

Editorial

Too many cameras

Is it just me or have the camera manufacturers lost the plot? Take Panasonic for example. I'm a great fan of their digital cameras but they confuse me.

Forgive me if I have missed something obvious but why do they have to have a GX1, G3, GF3, GF2, GH2, G2, G10, GF1, GH1 and a G1 in their current line up of Lumix G series cameras? Olympus are just as bad with their PEN series - E-P3, E-PL3 and E-PM1. And don't start me on colours. I'm sure there are other manufacturers who are at it as well but these two will do to prove the point.

Do we need so many cameras to choose from or are they just doing it 'because they can'?

I guess being underwater photographers we have an advantage because the housing manufacturers choose which model they think is best for us. As a result, if you are looking for a new camera it is always best to look at housing availability first and then take it from there.

Peter Rowlands

Readers Lives

Is an Olympus Pen PL 01, 02 or 03 the ultimate underwater digital camera?

With interest I read the Editorial article "Enough is enough" in UP 61, with your friend saying the Olympus E-PL01 in its PT-EP01 housing stopped him wanting to upgrade, because it has got everything a scuba diver expects from it. AJ remarked in Readers Lives "More enough" in UP62 that for most divers their camera is about the dive and the ability to record and share with friends. It is about the memories. For him a decent digital compact is good enough to fulfill his expectation: it takes pictures of fish and other critters, he and his audience may recognize above water.

This is also my number one objective. But I also want pictures of fish that moves around and not just sea slugs or frog fish and stone fish that do not feel compelled to freeze. I am thrilled by the colourful abundance of fish on tropical coral

reefs in the upper 10m, where one can take pictures with ambient light, and still correct the fading red and yellow with Photoshop and the like. On most dives I come across more different species of parrot fish or wrasse than I can remember. So I need pictures when I open my fish guide immediately after I surface.

By the way, I stick with digital compact camera's because they are small and light enough to fit in any luggage, including battery charger, UW housing and UW strobe or video light. Also because they are 5 to 10 times less expensive than a full fledged DSLR plus the rest of the gear.

But compacts have their weaknesses: trouble to AF and colour noise when there is little light. I discussed the matter with experienced underwater photographers while on a diving trip in Indonesia, where I was frustrated day after day with the AF of my Sea & Sea 860 refusing to focus one time out of two. I didn't use the click on precision cast plastic lens on the underwater housing, because it reduces the sharpness of the picture which fools the AF. A lot of times I had to point to a nearby object with more contrast, and to keep the trigger halfway down and move back to the subject. Needless to say that by that time most fish were gone.

A check on the reviews of

the Olympus PEN P3 and PL3 mirrorless DSLR on www.dpreview.com revealed that both have a much faster AF than the P1 and PL1 and an autofocus illuminator LED, which I think is a must for macro underwater work. The "aging" 12.3 MP sensor of the PEN P3 is blamed for colour noise at settings higher than ISO 1600, compared to more recent 16 MP sensors in competing brands.

But I finally bought an Olympus XZ 1 digital compact, because I got convinced that the engineers at Olympus developed eventually a digital compact with underwater photography in mind.

It has got a bright 4 x optical zoom lens 6-24 mm F=1.8-2.5, a 10 MP sensor with 60% bigger surface per pixel than a typical digital compact camera, an image stabilizer, and it can export in RAW. It has an autofocus illuminator LED light. So far for the features.

The benefits I expect from them are:

The lens allows me to take relatively big items from pretty close with little light.

10 x optical zoom lenses of prosumer compacts typically have lenses with longer focal length which are not bright at all. A 3 x to 4 x range is OK for underwater, especially when it starts well in the wide angle side and when the lens is bright. Murky