

Olympus E3 / Nexus E3

By Karin Brussard

The Olympus E3 is the new flagship based on the Four Thirds standard E-System. The E3 is an extremely advanced camera that can be used for every assignment and fully complies with the strict requirements of DSLR photography.

Olympus have put their own underwater housings, made of polycarbonate, on the market for the E-330, E-300 and E410. For their underwater housing of the E-3 Olympus have sought to cooperate with Nexus. Nexus have been producing aluminium underwater housings for many years now, initially for traditional SLR cameras and now DSLRs of various brands.

Nexus has a lot of experience developing underwater housings and you can tell by the E3. The underwater housing looks neat and well thought-out. The Olympus E-3 fits nicely in the housing and the way Nexus has built the housing it enables the internal flash to be folded up. This allows operating the flash with an optical cable. Despite this Nexus was able to keep the housing compact. The Nexus housing is suitable for a depth up to 70 meters.

Besides underwater housings Nexus also manufactures various bayonet mount lens ports. Olympus also has a pack of ports developed for use on their own underwater housings but they have a screw mount. An adapter can be used to utilize ports from Olympus and other brands that also work with screw mounts (Inon for example) on the Nexus housings. This is very convenient for photographers already in the possession of Olympus ports but also for those who don't own ports yet and can thus choose Olympus compact ports.

I have tested the camera with some Olympus ports. The PPO-E3 has been designed specifically for the 50mm macro lens. This port has a wide base at the screw connection and tapers towards the end, making it extremely compact. This is very convenient when photographing macro subjects. The 7-14mm wide-angle lens not only requires the dome port PPO-E04 but also an attachment ring (PER-E02). The wide-angle lens is that long it won't fit directly on the dome port. The dome port is strikingly compact. The dome port shows some distortion at 7mm but I find that very acceptable for a wide-



angle lens like this. Olympus delivers a special zoom ring for this lens but unfortunately it can not be used with the Nexus housing. The cogs on the zoom ring don't coincide with those of the cog-wheel of the Nexus housing (contrary to the cog-wheels of the Olympus housings). I think this is a real pity because you have to decide which setting the lens has to be in before going into the water. Hopefully Olympus and Nexus will develop a new zoom ring for this.

For the 8 mm fisheye lens the same port can be used but without the extra ring. It makes the system travel-friendly since you only need one dome port for two lenses. The

dome port has been equipped with a lens hood that is attached to the port with a number of socket screws. There was one problem I encountered when using it. The lens hood was in the correct position when I used the port with the extra ring. But when I attached the dome port directly to the housing, the lens hood stayed on one side. And no matter how I tried, I couldn't get the word Olympus to appear on the top, but only a quarter turned. We did two dives on the same location that is why I wanted to change lenses in between. The whole of Dahab went looking for a fitting hexagon socket wrench, because mine stayed behind in the hotel room....



The Nexus housing is standard equipped with two flash connections for electronic cables and two connections for optical cables. The electronic connections have a standard Olympus mount and are meant for connecting Olympus flash units. Using the FL-36 in the PFL-E01 underwater housing or its smaller brother FL-20 in the PFL-01 housing TTL flash is enabled. However; I have used two Sea & Sea YS 110 flash units that can not directly be attached to the flash connections. They require a special Athena adapter. Unfortunately this adapter was delivered to my house one day too late.

If you want to operate the flash units through the optical cables you should not forget to fold up the flash of the camera because there is no button on the underwater housing to do it.

The underwater housing has a handle on both sides. My hands are quite small and I am very well capable of operating the shutter release button and the command dial without having to move my hand. The handles have grooves on them which I did not find very pleasant to hold. Although I can imagine

other photographers liking them.

The underwater housing comes with two magnifying glasses that you can place in the viewfinder of the house. The magnifier strongly magnifies the image but it only leaves a small part of the viewfinder visible. This is excellent for macro shooting as you will have an excellent view whether your object is sharp or not. The disadvantage however is evident; you miss a large part of the image which makes it hard to decide on an accurate composition. About the other glass unit, the pick-up unit, I am not entirely sure of its purpose. I thought afterwards that it might be meant for people wearing glasses, as some sort of correction. I have used both glasses a few times but I really prefer working with the housing without magnifier or pick-up unit.

The capacity of the battery lasts for about two dives. Since I operate the flash with an optical cable the flash of the camera has to do a lot of work. Thankfully it does not influence the battery life significantly. It means that I don't have to open the underwater housing.

All camera functions are operable underwater with the exception of folding up the flash. The functions are not displayed on the housing and due to the fact the housing is not transparent you can't take a peek as to which button you have to use for a certain function. This can be very tricky if you still don't know the camera that well. I had set the camera in the manual mode during the first dive, with an aperture of f/5.6. During the dive I could not remember how to change aperture. I had to work with the same aperture the entire dive. And because of using the 50 mm macro lens I had a limited depth of field. Still I carried on shooting and in the end I got some surprising and unusual results.

The auto focus on the E-3 works fast and very precise and the 11 focus points are ideal to capture fish. Although the camera fits perfectly in the housing, it once shifted and I was unable to operate the camera underwater. It meant I had to ascend, take my diving gear off, get out of the water, dry myself and the camera, open the underwater housing, fit the camera properly, close

the underwater housing, go back into the water, put diving gear on, descend and finally shoot. My buddy was not amused!

The Olympus E-3 has been equipped with Live View just like its younger brothers. The LCD monitor of the E-3 has a nice large size (2.5 inch) and its brightness can be adjusted in 15 stops. It makes it easy to decide a composition even underwater. I have tried out Live View while making pictures of my buddy. That is not as easy as it sounds. I decide on the correct composition, I see my buddy in the right spot, not breathing out and press the shutter release button. When I view the picture I see bubbles in front of her eyes because of breathing out, due to the shutter lag when using Live View. Live View works great for still objects but not for moving objects, it needs an experienced photographer to deal with the limited focus speed.

The Olympus E-3 and the Nexus housing make a great combination. The E-3 is a DSLR camera with fast auto focus and 11 focus points. The Olympus E-3 has absolutely no problem with the light areas caused by the sun. The shutter lag makes Live View less suitable for moving objects. The Nexus housing is well built and has a number of special specifications. External flash units can be operated through electronic as well as optical

cables. When using the optical cable, do not forget to fold up the camera's flash before closing the housing. The Nexus housing comes with an adapter so the Olympus ports can be used also.

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