

There will always be a new one along very soon

I feel sorry for today's housing manufacturers, I really do and in a way also for the camera manufacturers. The latter need to constantly develop new models to tempt our wallets and when they've squeezed all they can out of a format, they create another one to shift the goal posts.

The former, the housing manufacturers, that is, have to work at mercurial speed to keep up with the major camera manufacturers before they go and introduce a new model or, worse still, let it be known that there will be a new model imminently. Nothing gives the market more jitters than the thought of buying a camera which might be old hat in a couple of weeks.

I can understand why major camera manufacturers are very secretive about their developments but it would really help our industry if they would involve our housing manufacturers early on in the design process so that they could be up to speed as soon as a new model is launched.

I'm obviously not talking about the compact camera market here because this is very well catered for

Editorial

by own brand housings which appear at the same time as the new model. No, it's the SLR and semi pro end of the market which could really benefit from such a collaboration.

It would be no skin off the camera manufacturers' nose, so to speak, as they never intended, nor have the expertise, to produce a top end housing. Why not work with our manufacturers and create a win, win situation?

New kid on the block

Having expressed my sympathy for our housing manufacturers I am now going to do what they hate the most - suggest that there is a new camera that they really ought to consider housing.

I predict that 2011 will see some major developments in the middle of the market i.e. not compact and not SLR but the 4/3rd and APS interchangeable lens style cameras. More lenses will become available from 3rd party manufacturers to increase their versatility and popularity.

There will also be a significant development in an area between this format and the SLR with the advent of the mirrorless Micro 4/3rds format.

To put it technically, the Micro Four Thirds system uses the same sensor size (18 x 13.5 mm) but allows slimmer cameras by removing the mirror box and optical viewfinder.

Removing the mirror mechanism allows this shorter flange back distance, meaning lenses for the new mount can be considerably smaller than current Four Thirds designs. The format will allow framing to be carried out using Live View on either the LCD monitor or an EVF.

The other major benefit is a shutter delay almost as good as an SLR which has always, for me, been the frustrating feature of compact cameras.

In truth the new format has been around since late 2008 and like all emerging technologies it takes time to establish itself but, with the advent of the Panasonic GH2, we have, for the first time, a camera that can shoot high quality stills and full HD video in an SLR form which works extremely well ergonomically because you can view through the electronic viewfinder. This brings the camera to your eye which is a much more stable way of shooting either stills or video.

The result, as far as I can see, is a jack of all trades and master of all trades situation combined with

the availability of a fisheye and wide zoom lenses with, no doubt, macro lenses on the way.

For me this makes it an excellent camera to urge the manufacturers to house and I would be more than willing to be a test pilot.

There is, finally, a feature which is of no benefit whatsoever to underwater photographers at all but I suspect will be a major cliché, especially to those who primarily shoot video.

The Panasonic GH2 has a video setting called EX Tele Conv which just records the centre 2 megapixels of the frame because, believe it or not, even full HD video is no more than 2mp.

Compared to 35mm the Micro 4/3rd format has a crop factor of x2 so the 14-140 kit lens is actually a 28-280. Shoot video with the EX Tele Conv on and the total crop factor becomes 5.2x with no loss of aperture.

That makes the 14-140 become a 72-728mm. Buy the 100-300mm telezoom and this becomes 520-1560mm, again, with no loss of light!

I obviously don't want that capability underwater but what a fantastic lens to have for shooting wildlife video on land

Peter Rowlands
peter@uwpmag.com