

DeepPro GoPro H3 Housing & BigBlue VTL2500P Light

by Ron Lucas

I am no videographer but would like to produce short clips of fish, wrecks and reef sites with a view to adding them to the free BZS Bermuda Reef Life HD app for iOS and Android at some point. I know that at very least I would need a Panasonic GH3 or 4 or equivalent plus a housing and dome with an expensive wide angle lens to get professional level footage - an investment of over \$3,500 without lighting. For short clips to back up HD still images I am reluctant to spend this kind of money.

So two Christmases ago I chose the budget route and persuaded my wife Lorraine to gift me a GoPro Hero 3 Black, a LCD Touch Back, a SOLA 2000 video light and a ULCS handle and tray. I thought I was all set as I could use my existing arms and clamps. I anticipated this might be the ideal setup for days when I go diving at short notice or otherwise could not find the time or energy to set up my DSLR rig for still photography. After all one can even get still photos with the GoPro as well as video. I was on my way! I could mount the GoPro to the top of my DSLR housing for overseas trips.

Since 2012 two new generations of the GoPro with incremental improvements have been released and we are now up to the GoPro 4 which has 4K video. albeit underwater it would probably be better with a small sensor to use one of the lower HD resolutions.

I very soon found the shortcomings of the GoPro system for underwater use. These include the very light weight of the setup which greatly impacts video stability and more important for me the close up minimum distance of about 12 inches before focus is achieved which is too far on a wide angle lens camera for smaller fish photography. The lack of a zoom facility is only partially resolved by the different wide angle settings but I could live with that. Then, as has happened to a couple of friends GoPros, the plastic camera housing started a minor leak - I could not work out where but I suspect around one of the push button controls. My view is that the \$60 GoPro Scuba Housing is not suitable for sustained use at depth. Well perhaps for occasional SCUBA use and probably fine for snorkelling



GoPro Scuba Housing and DeepPro GoProHousing

and free diving. Some folks have had more success. I was able to rescue the camera thanks to desiccants absorbing most of the moisture. I purchased a replacement GoPro Scuba Housing but was afraid to use it in case it leaked and I wrote off the camera!

When the USA made DeepPro housing was announced I put my name down with the manufacturer for one of the first batch and also ordered a BigBlue Video light, both of which arrived late September. The very solid hard anodised DeepPro

6061 aluminium housing with all stainless and brass hardware has been tested to 450 feet and so is suitable for technical diving although I rarely go beyond 100 ft. Because it features a lexan dome with shade and a built in diopter, it is optically corrected for excellent underwater wide angle without degradation and with the same field of view as the GoPro POV (point of view) settings above water. These are significantly reduced underwater by the flat port of the GoPro housing which comes with

the camera. The DeepPro has proper levers instead of buttons, closeup ability to 6 inches, a built in shade for the LCD window plus a tray with 2 handles. Actually it is much easier to install the camera and close the housing with the two locking spring clips than using the mechanism on the GoPro plastic housing. For divers who do not want to use video lights a filter can be installed, preferably by DeepPro for blue or green/fresh water. The housing is slightly negative in water which is a good thing for video but if using video lights I suggest adding some flotation. I used medium foam floats on my second dive and this was a great improvement. I have been providing feedback to DeepPro on a couple of very minor aspects and these will be incorporated in future batches. They are related to the handles/tray and instructions rather than the housing itself which I have found great in use. It really just takes minutes to get the outfit ready for diving if batteries are charged and the micro SDHC card installed and formatted. When not in use I keep the main housing O ring in a sealed ziplock bag rather than leave it in the housing groove to deform. The GoPro 3, 3+ and latest 4 cameras all fit the DeepPro Housing.

Trays for future batches will incorporate a centre hole so that a tripod can be installed and



Nauticam Housing and DeepPro GoPro housing

possible tripod solutions include the GorillaPod Focus or the ULCS Tripod Clamp which I have purchased and is shown in the photo using 8 inch ball arms as legs. For those with the wherewithal it would be best to purchase a fully featured underwater tripod but I only expect to use a tripod arrangement from time to time for close up video of nudibranches and the like. The cost of a high end underwater tripod would otherwise buy a backup GoPro camera. Anyway a full tripod unit would probably be too big for this setup. A setup button control lever has been added for the GoPro 4 although I personally feel that set up should be carried out prior to diving and placing the camera in the housing.

