

Olympus Nauticam NA-EM5 housing

by Phil Rudin

The Nauticam NA-EM5 housing is the eleventh in the industry leading line of mirrorless camera housing from the Hong Kong based manufacturing company.

I think the NA-EM5 is another excellent fusion of advanced engineering, innovation, pleasing style, ergonomics and compactness. Nauticam's patented port locking system has been designed into the left side of the housing complete with a Nikonos V retro style push and twist lock/release. Above the port lock is the zoom/focus wheel which is easily reached with the left thumb while holding the left grip. The mode dial is also accessed with ease using the left thumb.

The locking clasp for this clam-shell style housing is a push button rotary buckle incorporated into the ergonomic right-hand grip complete with mounting points for an adjustable wrist support strap. The wrist strap is a must during long dives or multiple diving days. When using the right-hand grip all of the controls are within easy reach of the right thumb and index finger. The right thumb rests just

below the F/stop dial and the index finger aligns with the shutter release and is just in front of the shutter speed dial. These dials and several of the buttons are user programmable so you may change the arrangement if you like.

The top of the housing has a cold shoe and threads for a standard mounting ball for modeling lights, video lights and other accessories.

The rear of the housing has an antireflective, scratch resistant LCD window, controls for all push buttons, a switch to move between the LCD and EVF, an alarm window which flashes red if moisture is detected along with the addable alarm and on the lower right the is the on/off switch. Nauticam has moved the Main housing O-ring to the rear door which makes it very easy to clean and service.

To the right of the F/stop dial is a spring loaded push lever to turn video on and off. This is one of the only housing I have used where I did not accidentally trigger the video function.

The Fn1 button on the rear of my



Nauticam NA-EM5 housing with the 7-14 dome port



Comparing in size and by inference weight from left to right the compact Olympus XZ-1, the NA-EM5 and the SLR Canon 7D housing

housing is set up to activate auto focus, a number of other functions can also be assigned as well. I have the Fn2 button on the top of the housing to the right rear of the shutter speed dial programed to control the ISO setting rather than having ISO assigned to a command wheel. Inside the housing is a tray which mounts to the camera via a tripod screw, the tray then slides neatly into the housing. The tray has no built-in locking device so caution should be used when opening the housing to prevent the camera from falling out. The camera shoulder strap mounting triangles can also get in the way when sliding the camera into the housing so be sure that they are turned up. I have also removed the rubber eye piece cup from the EVF to avoid having it pushing against the LCD window when closing the housing.

The front of the mounting tray has a lens release lever built in so that you can remove the front port and mount a different lens without having to remove the camera from the housing. The battery and SD card can also be removed from the camera without taking the camera off of the tray.

The E-M5 body has no in-body popup flash and comes with a small hot shoe mounted flip-up flash included which can trigger all strobes supporting fiber optics. A “wedge” has been mounted to the inside front half of the housing which will pop the flash up if you forget when installing the camera. This has been a real buzz kill for me on several occasions when I gotten to thirty or forty meters and realized I forgot to deploy the popup flash. If you prefer to use hard wired strobes a Nauticam single Nikonos 5-pin or single S6 bulkhead can be installed on the right top of the housing. Nauticam also offers an HDMI bulkhead for accessories like the Nauticam NA-DP4 housing



for an HD DP4 4.3” monitor for video use.

The rear door of the housing leaves room for the large 3” OLED LCD touch screen to be angled up about fifteen degrees. During my field tests I found this angled LCD viewing position was much more comfortable compared to a flat screen for shooting in both portrait and landscape. The housing has a depth rating of 100 meters (328ft.) well beyond the limits of recreational divers.



Panasonic 7-14mm, at 7mm ISO-400, F/5, 1/250th, Cooper's Reef, Dry Tortugas Florida USA

My housing was equipped with the optional flexitray with dual grips which I used for much of my field testing. The tray handles are laterally adjustable to allow for greatest comfort with or without gloves and for hands of all sizes. The grips are also threaded on top for attaching a verity of strobe arm mounting balls. Two optical flash connectors for the Sea & Sea type fiber cords are located above the port opening and provided



reliable automatic flash exposure while I was using the Inon Z-240 and S&S YS-D1 strobes.

