

Panasonic Lumix LX100 Review

By Jim Decker

I was super excited to get my hands on the Panasonic LX100. It's a revolutionary camera! Being the first compact camera with the ability to shoot 4K video and also great stills. I wanted to see how it stacked up against other top compact cameras such as the Canon G7X and the Sony RX100 II and III.

4K Video Recording

Of course the #1 big draw to this camera is the 4K recording capability. The LX100 shares the same 4K specs as the GH4, recording 4K 30p at a data rate of 100 mbps. The video looks fantastic. The exposure meter can be set to remain active during shooting, making it easy to monitor exposure in addition to zebra striping to show highlight areas that are starting to get a little hot. Video can be shot completely in manual exposure mode. These features combined, rival or exceed the capabilities of video modes in most other mirrorless or compact cameras. The LX100 makes an excellent primary video capture device especially if one shoots a little bit of stills too.

Excellent Custom White Balance

One of the problems with Panasonic in the past has been poor custom white balance execution. Previously, it had been so bad as to require a red filter or lights, with no chance of a decent white balance without either of those items. I was pleasantly shocked to find the LX100 execute a perfect white balance at 50 feet on my first dive. I

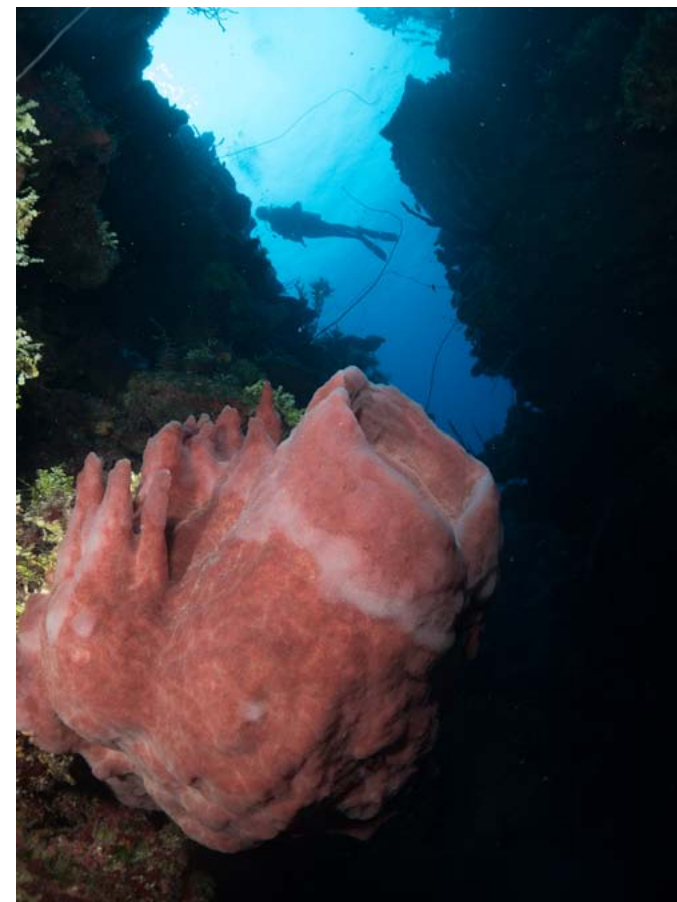


(If you're online, click to play.)

4K video from the LX100 is stunning, with great color rendition in ambient light with a custom white balance or when lit with video lights. 4K footage down sampled to 1080p looks sharper than if it was originally shot in 1080p and is a great reason to shoot 4K now even if you don't have a 4K display yet.

even had a great custom white balance executed at 70 feet.

The procedure for executing a white balance is simple. Press the white balance button, press up to activate custom white balance, then the center button to execute. There are 4 white balance banks



The LX100 does a great job with smooth gradients in blue backgrounds that go from very bright to dark.

available making it easy to save favorites for different depths or with lights.

Until now, I haven't seen cameras other than Canon execute such a great custom WB. I hope this is an indication that the next generation of GH4 will also get this great custom white balance color.



