

The King is Dead. Long Live the King!

By Michael Gallagher

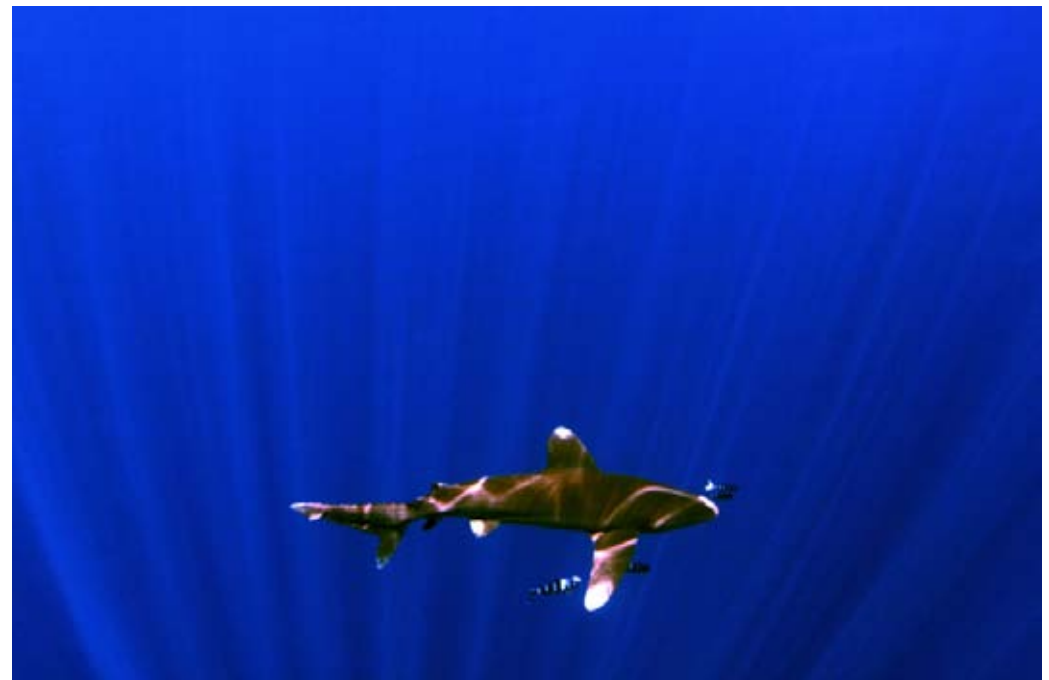
If I'm totally honest, I was determined not to leave the London International Dive Show in March 2009 without a new underwater housing, and before the show I had pretty much convinced myself that it had to be a Subal. I was getting more and more frustrated with my old rig (Canon 20D in an Ikelite housing), and to my mind Subal was the logical housing to partner with my newly acquired Canon 50D camera. After all, most top underwater photographers at the time seemed to use one, particularly those based in the UK at least, so I was fairly confident that Subal was going to be the way forward for me too.

Such was my mindset as I browsed the stalls, scanning for underwater housing manufacturers. Upgrading my underwater housing was a serious decision, so prudence compelled me to investigate as many of the different candidates as possible. I must have played around with five or six different housings that day, plaguing each manufacturer with dozens of questions, but to my surprise it was the Hugyfot that

made the biggest impression on me. Most striking of all was its size and sleekness - how could something that compact do the job properly, I wondered, when all the other housings were much bigger and bulkier. I was both intrigued and dubious in equal measures, so I decided to retreat from the dive show to do some more homework.

My homework consisted of two exercises. Firstly, I sent Andy Fenn (Hugyfot's distributor in the UK) an extensive list of further questions covering anything and everything I could possibly think of. Would the housing be compatible with my current strobe set-up? How reliable was the Hugy-check system? How did after-sales support work? The list of questions went on, but to each and every question I could throw at him, Andy's responses were thorough and reassuring. Secondly, I turned to the

Oceanic Whitetip Shark, , Red Sea, Egypt, Canon 50D, Hugyfot, Tokina 10-17mm FE lens at 17mm, None, F8, 1/100s, 200





Coleman Shrimp, ,Komodo, Canon 50D, Hugyfot, Canon 60mm macro lens, 2 x Ikelite DS125s, F22, 1/125s, 200

internet to establish why I had never heard of Hugyfot before, and whether or not I was about to make a big mistake. As it turned out, I learnt that Hugyfot is a well regarded and long established housing manufacturer, favoured by many top underwater photographers, most of whom are based on the continent. Hugyfot just wasn't that well known in the UK, that was all.

So, let's fast forward to August 2009 when I journeyed to the Red Sea to give my new underwater rig its first outing. As luck would have it,

my dive guide for the week was Dray Van Beeck, underwater photographer extraordinaire and a fellow Hugyfot user. Much to the annoyance of Dray's wife and fellow dive guide Karin, I spent many hours that week chatting away with Dray, learning the finer points of my new Hugyfot housing first-hand from a real expert. In the water it was a revelation, particularly compared to my previous rig - so solid and precise, yet so compact and easy to use. I had found the King of underwater housings!

