

Sea & Sea YS-01 review

by Lawrence Alex Wu

This mini gem of a strobe certainly packs a punch with lighting and features. And at almost half the price* and size of most reputable strobes, the YS-01 is a worthy picture perfect addition for any underwater photographer looking for strobes...for both macro and to my surprise, very wide angle underwater photography too.

Wide-angle photos require both power and lighting angle coverage so I was skeptical when this palm sized surprise popped into my hands. So armed with a pair of these twinkling twins and my wet wide-angle lens, I decided to really put them to the test. Thanks to AquaMaster Thailand, my local SEA&SEA distributor, and over the span of several trips, I tried them out in the shallows, at depth, in darkness and in good to bad visibility. Without a doubt, these tiny powerhouses proved impressive on size, weight, intensity, angle of coverage, battery consumption, recycle time and price...wow, what a mouthful! ...and did I mention I took them to 75 meters?...well, in my dreams, but they are rated for it!

For my wide-angle setup I insist on a 'wet' wide lens with my

compact housing. This not only widens my camera's angle of view but more importantly, it also reduces the subject-to-lens and strobe-to-lens distance giving clearer photos since there are less particles in front of the subject...Perfect for less than great visibility. My wide lens setup in particular gives a viewing angle of almost 135 degrees which means I can frame my modeling diver 1 meter away from top to fin...so let's light her up too!

With this compact and versatile setup, I ventured first to the eastern Chumphorn Pinnacles of Thailand, which graced my diving with 30+ meters of visibility! The topology here included steep bulging walls of coral, masses of schooling fish, giant harp corals larger than 'my' life (probably older too) and macro-wide-angle shots which require both close-up subjects and far away backgrounds to be lit up. All photographically challenging, but in the end, with the 110°x110° coverage (with diffuser) and GN (guide number) 20 for intensity – similar to the 110-alpha's 105°x105° + GN22 - all these shots proved easy photo picks for the YS-01...and pictures for my collection!



There's plenty of power from these strobes to fill flash close up subjects against an intense sunspot

*ISO 80 1/125 sec at f6.3 Canon PowerShot.G12. Dual Sea&Sea YS-01 strobes
INON UWL100+dome*

Next up was the other extreme with 5-10 meters of visibility in Coron's famous World War II shipwreck graveyard. Here silt dominates and daily tidal currents that wind through dozens of islands dares the underwater shooter to strobe their photographic memoirs. With my almost meter long strobe arms, I position my twin YS-01's as far behind my lens and as far apart above my hood as possible to avoid the ever-dreaded underwater snow storm syndrome call backscatter! With such low visibility, admittedly I had equally low expectations, but as the brief review of shots passed through my LCD screen, my amazement flared with hope as I saw vibrant images lit up one after another. And with my strobes' consistent reach of several meters in front of me, I was shooting up wartime guns and super structures like an M16 rifle on autopilot!

So after the success of strobing my wide shots I really had no doubts on the macro scale since it is less demanding on light intensity and sure enough, my twin YS-01s proved me right. With even lighting from the included diffusers and better yet a recycle time fast enough to keep up with my camera's 1 second per frame continuous shooting, these strobes delivered half power flashes triggered by its on-board flash, that outlasted my camera's limit of 20 continuous shots (using 4x Enelop's 2000mAH AA batteries)

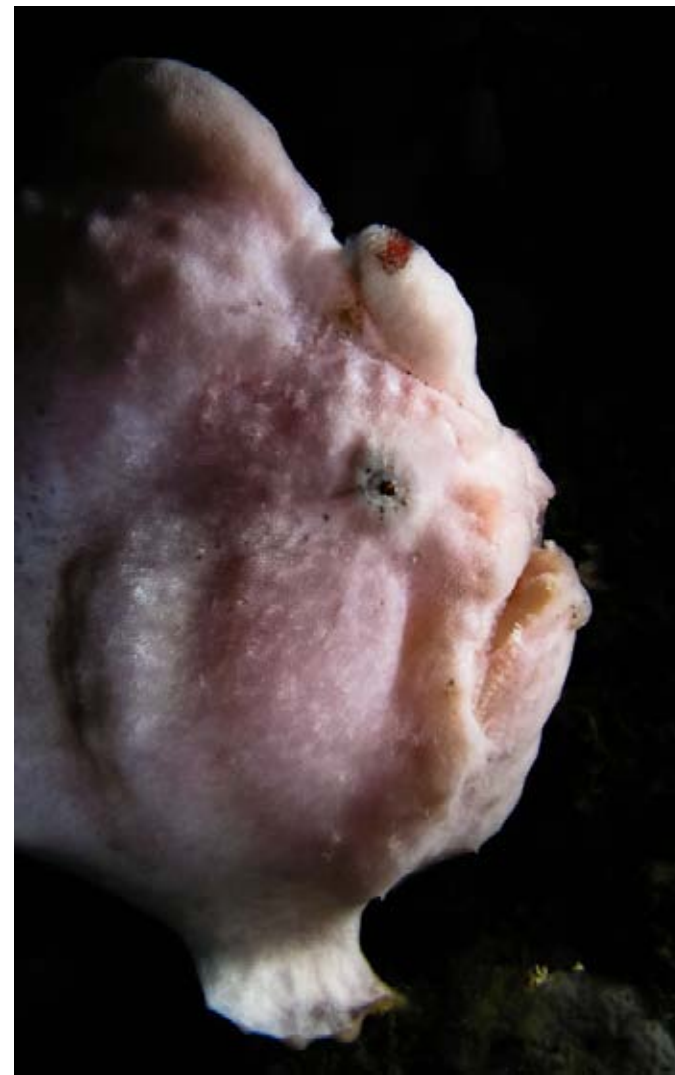
Then even at 1 notch down from full power flash dumps, they managed to pump out accurate lighting every 2 seconds on continuous shooting - which is way too much light for most macro shots anyway. Full power though, proved too much but then if they could keep up, these babies would probably be double the size/price and re-named from YS-01 to 110-juniors! And with almost comparable performance as the 110alpha strobes,



