

Akona Computer Pro roller bag

By Michael Wicks

If you're like me, you probably have about a dozen travel bags. I have the 29", 22" and 19" Pullman bags with wheels, 3 duffel bags including one with wheels and one that is large enough for me to fit inside. But for my cameras I have a few more. I have 2 Lowepro's, (waist and backpack), a Northface backpack which I outfitted with custom foam inserts and even a Storm case for my housings. But none of these bags or cases have been able to fulfill all my needs.

It may sound like I'm needy but with all the new airline restrictions coming down the pike I was in search of a bag that would allow me to carry my camera gear and housings in one pack. Although I have seen some professionals describe how they travel with their cameras in the housings I have not quite made this leap of faith. My current configuration for travel is the Storm case for my housings, the lowepro AW Computrek+ for my cameras and computer, Tusa dive bag and a Pullman 22" bag for clothes and personal items. That brings the count to 4 bags; 2 carry on and 2 checked.

But as previously stated this could cost me anywhere from \$25 to \$50 extra in baggage fees. So obviously my goal is to cut the bag count down.

Akona must have had a crystal ball. The Computer Pro roller bag seems to be the answer to my wishes, at least from their website description. It was time to find out if it was just hype.

Akona's bag is a 22" roll-along carry on bag. Its interior is completely configurable with Velcro dividers, of which some are the most powerful Velcro I've ever come across. In fact, one of the issues I've had with my other bags is that the Velcro has given way at times and I'll find my camera or lenses in other sections. But with such strong Velcro one would wonder how long the interior would last. It would seem Akona was thinking the same thing as the liner is a zipper in zipper out lining. Thus allowing for replacement, should the lining wear out; a very nice touch. The 2 handles are nicely padded and for those rare times where there's no jetway and you have to carry the bag down stairs this is a nice option. Although I not sure why the decision was to only put a handle on





the top and only one side. This didn't hinder me or my travels at all. But it would have been a nice convenience to not have to remember on which side the handle is located.

With 2 board-reinforced long dividers and 7 flexible dividers there are plenty of options for all my gear. The bag also came with 2 corner Velcro retainer pieces to hold down smaller lenses or other equipment. Of course, with such strong Velcro comes strong resistance. Reconfiguring can be a little frustrating but I would rather be frustrated trying to move the dividers than opening my bag and seeing my equipment all over the place.

Akona has included a laptop pocket on the outer area of the bag. The pocket is set up to slide in to a slit on the backside of the bag and is secured with a snap strap. The pocket is big enough to fit my 15" laptop with the external larger battery. This makes me believe it could fit a larger screen laptop but at this writing I didn't have access to one to test. As Akona states on their website the idea behind the external laptop pocket is to give the user the ability to roll the bag on board, unhook the strap, slip out the pocket and then place the bag overhead. No excess zippers to undo and it keeps your laptop a little more protected during take offs and

RSU-N

**high sensitive remote slave
cpu controlled
covers up to 25 mtr. / 100 ft.
nikonos and motormarine available
compatible with all strobes
no battery**



www.heinrichsweikamp.com/blitz/en/rsu.htm



landings. Again, a very nice feature.

One of the most interesting features Akona built into this new bag is the ability to unzip the outer layer of the bag, flip it around, zip it back in and convert this roll along to a backpack. I have to admit I was a bit skeptical. After all, this is a rather large bag to wear on one's bag. Was this was just a gimmick? My dive bag has the same feature, in fact I was new to diving and it's what sold me on the bag. Ask me how many times I've used it as a backpack. I was also concerned with regards to the fact that Akona only put shoulder straps. No waist or chest strap was included. I was surprised, however,

to find that Akona lined this piece with an immense amount of padding. All in seemingly the right places as well. With all my gear in the bag I hefted it on my back and cinched it down. I was pleasantly surprised to find the padding well constructed and the bag didn't seem to pull me backwards; at least not more than my smaller LowePro backpack. I didn't get a chance to test this, however, on the plane trip. One of my theories to test in the future is to see if I can pass this off as a personal bag and still roll on another garment bag. With all the changes in the airline industry and added charges for each bag the more we can consolidate the better off we'll be. I may test this on my next trip.

Ok, so now for the \$64,000 question. How does the bag perform

during travel?

I was asked to fly out of state to attend and shoot a friend's wedding. The gear for this trip included the following:

Canon Rebel xTi, 100mm macro lens, 70-200mm telephoto lens, vivitar 285 flash,

Mamiya C3 Twin Lens Reflex, TLR viewfinder, 80mm TLR lens, 250mm TLR lens, electronic light meter, and TLR handle.

Total bags taken for the trip were the camera bag and a backpack.

Since this trip was to a landlocked area no dive gear was required (unfortunately). The way I configured the bag, I was able to get all my equipment secured as well as have a compartment for some of my clothes. One thing I wasn't able to get in the bag was my travel tripod. I strapped this to the outside of my backpack. I also used my Lowepro lens caddies from my waist bag to protect the lenses during transit as the 70-200 was too long to fit upright.

