

Enough's enough

I took a friend diving recently and had a most fascinating conversation about his underwater photo equipment. His name is unimportant but just like the universal soldier I think he may be very representative.

As with all conversations between underwater photographers it doesn't take long to migrate to equipment and, when I asked how he was getting on with his Olympus E-PL1 in their PT-EP01 housing, he said something that I wasn't expecting. I was expecting "It's great but it's a little bit too this and it won't to that" but what he said was "It's stopped me wanting to upgrade" and that's the first time I'd heard that.

What I have heard from other people in the past, and I'm a guilty as the next person, is that, when buying some new equipment, I say "It's got everything I'll ever need" and then to really convince myself and in a separate, single word sentence, I add "Ever". I said exactly that in 1987 when I got my first 20mb (that's mb not gb) external hard drive. But what I've never said is "It'll stop me wanting to upgrade" so when the universal soldier said that, it stopped me in my tracks.

After a short silence and obviously concerned that he had

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seemingly physically locked both my brain and my body in momentary confusion, he added "because I'm getting all the shots I want out of it. It's a small neat package (he also free dives a lot) and I don't feel restricted photographically". Luckily for both of us, that unlocked me and I started to move again.

"Wow, that's interesting" I said, stalling for time while the enormity of the response sank in. "So you are 100% happy with it?" "Yes", he confirmed, "100%".

Now that's exactly what the manufacturers don't want to hear and they do their darndest to keep coming up with HD, Full HD, 3D, Supersonic, Turbo etc etc

The skill is to honestly analyse what you are in it for and what you need out of it. If you do that, and do it honestly, I suspect, like me, you'll calm down a bit and give more time to the photography than the equipment and the result can only be better images.

Britain's Secret Seas

Here in the UK we recently had an eagerly awaited 4 part series entitled 'Britain's Secret Seas'. The schedulers gave it the same Sunday evening slot as Top Gear so they obviously thought it would have a wide appeal and it probably did.

Unfortunately my idea of creating wide appeal differs considerably from the producers of this series. I prefer my general appeal bone to be tickled by the animals themselves and much more importantly by the stories that their lives generate.

A well written and narrated script is a thing of great beauty generated by quiet confident knowledge. I don't need a bouncing puppet presenter telling me it's awesome when the cameraman has produced average footage which could have been so much better if he hadn't been strangled with the rope of Health and Safety and it's an obvious sign that they've not got enough good material to fill the slot when they start featuring the film crew and the clipboards in the background.

But the thing that amazes me the most is how many meetings there must have been during the production process in which everyone was so busy agreeing with each other that they completely forgot how thin the

whole premise was but by then, I guess, it was all too late.

As with all things corporate the real talent i.e. the cameraman is burdened by producers chasing their careers. Gone are the days when Keith Scholey was in charge of the Wildlife on One slot and he would say to Peter Scoones "Here's £XXX,XXX. Go away for as long as you like and film whatever subject/story you want but you must be back in time for the editing which starts on such and such a date.

Such confident commissioning produced masterpieces such as 'Malice in Wonderland' and 'Reef Encounters' both of which had not one second of surface footage during the entire riveting 30 minutes apiece and most importantly no idiot in frame in a communication helmet wheezing how awesome everything is and how the producer is soooo brilliant.

The corporate cow is so fat it can't see its limitations but when the quality of it's output is questioned it comes up with every reason under the sun why it was the best. Well you would do if it was your job on the line, wouldn't you?

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