So far I have taken the DeepPro housing on a couple of one hour shallow shore dives and a deeper 55 foot wreck dive where it has performed admirably. Stability



Diver in Wreck, DeepPro Housing, GoPro 3 set on Medium still image, with Big Blue and Sola Video lights

in operation is a light and day improvement over the GoPro plastic housing as is closeup performance. As suggested I removed and clipped the included vinyl dome cover to my BCD once in the water before descending and replaced on surfacing to help prevent scratches to the dome. I would prefer a neoprene dome cover with a draw string as the vinyl cover comes off a little too easily. I have got some video clips of a common in the Caribbean, but rarely seen in

Bermuda, Schoolmaster Snapper and a Blue Parrotfish pooping which might be used by the educators at Bermuda Zoological Society to demonstrate that up to 40% of the sand on our beaches is created in this manner!!!! The kids will love it!! The housing built in LCD shade is quite effective. One problem I do have is the small size of the GoPro LCD screen and wonder if there is anyway this could be magnified.

A GoPro 3+ battery lasts about



DeepPro GoPro Housing with BigBlue and Sola video lights

an hour which is not long enough for me as I usually do two or three dives in a day. I do have spare batteries but rarely risk opening housings between dives on smaller boats in open ocean. However, a solution to significantly extend the GoPro battery time is in hand at DeepPro as they are in the final stages of testing a trickle charge supplemental battery which will fit in the housing. Vivid Housings has developing a Leak Sentinel for the accessory bulkhead port so owners will be able to draw a vacuum to test the housing integrity above water and review during the dive if they wish to add this feature. Both these and other items should be available from DeepPro around when this review is published.

DeepPro install and recommend using 2 small desiccants in their housing and sell packs at nominal charge. I'm not sure they are necessary as I have seen no signs of condensation but they are a good idea in a small housing anyway.

The DeepPro housing does have four hardware mounting holes for the tray and other accessories but in my opinion it is a little too large to mount on



Forceful Tug, DeepPro housing, GoPro set on Wide. Video Frame Clip with ambient light

another camera rig. For size comparison take a look at the photos shown with the standard GoPro dive housing and a medium size DSLR housing

First impressions of the DeepPro GoPro housing are excellent and although it costs \$1230 (twelve hundred and thirty) dollars more than a replacement GoPro plastic housing the phrase "You get what you pay for" comes to mind. Don't forget when looking at cost it includes the built in dome, diopter, tray and handles. It is so much easier to carry underwater than a DSLR set up.

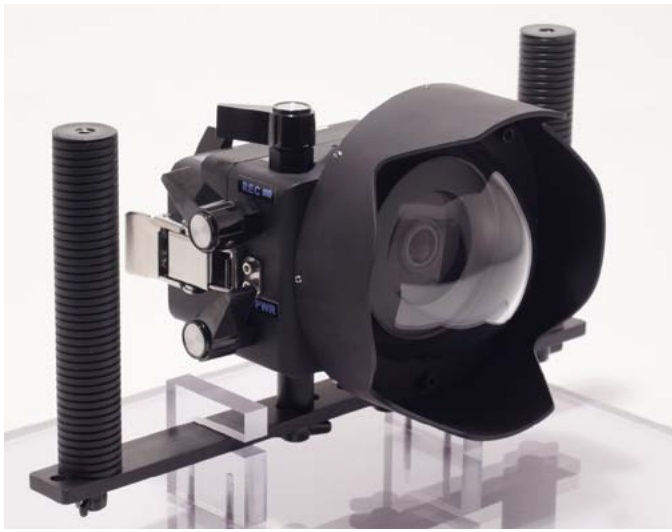
The instructions from DeepPro are quiet comprehensive and they offer servicing and extended warranty which is recommended every two years. I have found responses from DeepPro to all queries and suggestions to be great. The housing comes with a 2 year warranty and includes a spare body O ring. A complete set of O rings costs \$15 and a replacement dome and O ring just \$50. Check



Grey Snapper in Wreck, DeepPro Housing, GoPro 3 set on Medium still image, with BigBlue and Sola Video lights

out the details and sample videos on their website <http://deepprosystems.com>. For airline travel the whole setup including lights and chargers would easily fit into a carry on bag on most airlines.

