

Epoque ERX-C1010 review

by Dan Bolt

For those of us with a more restricted budget for our photographic kit these are very interesting times indeed. Gone are the days where there was a distinct difference in price between a compact camera and it's bigger SLR brothers, in fact you can now spend considerably more on a compact camera than you have to on an entry-level dSLR.

We're not quite at the same price-point when it comes to housings but even these are starting to become more affordable. Take, for example, the new Epoque ERX-C1010 for the baby Canon 1000D dSLR camera: for around £1250 you can get the camera, image stabilised kit lens, housing and flat port. That's not a whole lot more than a Canon G10 compact camera in an Ikelite housing and is actually less than the Panasonic Lumix LX3 in a UK Germany housing. So leaving aside the differences in camera spec & lens/port issues, prices like that can make the jump from compact to dSLR a lot less painful on the wallet.

Looking more closely at the Epoque ERX-C1010 (I'll call it the C1010 for brevity) it's plain to see that a lot of thought has gone into this resin/polycarbonate housing. Don't

for one minute think that because it is 'only' a plastic, 40m rated housing that it is not a serious bit of kit. Although weighing in at less than 2Kg holding it in your hands gives you the impression of quality, purpose and practicality.

Upon closer inspection there are a number of nice touches which prove the amount of thought that has gone into the design of the C1010. The hotshoe connector has a nice little docking groove for when it's not needed, and there is a specific slot for silica-gel tabs that will help control condensation issues. The finish to every part of the housing is superb and in the box you are supplied with a spare o-ring, grease and (more importantly!) a manual in English too.

The C1010 is one of a growing number of housings that allow for the internal flash to pop-up and be used for firing optically controlled strobes. Epoque do say that (with restrictions) the internal flash can be used as your sole light source, but it's power, position and coverage are all so restricted that they render it almost useless for this purpose. There are no built-in slots to hold optical sync cables but at first glance it looks like

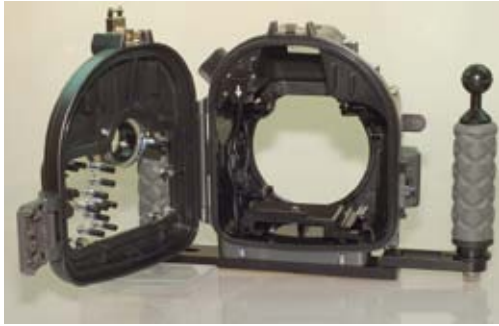


Sigma 15mm Fisheye. f18, 1/200th, ISO100. Spiny Starfish

you could position them on the flat face of the diffuser. Sadly, with either of the two dome ports mounted there is not enough room to use that either! However, some clever use of an old slate and the shoe mount quickly solved that issue and flash firing

works perfectly with my YS27's.

If you did want to use hard-wired strobes, Epoque will fit either a 5-pin or 6-pin bulkhead, and if you like your TTL then Epoque also make a housing for the Canon 430EX(II) flash. As a side note, Jurgen from Sealux will



convert the Epoque 6-pin cable to work with their flash housings if, like me, you have those in your kit bag.

The screw-threaded port mount and 4 available ports will allow you to use an impressive list of 7 lenses, I won't go into that as Sim Chee Ghee's article covered those in detail in the last UWP issue. But one lens they don't list is the Tokina 10-17mm Fish-Eye Zoom. It does (just) fit behind the smaller dome port, is useable with some slight edge softness and the closeness of the lens to the port will make 50/50 shots quite difficult. The focus gear for the EF-S 18-55 kit lens can be amended to control it's zoom too. Missing from the list of optional extras are any extension rings for the ports so at the moment you are limited to this list, but it isn't much of a limitation.

The ports used by Epoque are glass (not acrylic) and rather than re-inventing the wheel the domes are made and badged by Athena - a really good move as these are superb pieces



(Above) Lundy Seal . Sigma 15mm Fisheye. f8, 1/200th, ISO400. (Right) Seaweed. Tokina 10-17mm Fisheye at 10mm, f14, 1/125th, ISO400. (Below) Spiney Starfish. Canon EF-S 60mm Macro, f10, 1/60th, ISO200.

of glass to work with.

This review is primarily about the housing, but I would be missing a trick if I didn't mention the camera. All land-based reviews of this baby Canon have moaned about its poor implementation of 'Live View'. From their point of view it is actually almost useless, but if you know its limitations and work within them it can be very useful, especially with prime lenses. The big issue is that in order to achieve focus the camera raises and lowers the mirror a number of times, which takes time and, quite frankly,

feels bloody awful in your hand while the camera clunks it's way though the cycle. But if you turn autofocus off in the Live View menu and use manual focusing then all this palava is avoided and the Live View becomes a very useful tool indeed. Take the EF-S 60mm macro; it's got full time manual focus and is a dream to use in this housing with Live View switched on.

Most of my time in the water is spent breath-holding so size and weight of my kit is always an issue for me. This housing fits that bill perfectly, and especially with the





Shore Crab . Tokina 10-17mm Fisheye at 10mm, f5, 1/60th, ISO400.

dome fitted because it only requires a little added buoyancy to become neutral in the water.

All camera controls are accessible through the C1010 and even with 5mm gloves on in 6C water it is easy to use. Just about my only niggle with the design is the zoom/focus lever that stands very proud of the front left corner of the housing and, to me, looks a bit susceptible to knocks and bumps.

Having double o-rings on the large back door gives you a nice sense of security, and the large clear back also lets you see signs of water ingress

before it becomes catastrophic.

In use it became obvious that using the optional eye-piece extension would be beneficial as it is possible to press various buttons with your nose/regulator/snorkel if you just use the standard eye-piece. Even without it you can see through the view-finder well enough to compose your shots and confirm the focus point selected by the autofocus.

It was also apparent that while the C1010 is designed to be held in one hand, in reality the positioning of the grip, strap and the shutter-release lever requires you to be a very



Lundy Seal . Sigma 15mm Fisheye. f13, 1/160th, ISO400.

dexterous person indeed; and if you have to wear thick gloves you can forget it. Having said that, by adding either a single or dual handled tray it suddenly becomes a joy to use with the lever positioned perfectly and giving a nice positive feel with enough feedback to be able to hold focus and recompose easily. The tray mount is a thick block of aluminium giving a good solid base for any arms you may want to use.

If you approach this housing with an open mind then I don't think it will fail to impress. You don't have to lower your expectations, but you

do have to realise that it reaches its price point in the market because of what it doesn't have: It's not made out of aluminium, it only has 1 flash bulkhead, there are no built-in optical synch cable ports, there are no built-in arm mounts and would will need to add your own handles. But it does what you expect it to do perfectly and even coupled with the cheapest dSLR/Kit lens combination Canon have ever made you can get some superb results.

Dan Bolt

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