

Easydive LEO II PRO review

by Rico Besserdich

I had the opportunity to test the LEO II PRO Video housing for the CANON 7D, designed by the Italian housing manufacturer EASYDIVE (www.easydive.it). My first impression : Awesome tool ! Now, let's have a look at it !

The main difference between all other uw housings is that camera controls are accessed electronically by using the camera's mini-USB port. The "heart" of the housing is a matchbox-sized electronic unit that connects the camera to the button panels that you'll find on the right & left of the housing (as parts of the housing's grips).

In times when the big guys of the industry produce at least one new camera model every year, making it necessary to buy a new uw housing too because of it different bits and pieces (such as button positions), the revolutionary idea of accessing most of all camera functions electronically produces a very pleasing advantage: a multiple camera support.

The EASYDIVE LEO II supports all common camera models from CANON & NIKON - In simple words : one housing fits all! That means, we can now upgrade to a

newer camera without the annoying need to buy a new housing.

Supported cameras are (as of December 2012):

CANON : 10D, 20D, 30D, 40D, 60D, 350D, 450D, 550D, 600D, 650D, 5D Mark II & III, 7D and the new 6D.

NIKON : D40, D50, D60, D70, D80, D3000, D3100, D5000, D5100, D300, D300s, D90, D7000, D600, D700 and the D800.

If switching to a different camera, the only items needed to be replaced are the housing's USB electronic and camera mount. This is sold as a bundle for approx GBP 165 (200 EUR).

This is way cheaper than buying a new housing and indeed the multiple camera support clearly pops up as the main advantage of the LEO II. Besides this, if we want to stick with our preferred brand but we want to move to a new model, there is no need to modify the electronic at all. The CANON electronic of the LEO II simply recognises all CANON cameras and can access them. The same goes for NIKON, too. It's as simple as that.

The housing itself comes in a





Housing is closed, sealed and ready to dive. The camera is switched on, showing the main settings on its LCD. A green flashing LED in the button control indicates : system ready.

pleasing round-shaped design, it's made out of 8 mm thick marine grade aluminium and is depth-rated to 100 meters (150 meter & more on demand). 3 stainless-steel fastenings hold the housing's backplate which is double o-ring sealed. And for those who like to go to uw photo dives without o-rings there is a leakage detector (optical) built in, too ;-)

The 2 ergonomic grips support 2 bayonet-style strobe arm connectors each enabling you to connect four strobes or 2 strobes and 2 video/photo lights.

The single strobe cable connector is a Nikonos 5/6 pin one (switchable).

TTL functionality or fiber-optic strobe connection is not yet supported.

The standard version of the housing comes with a 6-button panel, allowing the user to access to 10 functions of the camera - some buttons can be pressed together, acting as a kind of shortcut. The PRO version comes with two button panels giving access to even more functions. I have used the so called Video Version of the housing where the right button panel controls the photo functions and the left-hand panel the video functions of my 7D.

The housing's port connector is a bayonet-style one; there are ports



Juvenile Lionfish – Na'ama Bay, Egypt. Canon 7D in Easydive LEO II PRO housing, Canon EF-S 60mm Makro lens f/3.5 , 1/250 s , ISO 100. 2 Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes in manual mode

available for all commonly used lenses for u/w photography. The port diameter is of 105mm which gives space for lenses (such as some SIGMA zoom lenses) that often do not fit into other housings/ports.

First impression : It is a real beauty. More than this, it even looks noble, a Italian jewel of a design at its finest :-)

The housing's USB electronic

requires 2 AA size batteries (preferably Sanyo Eneeloop's) to run. The batteries unit and the electronic itself are stored inside the housing but can be easily removed.

Fully charged batteries do supply enough energy up to 12 hours of operation (actually, during my tests they lasted as long as 16 hours).

Mounting the camera into the housing is easy. 3 cables are to



*Panorama shot of the Fiddle Garden“, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.
Canon 7D in Easydive LEO II PRO housing Tokina 10-17mm lens (at the 10mm end)
f/7.1 , 1/100 s , ISO 100. Ambient light*

connected to the camera : mini USB, remote control and strobe connector. After switching the camera on, we'll need the housing's USB electronic, there is a tiny switch for it. 3 LED's indicate the status of the unit. Green light indicates "everything ready to go", yellow means "battery low" and red says "out of order/malfunction". The self-test takes only few seconds and the red light never blinked to me.

