

Sony HDR-SR8 and Ikelite housing

By Karin Brussaard

Sony go back a long time in producing video cameras. The last series of models have been equipped with the possibility to capture in High Definition (HD), and for storage possibilities there is a choice between the internal drive and tape. This is also the case with the Sony HDR-SR8; it is capable of capturing in High Definition as well as in Standard Definition. The camera has an internal hard drive with an impressive 100GB of memory. This allows for capturing 13 hours of HD full-motion movie in the highest quality. Besides that the camera features a card slot for a memory card (Memory Stick (PRO) Duo). In addition to capturing full-motion videos, and even during the capturing of these videos, the also camera allows for capturing still pictures, and storing these on the memory card. The pictures taken while capturing a video at the same time have a resolution of 4.3 Megapixels and taking still pictures only they will have a resolution of 6.1 Megapixels. The LCD monitor has a width of 2.7 inch and a wide screen format monitor of 16:9. The camera lets you set various functions manually. Such as: focus, adjusting the white balance and under- or overexposure.

Ikelite is an American company which has been manufacturing underwater housings and flashlights since 1962. Ikelite uses transparent



polycarbonate for their underwater housings. Ikelite's two trump cards are the relatively low costs of and the large maximum depth for the housings. Ikelite has a number of basic housings that vary in size. This means new cameras from well-known brands usually fit into existing houses. It's only a matter of mounting the operating buttons on the right spot for operating the camera. This is, of course, a lot cheaper than creating an underwater housing for every type of camera from a block of aluminum. The underwater housings are tested at a depth of 60 meters, which is deeper than most other plastic housings can take.

The Ikelite model # 6038.92 can take both the Sony HDR-SR7 and the Sony HDR-SR8. The housing's dimensions including the handles are: 11x8x8 inches. The underwater housing comes with a base, two handles and a tray. This tray can be placed underneath the camera's base in order to put the camera down straight, for example when assembling the set, or during transportation. Inside the tray there is a piece of led to keep the camera steady underwater.



Instead of the tray, a battery for a video-light can be mounted. The underwater housing has been equipped with a flat port. It is not possible to swap this port for a wide angle port. The housing port is threaded allowing the use of optional external 67mm threaded wide-angle conversion lenses. Also included is a ring that is slightly bigger than the camera's lens and prevents the silver-coloured ending of the lens from reflecting in the port. Without this ring you might find a silver-coloured reflection in the captured movie. In addition a UR/Pro red filter is standard delivered.

The Pro Video Lite 3 includes a Video Lite Head, Mounting Arm, Battery Pack with Pouch and Mounting Hardware, Cable with In-Line Switch and Pro/Spd Charger. The lamp can be used to a depth of 90 meters and weighs 2.4 kilos. The lamp head contains two halogen lamps, one offering 50 watt and the other 20 watt. The real video lamp is 50 watt and has a 100 degrees angle. Thanks to this the light

coverage is even. The 20 watt lamp can be used as a diving lamp and as a focus lamp. This enhances the battery-life. Used with full power the battery lasts for 55 minutes. The halogen lamp produces such a significant amount of heat, that it is allowed for use underwater only.

Assembling the lamp speaks for itself. First you attach the pouch with two screws to the base of the underwater housing. The battery slides easily into this pouch. I would then mount the arm with the light head to the left handle and the switch to the right handle. If you are left-handed, you may want to swap the lamp and switch. Finally, I would connect one cable to the battery and the other to the light head. The battery has two connections. You can therefore connect two light heads to one battery. The battery-life will then be cut in half of course. If you want to be able to use the full battery-life of 55 minutes, you can opt to mount a second battery underneath the housing.

The back of the underwater housing has a lid that is closed with 2 stainless steel snaps. Attached to this lid there is a slide for the camera to be screwed onto. You don't need a screwdriver to do it; a coin will do the trick. A number of buttons from the underwater housing have to be pulled outside before sliding the camera

into the housing. If you don't pull these buttons out, they are in the way when you slide the camera inside. It is important to keep the buttons in the correct mode when you pull them out and not turn them. If you turn the buttons and slide the camera inside, you will not be able to operate certain functions. The camera or other buttons stop you from being able to turn the turned button into the correct position.

The camera's handgrip can only be loosened on one side. You cannot remove it entirely from the camera unless you use scissors. I think this housing was built for a camera without a handgrip, because it was rather difficult to get the camera into the housing with its handgrip. The housing is of sufficient size to be able to contain larger battery types. The Sony NP-FH40, FH50, FH60 and FH70 all fit into the housing.

