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Olympus 12-50 update

by Dan Bolt

We left the first part of this review with the promise of photos from a trip to the Maldives, sadly that didn't happen due to me getting a chest infection and being declared unfit to fly or dive on the day I was due to fly - sorry about that.

Happily though I regained the use of my lungs in time for a week in Scotland's sea lochs so I am now able to give you a more rounded view of this versatile little lens. In fact I'm sitting in the bar of the Loch Carron Hotel in north western Scotland as I type this piece so please forgive any 'smelling pistakes' the beer is rather good!

This morning I dived the Strome Castle slipway at the entrance of Loch Carron; a very narrow, and therefore fed by very strong currents part of the loch, but home to a bed of rare Maerl (calcified seaweed). The habitat is home to many brittle-stars, hermit crabs and Flameshell molluscs, another rarity.

This is exactly the sort of dive where I see the Olympus 12-50mm being the lens of choice; a dive where you are not too sure what you will encounter and might not have the chance to revisit too often. Due to the tidal currents this spot can only be dived twice a day, and with a string of other sites to visit this week our dip this morning could have been the only chance to record what was going on down there.

Having read part 1 of this review you'll already be aware of the potential of this lens. In fact I've never had as much interest in any other articles I've written for UwP so I know there are a good number

of you seriously looking to get hold of one.

All I really have to add to part 1 is that the guru who is Peter Rowlands was spot on when he suggested I try a +2 dry dioptre inside the Zen dome. What a difference that made; suddenly the minimum focus distances came right down and the true potential of this lens was apparent. At the 24mm end you can focus to about 15cm and out at the 100mm setting it's a fish-pleasing 50cm. This was all very nice, but the most dramatic improvement was seen when using a Subsea +10 dioptre at 100mm.

I am hugely impressed with the macro capabilities when using this combination. It gives sharp images with almost no chromatic aberration and a usable depth of field coupled with a working distance of about 25cm. All these dioptres give a fairly narrow focal-band (ie from 25 to 30cm) but when you find a subject of about 3cm you can rest-assured that the image quality will be awesome.

Painted Goby. 1/60th, f/22, iso320, 100mm, Subsea +10, 2xYS110a strobes



As things stand at the moment you will have to make your own zoom gear.





Mustard Fish. 1/60th f/5.6, iso320, 24mm, 2xYS110a strobes

During today's dive I was able to shoot diver portraits (it's a shame I only had Alex Mustard as a model! hard times), animal portraits and macro photos all in the flick of a switch, a very happy chap I was when I surfaced! Therein lies the appeal of the Olympus 12-50mm; true versatility coupled with very good image quality in a light and compact package. Adding to the appeal is the fact that a matching port already exists which can also be used with a range of other lenses (14-42mm and

9-18mm).

As things stand at the moment you will have to make your own zoom gear. I've cut a 4cm strip from another gear (actually from the 9-18mm lens, you'll need to shave the thickness down to about 4mm) and glued it to a moulded piece of white plastic (actually from a divers-slate), about 4cm square. I then use the lens in e-zoom mode which means I only need a couple of cm of travel, and tape the gear to the zoom lever.

I've still got a few days left



Feather Star on Maerl. 1/60th, f/13, is320, 40mm, 2xYS110a strobes

diving the awesome sea lochs and if I'm not shooting wide-angle (using the Panasonic 8mm fisheye), I will be using this lens simply because I know I can shoot anything I may stumble upon. From a small clingfish or nudibranch, right up to a conger eel or Mustard-fish I've got it covered.

A final note is just to say a big thanks to Dave Black from 5 Bells Diving without whom there would be no week-long diving trips to Loch Carron.

www.5bellsdiving.com

Dan Bolt

www.underwaterpics.co.uk



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