As the housing does not have a top window to read the camera's settings, it is advisable to turn the camera on before going to dive, de-activate the "auto off" function and set the camera's LCD to "Info" so that it displays the camera's settings such as ISO, aperture, shutter etc.

If you forget this step you would then be shooting blind. And as there is no button to switch the camera on or off, it might be a good idea not to

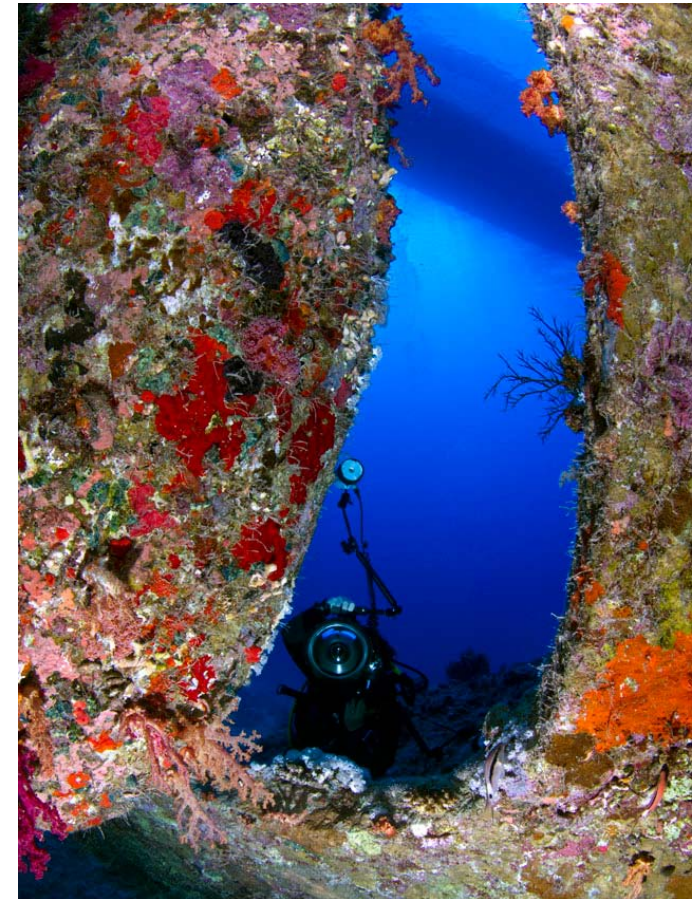
forget to switch the camera on before finally closing the housing and hopping in the water.

During my tests, every day I was out for diving for 8 hours (camera switched on all the time) and after returning back to the hotel, the camera battery power was still at 25%, still enough to transfer all my pictures to the computer.

Mounting the backplate to the housing was quick & easy as well as mounting the port to the housing.

The bayonet style port mount gives a good & safe feeling of 'locked & tight'. When using zoom lenses (during my test I used a Tokina 10-17mm and a Sigma 10-20mm), assembling the zoom gear was easy but -as with all kind of zoom gears- it required a proper double check.

A huge variety of flatports, extensions rings



UW photographer v/s the prop of the Dunraven – Red Sea, Egypt

Canon 7D in Easydive LEO II PRO housing. Tokina 10-17mm lens (at the 10mm end). f/11 , 1/80 s , ISO 200, 2 Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes in manual mode

and domeports are available and all look very solid and well designed.

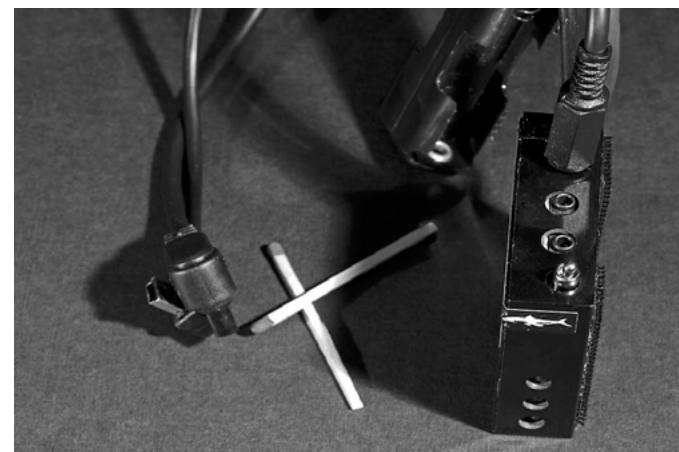
All set up for wide-angle photography (Tokina 10-17mm lens, domeport, Easydive carbon strobe-arms plus 2 Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes) the housing turned out to be neutral underwater.