Like the Nauticam NA-NEX-7 housing the NA-EM5 housing has been designed to take full advantage of the electronic viewfinder (EVF) and a standard EVF pickup viewfinder is included with the housing. The EVF finder worked well and allowed a full view of the information on the EVF screen much like a quality DSLR optical finder would. An accessory LCD window is being released which can be user installed and accepts the excellent Nauticam 45 and 180 degree accessory optical viewfinders. This will be my choice when using the EVF because it allows a much larger 1:1 view into the viewfinder.

Nauticam also has a range of seven acrylic dome ports to cover most of the lenses I listed above.

Some of the flat ports include the 67mm thread for accessory closeup lenses. Nauticam is also developing a port for the Olympus 12-50mm zoom which will allow the lens to zoom over the entire range and be switched into the macro mode. A new port for the Olympus 60mm macro lens with access to the focus limiting switch is also being considered for the system. All use the excellent port locking system that Nauticam is well known for and all ports are interchangeable between the current eleven and future mirrorless camera housings.

If you are a longtime user of DSLR systems the first thing you will appreciate about the NA-EM5 housing is how compact and easy it is to move around with both in and out of the water. Like all of the compact aluminum housing it is somewhat negative with both the 45mm macro port and the larger six inch port for the



Spotted Moray Eel, Panasonic 45mm Macro, ISO-200, F/11, 1/250th

Panasonic 7-14mm wide angle lens. I have been using Inon float arms to offset the negative weight and have had no issues with fatigue in my right wrist holding the housing for extended periods of time.

When I use the E-M5 above water I always have the vertical battery grip attached to the camera because it makes the camera much easier for me to hold and control. Even with the battery grip the size and weight of the system is less than most DSLRs. Underwater I found the

camera controls easier to use while in the housing than on land with the battery grip. This may just be because I have used the camera underwater so much more than on land but it still says a lot about the well laid out design of of the Nauticam NA-EM5 housing.

While the controls are not as well spread out as those you would find on many DSLR housings they are still quite easy to use and I found myself spending a lot more time looking into the viewfinder than at the controls.



Panasonic 7-14mm, at 7mm, ISO-200, F/7.1, 1/250th, Avanti Wreck, Dry Tortugas Florida USA

is a major upside when shooting macro and trying to keep a very small animal in sight from frame to frame without having to look away from the viewfinder for shooting information. While I still firmly believe that a quality optical viewfinder on a DSLR is without doubt superior in overall image sharpness the EVF still has several note worthy advantages.

The E-M5 auto focus speed was both accurate and fast in the AF-S mode with all of the lenses I used during this review. I have not fully evaluated the AF-C shooting mode on the E-M5 at this time. Most of the mirrorless cameras I have reviewed in the past have not worked all that well for me in AF-C mode either above water or below water so if fast moving subjects are your passion this should be taken into consideration. One of the things that really sets the E-M5 apart from other mirrorless cameras is its excellent resolution and dynamic range. Even at the higher ISO settings it produces image quality that rivals all but the best DSLR_s in todays market. This is the first camera from Olympus with the in-camera 5-axis image stabilization system which when used with the high ISO image quality of the E-M5 will open an entire new range of very low light imaging possibilities both above and below water.

Of all the digital cameras I have used the E-M5/NA-EM5 combination has by far been the easiest for me to warm up to. It has features that make it an excellent choice for all but the most demanding of underwater photographers. Image quality is in a word outstanding, on par

with the very best APS-C sensor cameras and quite expectable for both large prints or full page publication. As a travel system this camera and housing will be hard to beat. I am able to fit two camera bodies, four to six lenses and gears, the Nauticam NA-EM5 housing, three ports and three or four strobes all into my carry-on bags along with extra batteries and chargers. The file sizes are quite manageable with my current laptop and storage device and the images look great in the new Lightroom 4.

If you are looking to downsize or to move up from a consumer compact without giving up DSLR quality this could be the system you have been waiting for.

Phil Rudin

Getting Help Along The Way

I would like to thank Nauticam-USA Sales Manager Chris Parsons for his assistance along with the fine staff at Reef Photo and Video for much needed technical support. Also the excellent crew at Spree expeditions for the help they provided during my recent trip on the M/V Spree to the Dry Tortugas where part of this review was done.



After several years of using mirrorless cameras I still prefer looking into a viewfinder far more than composing with the LCD screen and I have come to appreciate the upsides of the EVF as a result. The instant feedback of information with the EVF viewfinders is excellent. I can review the image I have just taken in the viewfinder with or without the histogram, view shooting information, see +/- EV level changes in real time and on the histogram. I can also preview the effects that applying art filters will render and much much more all without ever removing my eye from the viewfinder. This

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