

External SLR monitors

by Peter Rowlands

From an underwater photography equipment point of view, the 2011 DEMA Show was the year of the external HD monitor. True, they've been around a long while in the video market but this new batch are all designed to be used on SLR housings which have video capability.

Most SLR cameras now have the capability of shooting full HD video and with their larger sensors comes the ability to capture good footage at high ISO levels; perfect for underwater photographers. Unfortunately SLRs are ergonomically designed to take stills by looking through an optical or electronic viewfinder and then reviewing the resulting image on the large rear LCD screen. When shooting video on an SLR we view the footage being shot on the same LCD screen but ergonomically it is not ideal. It's a bit like using a two legged tripod. You have to hold the housing out in front of you in line of sight and this makes keeping the housing steady a significant problem. The last thing video shooters want is shaky footage.

It seems like all the manufacturers have twigged a solution at the same time because there were no less than 6 external monitors on display at DEMA! The reason that an external monitor is the solution for video is that it allows the viewing image to be placed where it is more convenient and at an ergonomically better angle. As a result the housing can be held with your arms 'tucked in' to your body which makes everything far steadier.





Dive and See already produce a 7" monitor and this 5" one will be available shortly

One of the main problems which had to be overcome when making an external monitor was working with mini HDMI connectors. Unfortunately these are flat and wide rather than round so a suitably large bulkhead connector had to be available on the SLR housing to allow this connector to pass through. It remains to be seen how robust the HDMI design of connector is. The majority of monitor designs incorporate a fixed through cable which means the SLR housing is attached to the monitor housing permanently. Only Nauticam bucked the trend with unpluggable connectors which will make storage for transportation much easier. The problems of the HDMI design means that not all current SLR housings can be used but I am sure that from now on designers are going to incorporate HDMI capability as standard.

Nauticam and Backscatter chose to house existing land monitors (Small HD4.3" and Sony CLM-C55

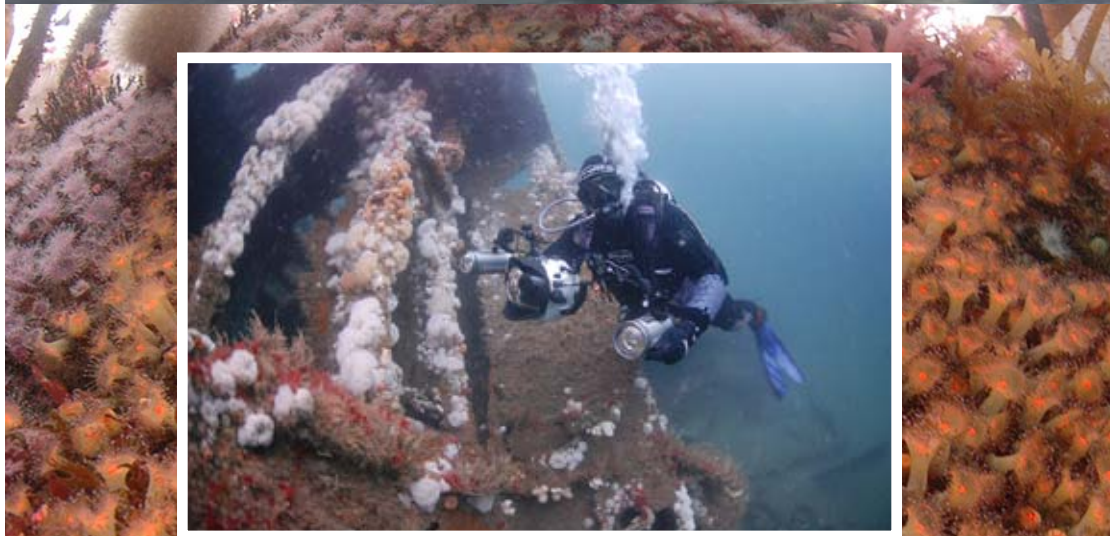
5" respectively) which makes carrying a back up much less expensive. Believe me the last thing you want in the field is to have to go back to viewing the camera's

LCD screen after you've got used to an external monitor! Aquatica have chosen to house an OLED rather than LCD monitor which gives improved brightness and contrast.

Nauticam have even produced a special version of their Nikon D7000 housing which is ergonomically much better for video use. 5 main controls have been moved much closer to the right handle which will make adjustments during shooting much easier.

I am sure there will be reviews in the coming months of these exciting new capabilities but more importantly there should be some much steadier underwater footage on YouTube!

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