

UK-Germany 50D Housing

by Mikko Voipio

During a liveaboard trip to the Red Sea last November some of the fellow photographers suggested I upgrade my good old Canon EOS 350D to a full frame one - the new EOS 5D Mk II. At the time I was convinced that I wouldn't upgrade the system for a while. I knew that the 350D with UK-Germany housing was small and not so heavy to carry on a plane.

The comments about an upgrade stayed afterwards somewhere back in my mind. During the holiday season the upgrade slowly began to sound more and more tempting. I started to investigate the EOS 5D Mk II as well as the DX size EOS 50D. Although the FX camera is superior in image quality in the end I decided to stay with the DX format. The 50D allows me to continue using existing lenses, like EF-S 60mm macro and Tokina 10-17mm fish-eye.

The EOS 50D is the latest of Canon's prosumer series DX DSLRs. It has the same 1.6 crop factor as earlier DX consumer/prosumer DSLRs and uses the same EF/EF-S lenses. The overwhelming 15 megapixels of 50D in DX sensor makes the pixel density extremely high. Theoretically this may not be an advantage in underwater photography because the optical energy per pixel is relative to the surface area of the pixel. However, Canon engineers have made incredible work to develop the sensor with practically no gap between pixels to maximize the photon count for each pixel.



The big improvement in EOS 50D is the bright 3" LCD display with 920000 pixels compared to the 230000 pixels in previous model, EOS 40D. The images look now much brighter and clearer on the screen. Also the new Digic IV image processor provides faster and better results. 50D also provides up to 12800 ISO speed. However, according to my experience the highest ISOs are not very useful due to the visible noise.

The LiveView function in EOS 50D is improved compared to the EOS 40D. 50D has still the Quick Mode but also new Live Mode and Live Face detection Mode both of which use the image sensor for focusing instead of the separated focusing sensor used in Quick Mode (the mirror is lowered down during focusing operation). However, the Quick Mode is focusing faster and more accurate than the two newer modes but requires interruption of the display.

The EOS 50D provides handy Quick Control Display where all the main photo parameters are visible at a glance - really useful feature for underwater photographer. The user can also modify



most of the parameters using Multi-control button and the display.

After some discussions and comparisons I decided to buy yet another housing from UK-Germany. Uwe Kiehl provided me the information I required promptly and promised to "customize" the housing a bit. The photos he gave convinced me that the quality looked at least as good as before. My good experiences with the 350D housing and ability to use old ports and zoom gears simplified the decision even more. The housing arrived just a week before my trip to Seychelles, enough to test the housing in a pool before the trip.

The UK-Germany 50D housing is designed using a CAD system and made of aluminium using 5-axis-CNC milling machine. The precise design and production explains why the front and back of the housing fits snugly together. The lap in front part makes the alignment easy and the risk to break guides is eliminated. The inside of the housing is coated with matt black material which prevents any internal reflections. The two halves are locked together using two latches with a locking



The EOS 50D fits nicely into the housing.

mechanism (prevents accidental opening).

The dimensions of the housing (std version) are 190mm by 165mm by 120 mm and it weights about 2 kg without port and camera. UK-Germany rates the housing to 70m.

The EOS 50D fits nicely into the housing. The camera is installed into a tray using the tripod mounting threads so it is easy to insert and remove from the housing. One can change memory card without sliding the camera out but the battery compartment cannot be opened. However, sliding camera partly out and the battery can be replaced, too.

There are windows for both displays: a small one on top of the housing and larger one on the back. Both windows are well placed. Due to the Quick Control display of the 50D the top one is not used much.

The housing provides two connection points for flash arms: on left and on top. Normally the left one contains Kilgus shoe but any other with M5 screws can easily connected. These holes are also used for the left handle option so the fixing is then



Tokina 10-17@12mm,, ISO 200 1/45th@F16

not available for a flash arm shoe. On top there are two holes with M5 threads and one with M8 tread which can be used for second flash arm connection or for a focus light. One S6 sync connector (on left) is included, second (on right) is optional.

The housing uses UK-Germany bayonet port system. UK provides six different flat ports and two different dome ports plus several extension rings. The zoom/focus control is not in the port but in the housing. With the second handle on the left, like my old housing, the zoom knob is comfortably controlled while grabbing the handle. Even if a strobe arm is connected to the left side of the housing (standard set-up) the zoom control is easily operated. The zoom/focus control system requires tailored zoom-ring or focus-ring for each lens (ordered separately).

UK-Germany has changed the handles, a warmly welcomed improvement. The handles have now a shaped grip with rubber coating providing much better feel and ergonomics than the old ones. On top of the handle is an M8 threaded hole.