I did leave the Red Sea with

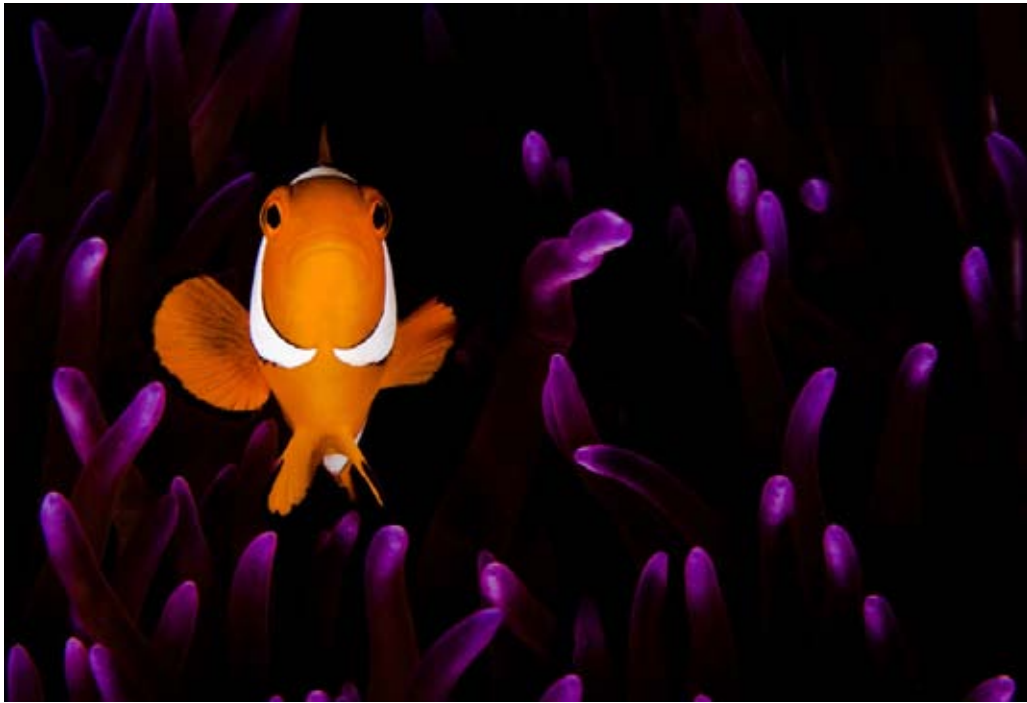


Dwarf Minke Whale, ,Great Barrier Reef, Canon 50D, Hugyfot, Canon 8-15mm FE lens at 10mm, None, F5.6, 1/250s, 200

two gripes in respect of the housing though, which I duly reported to Andy as soon as I was back in the UK. Firstly, after just a week in salt water its beautiful black lustre had faded noticeably. Secondly, the alignment of the camera inside the housing could sometimes move so as to render the camera's shutter speed control dial inoperable. As it turned out, a quick application of cheap and readily available Ballistol oil was all that was needed to restore the housing's original black lustre. Then the camera tray inside my housing was promptly

replaced by a new, more robust version which the Hugyfot engineers had been working on anyway, and the alignment problem never reappeared.

A number of immensely enjoyable and successful trips with my Hugyfot followed. In Papua New Guinea, I photographed plane wrecks and pygmy seahorses and everything in between. Between dives I delighted locals with slideshows on my camera's LCD screen. In the Sudanese Red Sea, a compact camera user wielded a rig bigger than mine. She took pity on me and later became



Clown Anemonefish, , Papua New Guinea, Canon 50D, Hugyfot, Canon 60mm macro lens, 2 x Ikelite DS125s, F22, 1/200s, 200

my girlfriend. At Sundive's annual underwater shoot-out in Australia, there wasn't another Hugyfot to be seen amongst the rigs of more than 50 participants. I won the wide-angle category and came second overall. In Cocos, a Seacam-toting American consoled me for having such a small and patently inadequate rig. I just smiled, and remembered to wave at him underwater when the current was pumping.

In Djibouti, I could leap into the water ahead of oncoming whalesharks, confident that my dome

port wouldn't budge because of the suction generated by the Hugy-check system. Other photographers had their rigs handed down to them from the boat, and often had to satisfy themselves with just tail shots. In Lembah I could wiggle the housing into all sorts of nooks and crannies, and shoot at angles I would have previously thought impossible. On the Great Barrier Reef I could photograph dwarf minke whales one handed, holding onto the floating rope with my other hand as required by the regulations which govern encounters

with these leviathans. Other photographers incurred the wrath of the dive guides, which is never a good idea.

Inevitably with all these dive trips, I was never going to escape without some form of incident. Upon arrival in Bali late one night, blurred by jetlag and a couple of Bintangs, I didn't screw one of the sync cords into the strobe connection on the housing properly, which flooded the strobe connection on the first dive the next morning. The kindness of Tulamben-based underwater photo pro Jeff Mullins helped me to avert complete disaster, as Jeff's special spray dried out the strobe connection sufficiently to restore the strobe's functionality for the rest of the trip, albeit without TTL. Back in the UK, the strobe connection was easily replaced, but I had learnt an important lesson.

Another lesson I learnt along the way was that there is a price to pay for such a robust yet compact housing - negative buoyancy. I didn't have the Hugyfot long before I had the sense to purchase a pair of thick buoyancy arms for it, which immediately made the rig much more neutral and easier to handle in the water.

So, where to next for me and my Hugyfot? Well, sadly we must

now go our separate ways, as I was recently lured into the world of full frame by the impressive specs of the Canon 5D Mark III. Needless to say, this time I didn't need a dive show to help me decide which underwater housing to partner it with. As soon as whispers of the latest entry-level full frame Canon reached me, I put my name on Hugyfot's waiting list for the matching housing. And now with my new underwater rig ready to go, I am busy planning my next dive trip, the first in a new era of underwater photography for me.

The King is dead (well, for sale to be more precise). Long live the King!

Michael Gallagher



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