It's time to take the camera with me on a dive. First thing that strikes me is the weight. The combination of the underwater housing and the lamp makes a rather heavy load and it has a negative floatability. To put it in other words; it will sink if I let go of it. To prevent the camera from disappearing into the depths, I attached the underwater housing to my wrist using a wrist strap. I have to hold the camera with two hands during diving because it is too heavy and too big to keep it dangling from



my wrist. Swimming around I look for nice objects to capture. Fish do tend to swim away from you, not towards you, so you end up capturing their tail. So much for fish as a suitable object. I start concentrating on objects that stick around for a while and don't swim away speedily.

The camera has been equipped with an electronic viewfinder as well as an LCD monitor. The viewfinder is on the small side, which is why I automatically used the monitor to decide the composition on land. The housing doesn't offer room to work with the monitor folded open. It is possible though to open the LCD monitor, turn it 180 degrees and flip it

back onto the camera so the monitor is upside down, as it were. Ikelite has placed a fold-in mirror on the left side of the housing so you can still work with the LCD monitor. To prevent you from having to watch a reversed image on the LCD monitor, Ikelite built in some electronics that turn round the image again. It requires attaching a cable to the camera. If you choose to use this electronic possibility, you will lose the option of capturing sound with your movie. I found that the mirror doesn't work as good in practice as it sounds in theory. The mirror is very small and I had difficulties deciding the composition through it. Moreover, you can't hold

the camera straight ahead of you but it has to be tilted to the right somewhat. I found that a rather unnatural position. For these reasons I mainly used the common viewfinder.

Around Coiba the water temperature during some dives drops from 28 to 16 degrees Celsius at times. The temperature in the housing was always at a minimum of 32 degrees. That was the temperature on land, and thus the temperature in which I would open the housing to install the camera. The temperature inside the housing could even rise since the underwater housing was sometimes lying in the boat in the sunshine. Even though I did cover it up with a towel, it could still be very hot underneath. During one of the dives when the temperature had dropped many degrees, I wanted to capture a yellow anglerfish. I looked through the viewfinder but saw the fish in a haze. At first I thought my glasses had steamed up but that wasn't the case. When I looked directly at the anglerfish, I could see it clearly. Startled I checked to see if the camera was accidentally set to manual focus but that wasn't the case either. Finally the quarter dropped and I realized that the lens was steamed up. Due to the temperature drop, the air inside the housing condensed and I hadn't placed a silica sack in the housing. Nor was there one on board of the boat and we'd planned to take another dive in one hour. To be able to shoot during the next dive, I put a tampon inside the underwater housing, and I must say: it did the job!

All functions of the camera are operable yet not all quite as easy. Especially operating the touchscreen is difficult because you have to turn the underwater housing one quarter and let go of it with one hand. The on/off button and the record button are in a logical spot and are easy to find and operate



even blindfolded. The camera offers the possibility to swap over to photo mode. To switch over, you have to move the on/off button to the left. However, I was so desperately focussed on recording a full-motion video and searching for suitable fish and compositions, that I completely forgot to take pictures. The lamp's switch is simply mounted to the handle of the underwater housing. Activating and deactivating the light happens smoothly by turning the button. I was able to do it immediately without having to let go of the handle.

The Sony HDR-SR8 has a Carl Zeiss lens with a focal distance of 40-400 mm for the 16:9 format. These 40mm don't offer a lot of wide angle. If you want to capture large objects such as sharks, manta rays or corals underwater, you have to keep your distance to capture your object fully. Often it turned out I was still too far away to correctly expose the object with the video lamp which results in videos with a very low amount of colouring in them. I was hugely disappointed after my first dive because of the lack of colours in my video. The dives after that, I tried out various possibilities to obtain more colour in my movies. First I used the red filter that was



included in the set. This filter is made for use in blue water. Unfortunately the waters around Coiba are not of a clear blue colour but have a greenish shade. That's why the red filter did not work at its utmost.

The second option was to manually set the white balance. For this you have to operate the touchscreen using the buttons on the outside of the underwater housing. This is not easy, because I had to turn the underwater housing a quarter towards myself and let go of the left handle. Due to the



camera (40mm) is rather limited for wide angle possibilities. It is nice to see a red filter included with the underwater housing. Every camera function can be operated under water, though not all of them with equal ease. The battery of the Pro Video Lite 3 is a beautiful but heavy combination with the underwater housing. The set has a considerable negative floatability and it is hard to stabilize it. The mirror on the outside of the underwater housing is a nice invention but it doesn't work as good as directly looking at the LCD monitor.

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heavy weight of the camera and the strong current, it was not easy to hold the camera with only one hand. The easiest way of catching some colour in the movie is mounting a wide angle lens. The housing is threaded so it offers the possibility of using optional external 67mm threaded wide-angle conversion lenses. This increases your angle of view so you can capture your object from closer up.

The Sony HDR-SR8 is a camera that allows for video capture in High Definition as well as Standard Definition. The hard drive of 100GB ensures hours of video-recording also in HD. The angle of view of the



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