The Bossk BigBlue VTL 2500P Li ion rechargeable 2500 lumen fully featured 120 degree wide adjustable power video and technical light is a bargain, especially when bought from DeepPro in conjunction with a housing as they offer kit prices at discount. On its own it costs \$430. The solid build and technical specification match those of the DeepPro Housing and is rated for 100m. It has 4 video light intensity levels, an alternative 10 degree spot light beam and a built in red mode for night diving so you do not scare the fish. There is an accessory Goodman glove for hands free operation, a yellow filter and a ball mount. The battery level indicator surrounds the single push button switch which takes a little time to get used to. I suspect



DeepPro Systems Domed GoPro Housing

with judicious use I will get 2 dives from the light as during my first dive it was only down to medium charge after leaving on for one hour at maximum intensity. The removable battery takes several hours to fully recharge in the supplied external charger but if you purchase a spare battery as I did this would be of little concern. In comparison to my 2012 model Sola 2000 video light it has many more features, is more powerful, heavier built and more versatile. However I will have to pay particular attention to the double O ring servicing each time I install a battery whereas the Sola 2000 is charged externally without removing the battery which substantially reduces the likelihood of a flood. Also at just over 461g with battery it is almost twice as heavy as the Sola 2000 which is very light. However, battery burn time is much longer. DeepPro confirm that they will liaise with Big Blue should the video light fail from other than misuse during its one year warranty period.



BigBlue VTL 2500P Li ion rechargeable

I should be pleased to report further on this housing and lighting solution to interested persons by email to ronlucasphoto@logic.bm once I have had more dives with the setup. I anticipate using it many times in 2015. Maybe one day I will be able to call myself a videographer!

Please note that I cannot comment on the long term durability of either of these products until I have had further experience with them. I paid for both items at published kit prices for personal use only and my review has not been influenced in any way by DeepPro or BigBlue.

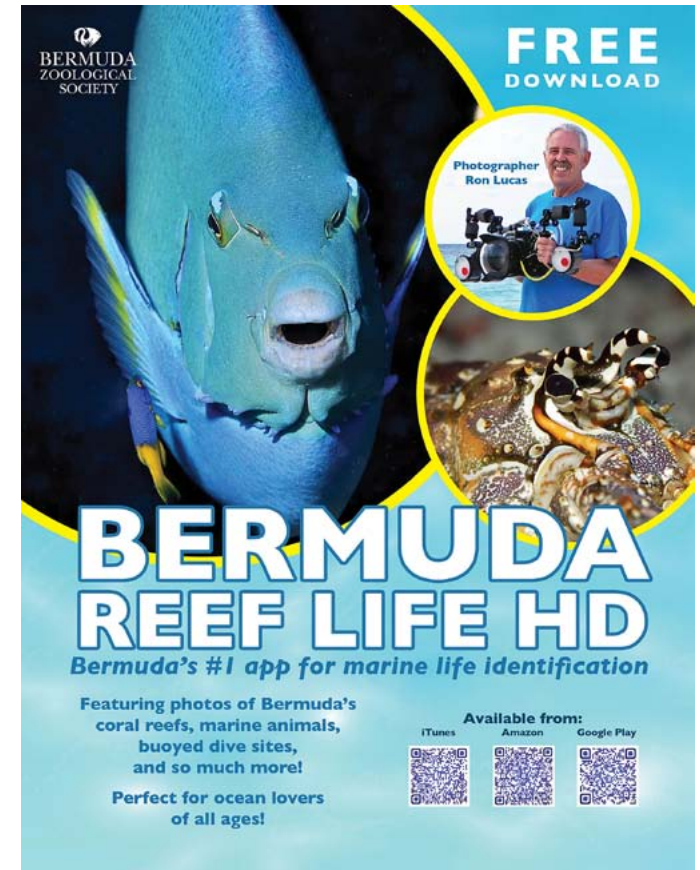
Ron Lucas

Author of the free Bermuda Reef Life HD App for iOS and Android smartphones and devices

www.ronlucasphoto.smugmug.com



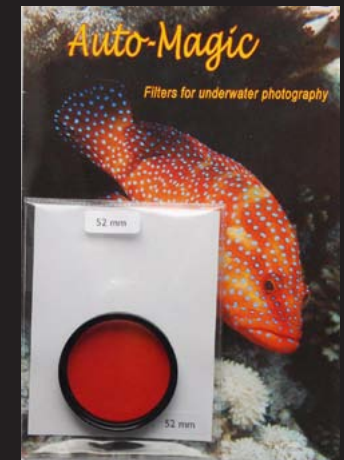
The Author in Caraquet Boiler D7100 Nauticam Housing, Inon 240 Strobes, f9 1/125



We've got you covered!



Magic filters are now available in 3 options. Original Magic for use in blue water with DSLR and compact cameras with Manual White Balance, Auto-Magic for compact cameras in automatic point and shoot mode. GreenWater Magic for use in green water with DSLR and compact cameras with Manual White Balance. Prices start at just £19.



The Auto-Magic formula is now available in a Plexiglass filter that can be added or removed underwater.

www.magic-filters.com