The LX100 does an excellent ambient light white balance execution to bring back true colors when strobes wouldn't be practical for large subjects like a shipwreck.

Stills

All this talk about 4K video casts a bit of a shadow over the stills features of the camera. It shouldn't though as the performance for stills is top notch. Super-fast autofocus, 11 frames per second in RAW, and a control set that would be at home on a top end mirrorless or SLR. The sensor is the same size as a micro 4/3 found in Panasonic and Olympus mirrorless cameras, giving great low light performance. Although the resolution

is only 12MP, the images are sharp and crisp with excellent detail.

Wide and Macro Accessory Lenses

With a lens as large as on the LX100 it presents a few challenges for shooting wide angle on a dive. While the stock port has no problem accepting a flip attachment for a macro lens, wide angle is another story. The stock port puts a wide angle



lens too far away from the camera's lens to be effective. The stock port can be removed and a shorter front port attached to bring a wide angle lens to the right distance. In testing we found the Inon UWL-H100 lens to have the best results with sharp corners. A dome unit can be added to the lens to expand the angle of coverage past 150 degrees. The camera lens needs to be zoomed to about 28 or 29mm to avoid vignetting of the shade. The camera has a menu option for "Zoom Resume" which will set it back to the last zoom setting used making it easy to always be set at the right focal length.

Control Set

The control set is a bit unconventional, but is very

comprehensive. There's no mode dial. The shutter speed and aperture dials both have an auto setting that determines what mode you are in. Put both on "A" and you're in Program Auto. Pick your own shutter speed and aperture and you're in Manual mode. This makes it easy to do quick changes without having to access a mode dial.

There's plenty of direct access to controls such as exposure compensation, white balance, and ISO. In fact, ISO is on a control wheel, so you can dial in ISO, shutter speed, and aperture all instantly with dedicated dials on the housing. This is especially crucial in video situations where quick ISO and aperture changes are mandatory to keep up with the action.



Unlike other compact cameras, focus can be separated from the shutter on the LX100 and reassigned to the rear AF-ON button. This is the preferred focusing technique used with mirrorless and SLR cameras for both macro and wide-angle underwater photography.

A downside is the size of the camera. It is not really “pocketable” but still much smaller than a mirrorless camera. It is very similar in size to a Canon G series camera. The trade off is a control set that is much more like a top end mirrorless or SLR than a compact.

Conclusion

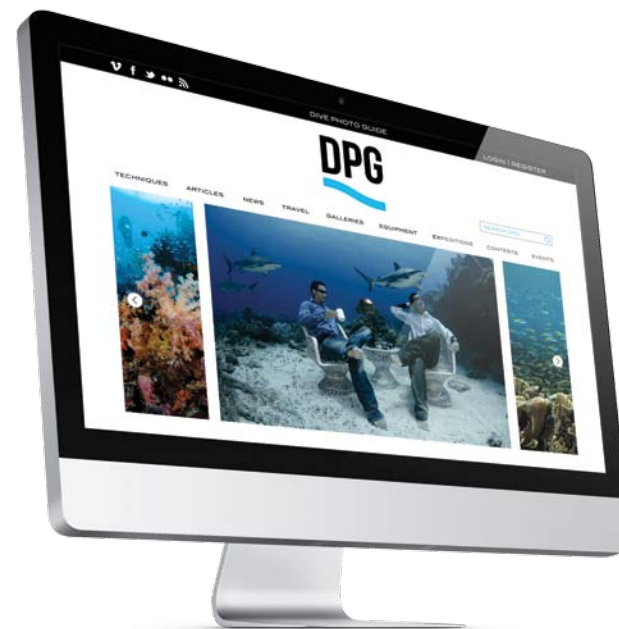
The LX100 is the best compact camera I have shot so far. Top-notch stills, excellent 4K video, great macro and wide angle lens options make it a great all-around, no compromise

camera for both the still and video shooter. I’ll still carry around a Sony RX100 topside for its ease of fitting in a pocket, but the LX100 is now my favorite all-around compact camera for underwater.

Jim Decker
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