be interaction between the model and marine life and you should always be prepared for the unexpected – another good reason to perfect your signals.

Working often with another photographer or a regular buddy who has an interest in the final result will be more successful than relying on someone you have just met on the boat. The roll of photographer's model requires endless patience which we must bear in mind when directing operations, otherwise the signals may not all be polite!

Mark Webster

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Hosts regular workshops both overseas and in the UK. For further details visit Mark's website

www.photec.co.uk

or see further details at

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