The Quick Control Display is by default

activated by pushing the Multi-control down. Unfortunately this cannot be done while camera is in the housing. However, this hindrance can be circumvented by programming the activation functionality to the Set button.

The main control knobs, the Quick Control Dial and the Main Dial, can be rotated while holding the right grip but it is not very comfortable with small hands like mine. On the other hand the exposure lock button is placed on the right hand side and can be operated easily with right thumb without leaving the grip.

A lens release knob is now included so changing the lens does not require removal of the camera. This speeds up lens changing and decreases the risk of leakage.

The most important disadvantage of UK-Germany products is the lack of any kind of instruction manual. If you are not familiar with the systems you have to guess what the purpose of any component/accessory is or you need to ask. Even though, according to my experience, Uwe provides good answers at least a short leaflet telling some hints about usage and maintenance would help a lot. Fortunately the knobs and buttons are (mainly) labelled.

The 45 degree viewfinder (an option) is great, much better than the standard viewfinder. The image is clear and larger. Also it helps to photograph slightly upwards. Because the viewfinder is rotating it is quite easy to use portrait composition, too. The only disadvantage is the slight coverage of the large display of the camera. When the viewfinder is turned sideways it is not a problem.

Although the trip to Seychelles was not mainly a dive trip I had some opportunities to leave my non-diving wife on the beach and head under the



*EF-S 18-55@18mm, Subtronic Mini's,
ISO 200 1/60th@F4.5*

waves of the turquoise Indian Ocean. During my half a dozen dives with the UK-Germany 50D I used either the Canon EF-S 18-55mm lens with a flat port or Tokina 10-17mm fish-eye with a dome port. Also two Subtronic Minis were included in my rig.

With 18-55 and a flat port the setup was slightly negative but easy to balance and nicely manoeuvrable. With the Tokina and the dome the system was lighter in water but still negative. When the strobes were pushed slightly forward (still out of image) the setup was in balance and easy to handle as well.

The first trial was made during a snorkeling trip. I had the Tokina with the dome port but no strobes. The dome was lifting the front but not too much. Underwater the system was very easily handled. However, it was quite challenging to take over-under images. The 45 degree viewfinder was then no advantage but rather a hindrance: hard to rise high enough if not standing on the bottom.

The dives provided a reasonable set of subjects



*Tokina 10-17@17mm, Subtronic Mini's,
ISO 200 1/125th@F8*

from eagle rays to nudibranchs. The first dive was spent to get used to the housing and - for me - the viewfinder but the following ones were productive. The bright image in the viewfinder and the large and crisp display were good tools to compose and review images. The controls worked fine and provided touch good enough to handle the camera. The access to the Quick Control display provided user friendly way to verify the parameters even it was not the most ergonomic way to modify those due to the mechanically overloaded nature of the Multi-control button (rotate-and-push operation to move into right parameter, then select and modify). This may be handy on land but with housing it's a challenge. Fortunately the parameters can be modified using some other method, too.

I also tried to use LiveView in a few places where the optical viewfinder was hard or impossible to use. It is, indeed, possible to take photos with LiveView but not easy. You have to push the AF button to focus which requires two hands or very awkward right hand grip. If one ends up using

LiveView the camera would be in a place where it may be hard to use two hands. Therefore taking pictures with LiveView requires some patience. I tried only the Quick Mode where the mirror is lowered for focus. Maybe the Live Mode would be more useful underwater if the display was not interrupted while focusing. However, operating the buttons would be the same. I wish Canon would adopt the Nikon way to control focus operation in LiveView modes (the trigger button).

The UK-Germany 50D housing for Canon EOS 50D is well made. It has a good look and a reasonably good feel. However, the mechanical overloading of controls, especially the Multi-control joystick like button, is really a challenge to housing manufacturers. UK-Germany has made a relatively good job with rotate-and-push type control even though the center push is not supported. Fortunately the missing activation of Quick Control Display can be programmed to the Set button. This is, indeed, a handy operation even for land photography: then the control view is much easier to activate.

Even though the upgrade from EOS 350D to 50D was a relatively big investment my feeling is still that it was worth the money. Now I am looking for the start of the local diving season with dives in the colder and darker Baltic Sea. Let's see how the housing can be handled with thick dry gloves.

Mikko Voipio



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Understanding, capturing and controlling light

16th-23rd January 2010



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The trip is limited to just 12 people, which provides plenty of time for image critique and also a 1:1 pool session to refine wide angle lighting. The course also includes lectures, interactive image review sessions and photographic diving.

The workshop costs \$2,175 USD (excluding flights) for 7 nights accommodation at the luxurious Compass Point Resort, workshop, 6 days of diving, social evenings, rental car and high speed Wi-Fi.

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