

Breaking the rules

By Joel Penner

What happens when you're set up to shoot video with your new DSLR only to find out that the focus button isn't working on your housing? Normally, you'd just have to enjoy the dive, and not be able to capture any images along the way. Why not switch over to your backup system? That's exactly what I did!

While at the Digital Shootout in Little Cayman I happened to be testing the Backscatter Flip-Up Magic Filter connected to the new GoPro Dive Housing. For most of the dive trip I had been shooting comparison video clips with the GoPro, as well as using it topside for time lapses, but on this dive I caught myself wanting to take some stills. That's when I thought, "Why not use the photo feature?" I ended up taking still images the whole dive and was pleasantly surprised with the results I got from the camera.

The GoPro camera

The GoPro has no manual controls when it comes to aperture and shutter speed. In addition, it uses auto ISO to attain proper exposure. Also, I think because the camera is really

geared for video, it tends to default more often to shutter speeds that I would associate with video frame rates. A few of the shots in this article were shot with 1/60, for example.

By using video lights, the camera shoots at lower ISO and images can appear cleaner. This can also aid in the camera choosing to use a faster shutter speed, but is completely unpredictable, so a steady hand while taking a photo is necessary in case the camera decides on 1/30 or 1/60 as its shutter speed.

Sometimes Rules Are Meant To Be Broken

When you read the instructions (you all read the instructions, right?), it clearly states that you only want to use the Magic Filter between 3-12 meters or 9-40 feet. Back in February, I had the opportunity to test the Backscatter Custom GoPro Housing and Magic Filters - <http://www.backscatter.com/sku/bs-gpuwg.lasso> - while snorkeling with the Manatees. I had accidentally kept my lights on while running the Magic Filter. The footage looked good, but I was reminded that I shouldn't use the



(Above) The author at work but the camera he used to take the shots in this article was the GoPro on top of his main housing system! Photo by Jennifer Penner



(Right) Lights, camera, action is fine but add a Magic filter and, theoretically, you are breaking 'the rules'. When you get shots like these, however, it obviously pays to break the rules!

Shot with a GoPro Hero2, Magic Filter and Gates VL24 Lights at 30 feet.





Shot with a GoPro Hero2 and Gates VL24 Lights. Shot at surface. Using the new flip up Magic Filter, I was able to flip it up to disengage it as I was swimming towards the turtle. © Joel Penner, Newmediasoup, LLC



Shot at 40 feet using a Magic Filter and video lights to light up the fans and sponge.



Shot with a GoPro Hero2, Magic Filter and Gates VL24 Lights at 85 feet

lights with the Magic Filter.

Then, a few weeks ago in a WetPixel Google Hangout, I heard Alex Mustard mention that he had heard of people getting positive results with this combination. This validation stuck in the back of my mind as we started the Digital Shootout and I had my GoPro setup ready to do more testing.

Many of the dive sites on Little Cayman are on Bloody Bay Wall, putting us in some excellent photographic set-ups that are deeper than the manufacturer's suggested usage rating for the Magic Filter. While at 85 feet, I looked out through this beautiful red coral and saw my dive buddy in a perfect modeling set up. With my video lights on full, I proceeded to compose my shots, and with a steady and stable hand, fired off a few shots. The images looked more than acceptable in the LCD of my GoPro, so I proceeded to take more photos throughout the dive. At the end of the dive, there was a cooperative turtle at the surface. As I swam toward the turtle, I was able to effortlessly flip up the Magic Filter (on the surface the Magic Filter will cause your image to be very red) and got off about 5 shots.

While the resolution of the GoPro LCD is low, these images looked good. It wasn't until I downloaded the images that I realized how well the combo had actually worked. I found that there was very little white balance and color correction needed on these shots. Magic Filter, GoPro and video lights for stills... another option for underwater image making! Who knew?

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