

Olympus XZ-1 and EPL-2 bodies with PT-050 and PT-EP03 housings

by Rob Spray

Like teenagers camera companies spend lots of time worrying about what's on the surface. Divers, like parents, have to pick up the pieces and for a long while as electronic technology was the focus compact divers didn't get the rub of the green. I go all misty eyed thinking back to when capable compacts were the weapons of choice for amateur photographers. You could jump in with one in an OEM case with a couple of wet lenses and the world was your mollusc. Then cheap SLRs killed off the bridge camera and box ported cases and fiddly bodies spoiled the fun.

Now I feel I have a friend back, the PT-050 for the XZ-1 carries that most obvious and useful feature – a big threaded port. They seem to have been absent from capable compacts for ages. Those who weren't ready stretch to third party housings have had to make do with a strange selection of clip on cookware. At the same time mirrorless large sensor cameras like the Olympus Pens are providing an alternative to SLRs for those who aren't in love with hefty

baggage.

So what do we have here?

With the XZ-1 Olympus return to a market Panasonic revitalised with the LX3 a couple of years ago – enthusiast compacts or bridge cameras. Like the latest crop of rivals it's a 10 Megapixel camera with a less is more mindset. The key feature is a super bright f/1.8-2.5, 28-112mm (equivalent lens). The housing is in Olympus' now familiar black and red house style with a single large camlock catch. The big fixed port looks generous on the slim case thread opens up so many opportunities. The plague of box fronted ports on small housings may be over!

Apart from that admirable port the case and the camera have a few more diver friendly tricks. The XZ-1 will run Olympus RC flashes and fire low power trigger pulses as well as lighting its own subjects. The fibre port is built in as is a cold shoe but the lever shutter isn't the only cool control. The body has a dial round the lens which takes on the primary parameter depending on mode – most importantly aperture in A and M



PT-EP03 left and the PT-050 right and below.





PT-050 rear.



PT-EP03 housing for the Olympus EPL-2



PT-EP03 rear.



modes – and the matching knob on the case gives you menu free direct control of that lens which gives you more creative control of subject isolation than any other compact right now.

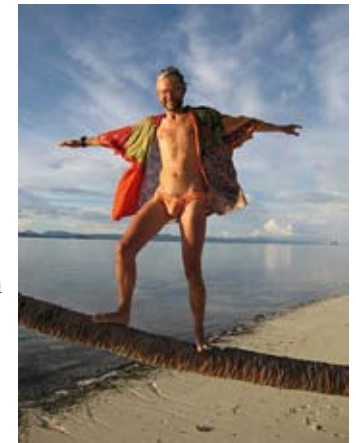
Next to this the upstart the new E-PL2 and its E-PE03 case look mature and evolutionary. Both are upgrades on the E-PL1 I adopted last year and build on the strong points of that package. The camera has

had a light makeover and looks more like the classic Pen P1 than the angular E-PL1. In most other respects it's quite similar but this year's picture processing lets it shoot up to ISO 6400. By my reckoning the new, smaller video friendly 14-42mm kit lens is more than twice as fast as its predecessor. Last year when the first Pen housing launched the standard port was Hobson's choice but now there's a range available so the system really has grown up very fast. Panasonic have done some great lens work and when you grow out of the kit lens you can dive some great small stuff from the 7-14mm, 8mm Fisheye and 9-18mm to 45mm macro. That's the beauty of the Four Third system, it's a team effort now.

The housing is very much like the that for the E-PL1 aside from the absence of the power bulge for the EVF-2 electronic viewfinder which the E-PL2 eschews underwater. If anything I'd suggest you choose between the E-PL1 and 2 depending

on whether you like the idea of the EVF or not. My year with the E-PL1 was fine without it, but I always wanted to try it!

Once last bit of bait for fanciers of the XZ-1 and E-PL2 is the addition of a Dramatic Tone art filter which seems completely irrelevant at first but having seen it in action on land I wonder whether it might be just the thing for misty wreck shots – both can shoot RAW files at the same time without breaking sweat you've got nothing to lose.



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