

Saga Dive Fiber Optic Ring Flash

By Jack Connick

Ring lights have long been a popular way for macro photographers to get bright, even light directly onto small subjects.

Due to the magnification involved, macro photos can consume a lot of light. Underwater photographers have long struggled to get their camera housings with two strobes into tight spaces, or get the lights positioned close enough to the front of the lens without creating lens flare or shadows from the port.

Ring lights take care of many of these difficulties, and while a bit bulkier they are fast and easy to shoot with.

Until now there haven't been many choices. Athena Industries produced a ring flash for a while, although it's been pulled off the market now. It had a large ring strobe light unit, power unit, electrical sync cord and needed adapters to fit ports. Thus it was a good, but somewhat heavy, bulky and expensive system. It also would not work with electrically synced cameras, as it used a re-worked Sea & Sea YS-01 strobe as the "power unit" that need a fiber optic cord to fire.

The Saga Dive Fiber Optic Ring Flash uses fiber optic technology, this is an add-on to existing strobes that transfers the strobe light output through a parallel series of fiber optic cords held in place around the front of the port. One advantage is that the fiber optics at the front of the port are much smaller in diameter and lighter than other ring lights with dedicated large, round flash units.

The light from the Saga flash adapter is very

even. Light was bright and even on the subject and rapidly tapered off in the background, creating nice bokeh, or a black background. Ring lighting is very even, so if you want more creative lighting solution, you're better off sticking with standard strobe setups, there's not much you can adjust on the ring flash.

TTL is the preferred shooting method, and my Sea & Sea YS-D1 strobe and D800 Nauticam housing worked very well and easily. Finding the subject at great magnification became the hardest part; I knew the lighting would be perfect, or at best I'd dial the EV up or down on the strobe with one click of the dial.

The Saga Ring Light also has an adjustable collar that allows you to pull or push the ends of the fiber optic cords in and out, thus focusing the light narrower or wider, and allowing for different lengths of diopter lenses. It

All shots taken in Raja Ampat with a D800 in a Nauticam housing with a Nikor 105VR and either a SubSea +5 or Nauticam SMC diopters.



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actually also can be used to give slightly more or less light on a subject as well.

Saga Dive designed the unit to be mounted on a short arm with the strobe upside down and centered over back of the housing. This does allow for the best flexibility of adjustment of the fiber optic cords, but it seemed in the way for me and blocked the use of a focus light mounted on the port.

I flipped the strobe cover over on the fiber



optic taking them out plugging them back. Then I mounted the strobe directly onto the left handle ball mount with a clamp. This freed up the focus light holder, and also mounted the unit out of the way of looking over the housing at the subject. The fiber optic cords are at a slight angle, but I was still able to adjust them in and out without difficulty or creating strain on them. One other note was that I found the strobe cap to be very slightly loose on the front of the strobe, but a single wrap of gaffer tape created a little “stiction” to hold it firmly in place.

They also sell it with a flip holder for a 67mm macro diopter, and if you want to use a flip holder that is the only answer – the popular Nauticam flip diopter holder doesn’t fit.

I decided to buy my demo unit with no holder, figuring I’d be shooting with my 105VR Nikon lens with a ReefNet SubSee +5 or Nauticam Super Macro Converter all the time. But in practice, flip holders are a nice adaption, and several times I wish I had the choice of taking the diopter off as you can then refocus the ring light wider.

Shooting was very easy, but you are limited to shooting tight macro. Usually with my normal

macro setup I can flip up the diopter and shoot fish “portraits”, or larger objects farther away. My dive buddy tried it on his Nauticam 7DMKII, but also mounted a second strobe off to the side; not a bad idea to have more flexibility, at the cost of a larger unit.

Mounting it off to the side, you also lose the ability to add arm floatation. I found the Stix FB-AQ float belt to fit well, and this added quite a bit of floatation to balance the rig nicely.

I found it to be very durable; the fiber optic cords are quite stiff and won’t bend or break in normal use. You do have to be a little careful not to get too close to a sea fan and catch the fiber optic cords on them!

About the only negative to the Saga Ring Flash is that it is sort of bulky to pack. However, it’s light and fairly unbreakable, so I just wrapped it in a few layers of bubble wrap and t-shirts and stuck it in my dive bag.

Currently, they are shipping the DSLR model and a much smaller compact camera version. They are studying adapting that model for use with mirrorless cameras using the Olympus mz 60mm macro lens as well.

The Saga DSLR Ring Flash Adapter is available custom made to your order; mounting option, strobe (Inon z240, D2000 or Sea & Sea YS-D1), port and housing all have to be allowed for. Longer 100mm ports that have no steps are necessary for it to fit. Turnaround is about 15-20 days and they ship directly to customers worldwide.

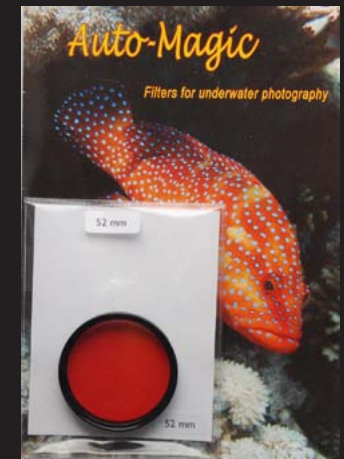
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