*Even and balanced lighting from dual YS-01 strobes
ISO 64 1/125 sec at f5.7 SeaNSea.DX-2G, Dual
Sea&Sea YS-01 strobes, INON UWL100+dome*

I really didn't miss the extra weight and bulk underwater AND while traveling.

Best of all, with the reputation of SEA&SEA strobes, even wide angle lighting and avoiding strong strobe shadows on subjects are now more affordable to everyone since two of these tiny strobes cost about the same as one large strobe... practically a revolution for the underwater hobbyist



Using repetitive shots & slight movements of strobe angles the right balance of shades & shadows can be achieved.

*ISO 64 1/1250 sec at f8.0 Olympus.C5050Z, Dual
Sea&Sea YS-01 strobes, INON UWL100+dome*



*Dual YS-01 strobes provide powerful intensity even for wide angle UW photography
ISO 64 1/80 sec at f5.1 SeaNSea.DX-2G, Dual Sea&Sea YS-01 strobes, INON UWL100+dome*

shooter!

Nowadays, a hard to find feature for mini sized strobes is a built-in LED target light but the one on my YS-01's was good enough to substitute my night dive torch. Great!...one less piece of gear to charge, carry and worry over! And not only is it a high-end white LED - as opposed to the cheapo LEDs that costs

pennies to produce - but it gives out a good even 1 Watt beam which I found I could use even for casual night dive video recording and photos! Bonus! Oh...and of course they work great as target lights too...I even managed a full 1 hour plus dive while strobing my photos!

Now, if you're not the night type scuba adventurer, the YS-02 is

technically identical to the YS-01 minus the LED light, DS-TTL and 5 grams! This shaves the price down about US\$100, but I find the LED a good replacement for my dive torch, which I use night and day to see what the real color of my subject is before its paparazzi appearance.

As SEA&SEA's entrance to mini strobe models, they've done a superb job with a few possible minor improvements. For gloved divers, the intensity dial might prove tricky, especially for feeling the increment clicks/changes. Next to it, I sometimes moved the power switch position accidentally de-synchronizing it from my camera's flash and likewise with strobe ignition/firing, I also got some missed firings on occasions. However, the strobe's SLEEP function, which automatically switches it off after 30 minutes, is a real battery saver for the light insensitive types.

Another great idea is the dual sync cord optical ports; one for triggering and one to trigger a slave strobe. It certainly made shooting any combination of strobes - be it the same brand or otherwise - a breeze to setup. Kudos to SEA&SEA for saving me hours of fiddling with tape, zap-straps and bungee cords to get strobes to fire together...especially if I decide a shot needs 3 or 4 strobes - attention cave photographers! Now if only they came with an external optical port

magnifier (as opposed to an indented port) so we could do away with the slave sync wire altogether!

For a strobe to be almost half the size, weight and price as most market strobes and still pump out comparable lighting with very decent recycle times and build, these strobes I'm sure are destined for stardom. And in these go-go gadget days, where we are so used to 'paying more for less', we can finally once (or twice if you buy two strobes!) say with the YS-01s you'll be 'paying less for more'!

Alex Wu

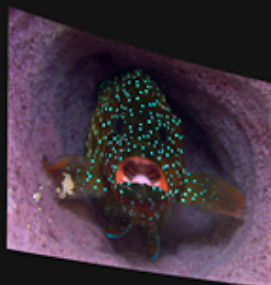
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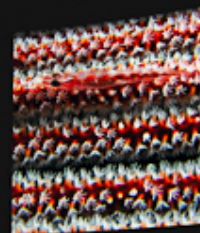
Underwater Photography Workshops

All of Alex Wu's award winning photos are
taken with only compact cameras.

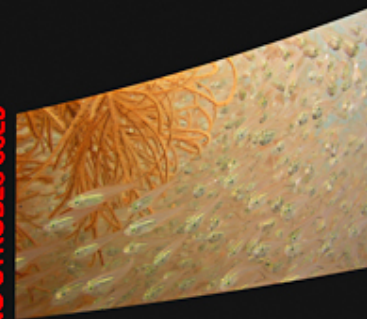
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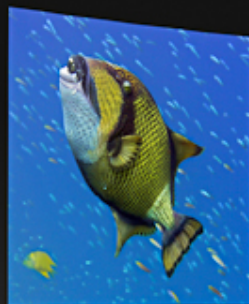
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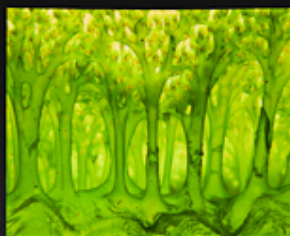
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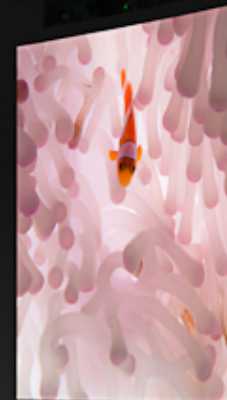
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