As with all flights, I was a little concerned with boarding and being able to secure adequate overhead space. With all my planning the last thing I wanted was to have gate check this bag. In the end this was a non issue as there was plenty of space on the plane. As planned I was able to detach the laptop pocket with ease, "toss" it on my seat and place the bag

overhead.

Once seated, I was able to slide the laptop pocket upright under the seat (window seat needed for this move of course). But if you don't have a bulky laptop you can just as easily place the laptop pouch in the seat pocket.

Deplaning was just as easy. The bag is the perfect width for rolling along the aisles. Once I arrived at my destination I opened the bag and all my equipment was in the correct and assigned locations. No damage, no movement.

I have also configured this bag to fit my Canon DSLR, 2 lenses, Ikelite housing, 2 DS51 strobes, Ultralight Arms, focus light. The one thing I was not able to fit in easily was the custom bracket for the Ikelite housing. After viewing the pictures on line of the bag's configuration I see that Akona has the bracket attached to the housing. Since my custom bracket extends higher than the 2 handle Ikelite this did not work for me. The 2 options I had were to lay the bracket over the top of all the equipment (wrapped in some type of cloth) or slide it in between the outer pocket that unzips to make the backpack.

Overall I give the new Akona Computer Pro a 10 out of 10 on design and a 9 out of 10 on functionality. There are only a few things I would recommend as far as

accessories or changes for the future versions of this bag.

1. It would be nice to have some sort of Velcro adjustable or elastic straps to assist in securing lenses. Had I not had the lens caddies I would have been a little more concerned with my larger lenses staying in place.

2. Although there are elastic straps on the outside edge of the bag they were not big enough to strap in a tripod. It would be nice to be able to accommodate a tripod in the future on the outside of the bag.

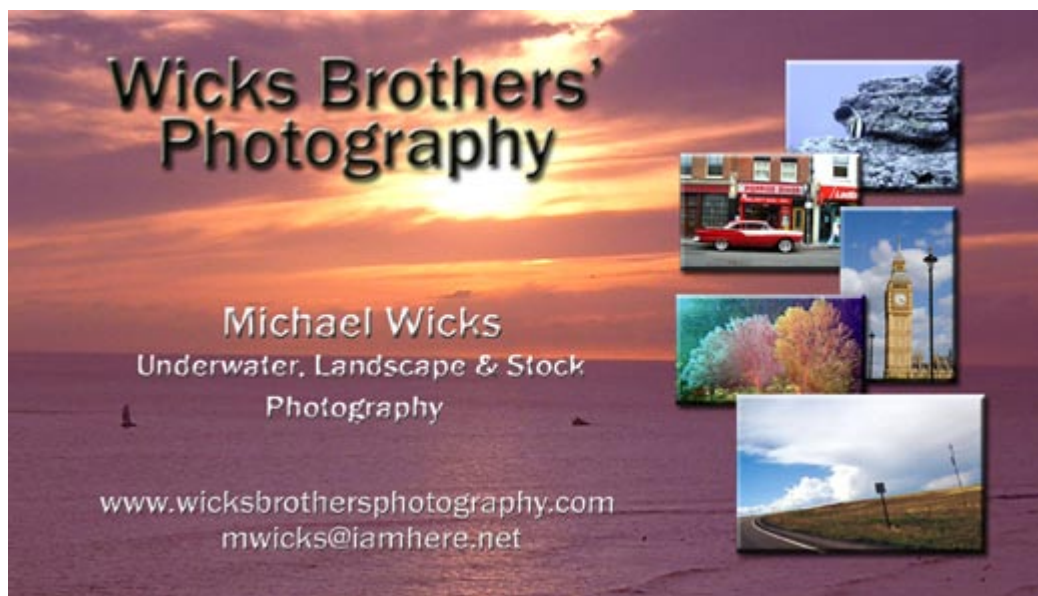
3. A complaint I have with many roll on bags is that the handle placement is set so that you can't really pull the bag behind you without periodically catching your leg or heel. I've seen some bags that have an extended T so that you can adjust

your walking with the bag. Again this is a complaint I have of almost all roll along bags.

4. A third handle on the opposite side of the bag would be nice.

Notwithstanding these requests I think the Akona Camera Pro bag is the perfect in between bag for those 3-5 day dive or travel trips where you want to cut down on the number and size of bags. I would recommend to anyone that travels with their camera and dive gear on short trips that this bag would be an excellent solution to your needs. Akona's MSRP is \$250.

Michael Wicks
mwicks@iamhere.net
www.akona.com



Wicks Brothers' Photography

Michael Wicks
Underwater, Landscape & Stock Photography

www.wicksbrothersphotography.com
mwicks@iamhere.net

The image features a collage of five photographs: a red car in front of a building, a snowy mountain peak, a clock tower, a colorful autumn forest, and a landscape with a road and a windmill.



TRAYS, PIVOTS AND ARMS FOR CAMERAS, HOUSINGS, STROBES AND LIGHTS



The original arm with O-rings in the balls for ease of use. Accept no imitations.

Your quest for the best arm system is over. Once you have an Ultralight arm you will never need to upgrade.

Used by more underwater photographers than any other arm system.

**Visit our website www.ulcs.com
E mail: info@ulcs.com**