

INON UFL-M150 ZM80

by Dan Bolt

Well known for their range of superb wet lenses for compact cameras, Inon have recently brought to market their 'Micro Fisheye' lens, the catchily named UFL-M150 ZM80, for the sake of brevity I'll just refer to is at the M150.

The first thing to point out is just how small this lens is, and I mean small. Its largest dimensions are 40x37mm, and yet in there somewhere are squeezed enough glass elements to give a 150 degree field of view and a minimum focal distance of 0mm, and yes, that's 0cm.

Secondly, Inon state that to remove all vignetting from your image it is necessary to zoom in to about 80mm (35mm equiv). However they also point out that if you want to, you can leave your camera at wider settings and go for the circular fisheye look instead.

For this review the M150 was paired up with Panasonic's DMC FT3 and DMW-WCFT3 housing, Inon tray and arms, and the Inon mount base adaptor for the lens. As the housing has an Inon fibre optic fitting built-in, the S-2000 strobe was the obvious choice and, as it turned out, was pretty effective.

Sadly all this kit arrived just ahead of autumn's first big storm so I had about a 3 hour window to get in and have a play before the water got too rough and the visibility too poor. I first decided to get into one of my favourite rockpools to see just



(Above) 1/60th, f/4.3, iso200, 44mm equiv



(Right) 1/60th, f/5.6, iso200, 80mm equiv

how macro the M150 really was. I found a young Snakelocks Anemone which was only 4cm across and positioned the camera roughly 8cm away from it. To my utter amazement the image on the FT3's screen showed me an anemone that looked to be about 1 metre away, not the 8cm it actually was. In fact on small subjects like this you really have to rely on that 0cm focus ability to be able to fill the frame. I'm never comfortable working that close to my subjects so opted to keep my distance (all 80mm of it).

To get a more natural feel to the light in the pool I positioned the S-2000 above the surface of the water and I have to admit Inon's s-TTL system worked flawlessly for this and every shot I took with it. You do have to work hard to light the scene properly with a single strobe and the proximity of





1/60th, f/5.6, iso100, 80mm equiv

the subject to the lens doesn't help matters. Quite often the correct strobe position to light the subject also produced flare off the inside elements of the lens or creates shadows from the housing.

Next up was a shallow shore dive at Babbacombe (Devon, UK) where the swell had already reduced the vis to about 3m. Here I wanted to see how the lens coped with mid & large sized subjects so headed out to some rocky overhangs. For this dive I swapped

the Inon S-2000 for my two Sea & Sea YS-110a, which meant using lots of electrical tape to fix the fibre optic cable to the housing, and switched them to manual.

For the mid sized subject I settled for a Velvet Swimmer Crab nestling under a sponge-encrusted rock. The crab was about 12cm wide and the rock about 30cm tall. Again I was instantly taken a-back by just how close you have to be to your subject in order to fill the frame with



1/60th, f/4.5, iso160, 47mm equiv

it. I was lucky that this crab didn't seem to mind the intrusion too much, but for these shots the top of the rock was almost touching the M150, a little too close for comfort.

Finding a larger subject tolerant enough to allow me to put a camera so close was a challenge too far with the limited time I had. I opted to turn the lens on to myself and I sat down under a large overhang to take a few images with me looking at some Dead Men's Fingers anemones. The camera

was at arms length with my nose just a few cm from the anemone. This was by far the easiest shot to light because of the increased working distance from the subject, back into 'normal' fisheye territory.

Although my in-water time with the M150 was limited, I was able to get the measure of it as a supplementary lens and as I have plenty of experience with Inon's own 'proper' fisheye lens (UFL-165) as well as the FIX fisheye (UWL-04) I'm



1/60th, f/5.0, iso200, 58mm equiv



1/60th, f/5.6, iso200, 93mm equiv

in a pretty good position to do this review.

The first thing to say in conclusion is that 0cm focusing ability really does mean 0cm. Looking at the camera's screen you are drawn into the scene and encouraged to move ever closer. While it may be a very clever piece of optical engineering, I do feel that it may encourage some divers to get too close to their subjects with the possibility of harassing wildlife, or damaging the reef (and the lens too).

If you elect to shoot mid-sized subjects the increased working distance makes it easier to light the scene, and until Inon invent the mini-ring-flash-for-compact-cameras I would recommend using 2 strobes, or even better, perhaps a Magic filter? (*Excellent idea! Ed*)

The Panasonic FT3 I was using did not have manual control over shooting settings but actually did a pretty good job of metering some quite complex scenes. Coupling it with the s-TTL enabled S-2000 strobe was a great choice and made for a

very small and light setup indeed. I do feel that to get the best from this lens it should be used with a camera that has a manual mode, like the Canon S95 for example. I say this because of the final comment I have to make on the M150 - image quality.

For all the cleverness of this lens it really does have one big flaw; edge softness. I would say that only the centre 50% of the recorded image is acceptably sharp with a quick drop off towards unusable at the very edges. I do however feel sure that some of the edge problems on the review setup was down to me not having any control over aperture. Being able to use a smaller aperture would make a distinct improvement. Perhaps someone will find a 'sweet spot' on another camera where this amazing lens will truly shine.

Another contributing factor might be the positioning of the lens which can be adjusted with a locking ring. Unfortunately with an autumn gale brewing and UwP's imminent deadline, I was unable to explore this further.

So would I get one? Actually, yes I would. I think that for tropical seas with lots of light and clear water this lens still has a lot to offer in terms of unique perspectives on every day subjects. Careful framing and composition will minimise the effect of the softness issue and, I hope, lead to some very interesting images being produced. And a bonus of diving in warm seas would mean that you could actually operate the S-2000 strobe under water, because with 5mm gloves on it is simply impossible!

Dan Bolt

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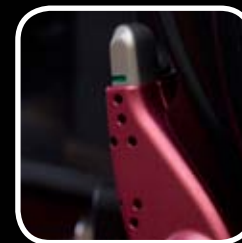
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