

Nauticam Olympus 12-50 mm port

by Phil Rudin

The 12-50mm F/3.5-6.3 ED M.Zuiko EZ micro 4/3 lens from Olympus has been released for several months now and has become widely discussed in underwater photography circles and U/W photography forums. In this article I will review some of the new underwater equipment made to support this lens and talk about why it is becoming so popular among Micro 4/3 camera owners.

The Olympus 12-50 zoom is the prime “kit” lens sold with the Olympus OMD E-M5 camera world wide, the lens also works for any of the M4/3 camera bodies back to the E-PL1. The E-M5 camera and lens sell for around \$1199/£1140 and the lens alone is \$469.00/£264* This lens is a compact, lightweight 4.2X zoom lens that covers a wide range (84-24 degrees) and also has a macro feature. The lens has a minimum focus distance of 20cm (7.87”) and locks at 43mm in the macro mode.

Once locked into the 43mm macro mode the lens focuses in a range from around 20-50cm (7.87-19.68”). The Olympus specs say the lens will fill the frame at around 48x36mm at highest magnification. I am getting measurements closer to

36x27mm or about 1:1 on a 35mm sensor. The 36x24mm 35mm 1:1 difference v. 36x27mm for the M4/3 is the difference between the 4/3 format and the 35mm 3/2 format. On the M43 sensor, with the Olympus 60mm macro lens you would be getting true 1:1 magnification of around 17.3x13mm (0.68x0.51”) at full magnification making the 43mm macro mode on the 12-50 a 1:2 lens on the M43 sensor.

This is the only kit lens I am aware of that has a zoom range as wide as 24 degrees and as long as 84 degrees with a macro function of such high magnification. The lens has the MCS (movie and still) mechanism for smooth and quite zooming during movie clips. The lens also has great build quality with the Olympus dust and splash proof construction which is excellent for harsh conditions.

Depending on your system type this lens can be used with a

Whip Coral Shrimp Pair, Olympus E-M5, Nauticam NA-EM5 housing with Nauticam port and zoom gear, Olympus 12-50 mm zoom, at 43mm, ISO200, F/16, 1/8 sec, 2X Inon Z240 strobes



number of housing configurations. For the current and past Olympus Pen and OMD housing systems the lens will fit behind the stock port designed for the housing. It can also be used with the Zen Underwater WA-100 Pen dome port for a wider angle of view and closer focus distance through the zoom and macro range.

Olympus has added an upgrade to the OMD firm wear which allows the camera to zoom the lens from to 12mm or to 50mm when set to U/W wide angle or U/W macro mode. I don't know if this is an update that will reach all past Olympus M43 cameras or not. I hope to see custom gears for Olympus housing systems as well in the near future but this remains up in the air.

Nauticam has introduced a macro port and zoom gear set that allows control over both the power zoom function and macro function of the 12-50 zoom lens. The port has the standard Nauticam port locking system, 77mm threads for mounting accessory closeup lenses and a left hand control that allows the lens to be shifted from E-zoom to macro modes by a clockwise or counter clockwise turn. The E-zoom function works off the main zoom control also accessed with the left hand. In a review of the Nauticam NA-NEX-5 for UWPMAG.COM I described the housing as a brilliant fusion of advanced engineering, innovation, style, ergonomics and compactness.

This port and zoom/macro gear are of that same excellent design we have come to expect from Nauticam living up to the "Innovation Underwater" Nauticam logo. The gear works in power zoom to allow a smoother zoom while shooting video. While some may suffer from sticker shock when seeing the port/gear combo price of \$800.00/£560.00 you will certainly come to appreciate the ease of control this



system provides once you hit the water. Because of the complex gear design needed to control both power zoom and macro the gear set includes nine parts and twelve screws to complete the assembly. The gear includes several pages of instructions for mounting which is really not that hard for anyone who can follow a few pictures and turn the included screwdriver. This port is also ideal for the 60mm macro with or without the Nauticam 60 macro manual focus gear.

The 12-50 zoom lens will also work with other Nauticam flat ports and the four inch dome port with the Olympus auto zoom. Keep in mind that you will only be able to use the 12mm and 50mm ends of the lens with the firmware upgrade. You can also lock the lens in the 43mm macro mode before mounting the camera in the housing if you only want to shoot in the macro mode. An after market gear for the 12-50 zoom and Nauticam housings is also being made by DIGI&DIVE which mounts quickly and controls the manual zoom function from 12 to 50 mm, this gear does not access the macro mode but is reported to work quite well. The



Anemone Shrimp with Eggs, Olympus E-M5, Nauticam NA-EM5 housing with Nauticam port and zoom gear, Olympus 12-50 mm zoom, at 43 mm, ISO200, F/13, 1/250 sec, 2X Inon Z240 strobes

gear can be sourced through, unterwasserkamera.at for €95,00.

With the manual zoom gear the lens is set by turning the zoom control on the left hand side of the housing. The power zoom takes a dive or two to master and you can run past the desired stopping point if you bare down to hard on the control. The focal length of the lens as it changes can be seen in the upper right corner of the camera display if you want to set a precise focal length between 12 and 50 mm.

Since most underwater closeup lenses for DSLR and Mirrorless cameras use the 67mm thread, Nauticam is offering a 77mm flip adapter for the 12-50 zoom port which will hold the 67mm lenses. At the time of my review I was using a 77mm to 67mm step-down ring to mount my SubSee +10 closeup

lens to the port using a SAGA 67mm flip holder. This configuration created vignetting at around 13mm to a full blacked out circle around the image at 12mm. With the Nauticam flip holder this is not an issue and you have full range of the lens as you would without any attachments. At the 12mm to 14mm end of the lens, especially with F/stops below F/8 corners begin to soften as you would expect with a flat port. This is hardly a deal breaker for such an excellent zoom range.

While using the ReefNet SubSee +10 closeup lens I was able to get slightly greater magnification at 50mm more than I did in macro mode (43mm) and without a closeup lens. The +10 closeup lens is of little use in macro mode because of how close the lens will focus locked at 43mm. I was able to gain greater magnification at 43mm using the thinner Inon UCL165 lens. The focus was very close but still within a safe working distance to the subject. I was also surprised at how fast the lens was able to focus in most cases for an f/3.5-6.3 lens. Not as quick as the 60mm macro but still quite good for a higher end zoom lens.

For Micro 4/3 system owners the Olympus 12 to 50 zoom is an excellent addition to the lens lineup and a must have for those getting into a Micro 4/3 interchangeable lens underwater system. Advanced users

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Ribbon Eel, Olympus E-M5, Nauticam NA-EM5 housing with Nauticam port and zoom gear, Olympus 12-50 mm zoom, at 43 mm, ISO200, F/14, 1/250 sec, 2X Inon Z240 strobes

will also enjoy this lens for travel as it covers a wide range of subjects in a small and light weight package. As a top-side travel lens it will also cover most of your needs shooting needs.

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THE IMAGE IS EVERYTHING



Image: Adam Hanlon

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