

Canon Ixus 980IS

by Dan Bolt

Recently arrived on the ultra-compact digital market is the top-of-the-range Canon Ixus 980IS (or SD990 in America). It's headline grabbing 14 megapixels alone are enough to tempt most non-diving folk, but there are a few more changes over the traditional Ixus setup that suddenly makes it worth a second look for us underwater-types.

Firstly, and at long last, Canon have added a Manual mode to the Ixus suite of gadgets - thank you Canon! So if you are looking for a little more control over your imagery you can now play with f-stops and fractions of a second to your heart's content. The brain of the camera has had an upgrade too, the Digic IV chip now shoots movies in .MOV mode which means you can cram 50% more video per Gb of SD memory than before and for no real loss of quality from what I've seen.

If you're like me and have oversized hands and fingers, these small cameras can be quite fiddly to access all the buttons and controls dotted around the body. Happily though, putting it into Canon's own WP-DC27 housing (rated to 40m) and the larger

buttons become a joy to use.

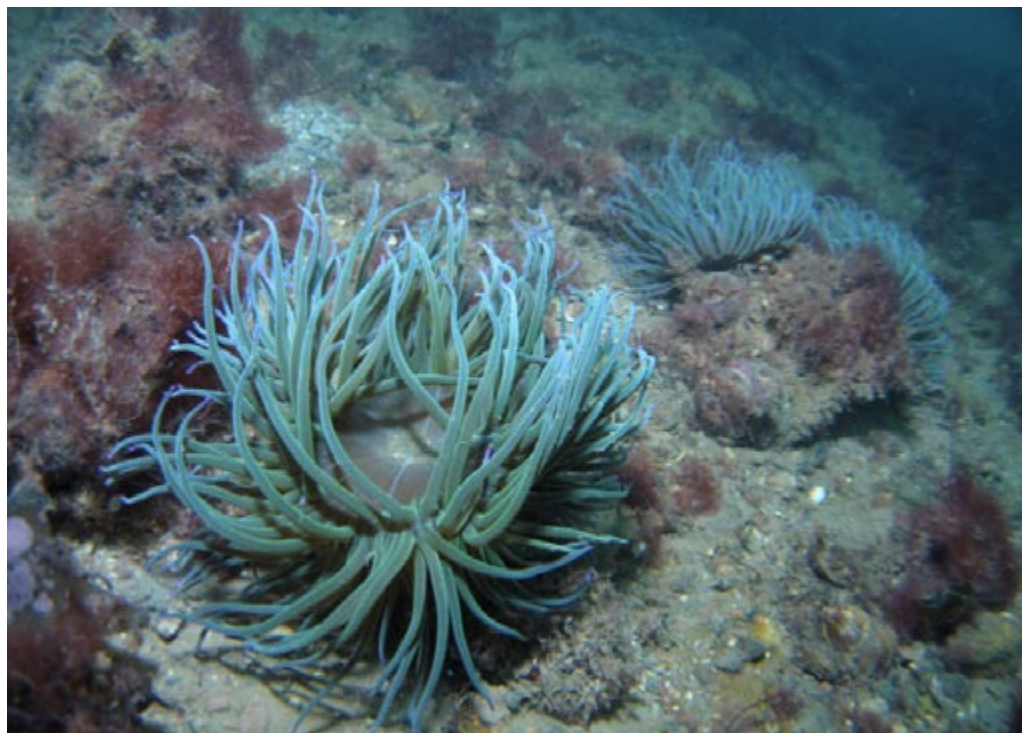
Here are my observations from the half-a-dozen dives I've done with it already;

Pros

- 14Mpix sensor is no noisier than earlier models & provides plenty of cropping potential
- Face Detect focusing works with fish!
- Servo-AF great for macro work
- Canons awesome image stabilisation allows low-light shots using low ISOs
- Focuses well (and quickly) both in low light and at full zoom (133mm)
- Support for Inon AD lenses
- Manual White Balance function (though I'd still like to see 2 custom settings)
- Turning down the Flash Exposure Compensation means you can get many more shots from the battery

Cons

- The lens is only 36mm at widest
- Manual mode only gives you 2 f-stops; fully open (f2.8 wide/f5.8





1/30th, f2.8, ISO100, Manual Exposure, Auto White Balance, Inon Fisheye Lens, 2 x YS-27DX



1/100th, f16, ISO100, Manual Exposure, Auto White Balance, Inon Macro Lens, 2 x YS-27DX



1/500th, f14, Manual Exposure Mode, Manual WB, 2x Inon UCL lenses, 1x YS-27DS strobe with snoot

zoom) or fully closed (f8 wide/f16 zoom). Though fiddling with zoom & adding lenses you can still get the results and f-stops you want, it would have been nice to mention this in the user manual

- The 'shift' function you have to use on the housing where you would be rotating the selection bezel is an awkward 2-handed job

- You must align the camera & housing 'Mode Dial' switches before you dive or you will not be able to use all the modes

- If you hold the camera with your right hand it is very easy to accidentally switch Modes with your thumb

- The camera generates lots of heat from the battery (especially with heavy flash use) which can lead to condensation in the housing

- Auto White Balance still has Canon's usual warm feel to it (though you may be able to counter this with the 'Custom Color' function)

- Flash synchronization is still only possible up to 1/500th sec

With the debacle over the daft, wide lens barrel used on the G9 (and other) housings not taking any supplementary lenses, it's nice to know that Inon have made an adaptor for their AD series of lenses. I've got the full range of the AD lenses (fisheye, wide-angle and 2 x macro) and apart from a slight softness to the corners can confirm they all work very well indeed.

I've teamed my Ixus up with a couple of Sea&Sea YS-27DX strobes which makes for a small and light rig with great potential for some creativity, and having had the use of mine for a while... I'm keeping it!

Thanks to Cameras Underwater for getting the new kit to me so quickly.

Dan Bolt

www.underwaterpics.co.uk



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