The ‘heart’ of the housing: The USB electronic control unit plus batteries.



Inside the housing.



The housing’s electronic USB unit. More or less size of a matchbox.

It is very ergonomic and power-saving to be with it underwater and I never experienced any wrist ache. The 2 grips are very ergonomic and you just need your thumb(s) to access the control buttons and take your shots.

Looking through the housings “viewfinder“ to achieve a first shot comes as a bit of a surprise : There is no viewfinder ! The housing’s backplate holds 1 huge window (polycarbonate) and you are looking directly through the camera’s viewfinder. Although very suspicious at the beginning, I have to say that it worked just great.

For some camera models, the manufacturer offers mini-viewfinders that replace the one of the camera, providing a larger field of view.

Although, the “EasyFinder” is not available for the Canon 7D, I didn’t miss it.

Changing shutter speed, aperture and other settings worked quickly, I haven’t notice any delay caused by the USB electronics. To review a pic after shooting it (I don’t do this after every shot, but

sometimes I like to have a quick look) it is a good idea to set the camera to “Display last image until any button is pressed” .

However this was the way I did it. If you are used to review all your pictures, while doing your safety dive stop, you might find it disappointing that such a option is not provided by the housing as it is not provided by the camera’s remote-controllable operations.

The PRO version of the housing comes with 6 more buttons on the left side. Which camera functions are accessible through those buttons depends simply on the USB protocol of the camera and on what you want. The USB unit of the housing is programmable, by the manufacturer, which gives users the opportunity to create their own ideal setup. There is a list of accessible camera controls (depending on camera model) and you can choose which function you would like to access with which button.

For NIKON, the selection of focus points is

working with the LEO II, but regrettably it is not for CANON.

But despite the disadvantage of not being able to change autofocus points of my 7D (often I had it set to middle focus spot only), I’ve found the housing extremely easy & ergonomic to use while shooting underwater.

I am not a videographer but as the Video version of the housing was given to me I of course used the opportunity. The left button panel of the housing accesses the video functions of the camera.

Live View on/off, recording on/off, white balance (presets), autofocus + manual focus controls are provided. The right side button panel provides magnification & ISO control when shooting in video mode. I’ve shooted around 40 minutes of video in several takes and haven’t spotted any problems.

An Easydive housing is like a Ferrari : If you know how to handle it, it is a incredible powerful tool ;-). The Easydive LEO II PRO is a very well



*Glassfishes – Na'ama Bay, Egypt
Canon 7D in Easydive LEO II PRO housing. Canon EF-S 60mm Makro lens.
f/3.2 , 1/250 s , ISO 100. 2 Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes in manual mode*

designed & high quality piece of kit for the advanced underwater photographer, with easy access to the most important functions of his/her camera underwater.

Digital SLRs of the newer generations do come with a overwhelming array of functions & buttons (some of them very confusing), but in the end what makes a shot is still having an eye for photography.

The Easydive housing does add several functions, however LEO II can't access all options of your camera. It never will. So, if you

prefer to play with buttons, wheels & magic sticks instead of taking photos underwater this might be not the right housing for you. The question is: do you really need more ?

Having one housing that can host several different cameras comes in very handy and inexpensive and the USB electronics, and therefore the accessible controls customized is a value which speaks for itself.

To sum up, as a professional underwater photographer, I can highly recommend this housing.

Standard Version (housing body, USB electronic, 2 grips, 1 Nikonos



Photo : Isabella Maffei

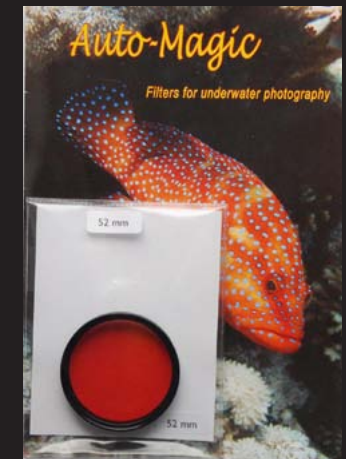
strobe connector, backplate, camera mount, zoom control, 1 button unit with 6 buttons) is 1690,00 EUR (GBP 1.390,00). PRO Version“ : (including another button unit with six more buttons) is 2090,00 EUR (GBP 1.720,00)

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