

Sea & Sea YS-D2 review

by Dan Bolt

For the past couple of months I have been putting the new Sea & Sea YS-D2 (apparently no relation to R2-D2) strobe through its paces around the UK coastline. Since its launch it is already proving to be a popular choice amongst my underwater photographer buddies; with some upgrading to the new model from older Sea & Sea strobes and others switching over from Inon units. I'm going to have a look at what's on offer from the YS-D2 and explore why my friends are parting with their hard earned cash.

The YS-D2's headlines are pretty impressive; although it has the same maximum Guide Number as its predecessor of 32, the recycle time between full-power flashes has been trimmed down to 1.5 seconds from 1.9 previously. We'll see what this this means for you later. At the other end of the power scale the DS-TTLII mode is now able to turn all the way down to a Guide Number of 1, where the previous low was 3.7. Additionally, the EV compensation you can dial in has been increased from +/- 1.5EV to +/-2.0EV giving you total control over the output. For compact camera shooters, there is now a Custom Mode that means you

can program the strobe to cope with the different pre-flash systems used on a huge array of compacts. There are 5 different custom mode settings and the user manual lists the current cameras covered by the modes – I think it is safe to say that you will struggle to find a camera that this strobe won't work with!

The headline figures are what most people judge their flash-units by, but there are other more subtle and aesthetic reasons that go into selecting which is the right strobe for you. So the other changes that Sea & Sea have introduced might not grab the headlines, but are equally important to assessing the overall usefulness of the YS-D2. Top amongst these changes is the newly designed control panel on the rear, not only are the dials chunkier but the rotary magnetic system has a very positive feel and will all but eliminate the accidental-mode-switching annoyance that was all too prevalent on the YS-D1. I'll discuss more about the control panel later.

*YS-D1 (r) & YS-D2 (r) side by side
(front view)*





Rear controls of the YS-D2

Other subtle changes come in the form of a more powerful targeting light which now has two power outputs of 100 & 300 lumens, an audible beep when the unit is ready for action (initially I thought that this was a bit of a gimmick, but in use I've found it surprisingly reassuring and will miss it when I gives the strobe back!), an improved mounting base and fixing bolt and a nice red-filter to cover the targeting light that can be placed into either of the two supplied diffusers. The battery compartment has also been tweaked to make inserting the batteries (in the right order!) easier too.

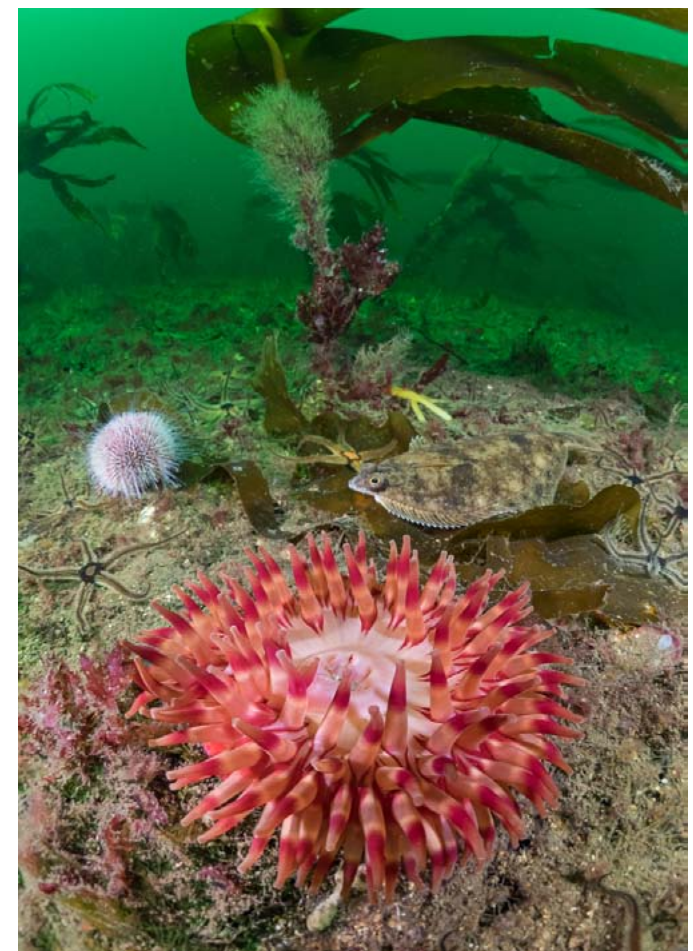
Sometimes it can be the things that DON'T change that can also make a difference, for example going from the YS-D1 to the YS-D2; you can still use the same fibre-optic cables, you can still use the same electronic synch cords, the battery cover



Rear controls of the YS-D1

(and hence the o-ring) is the same, the diffusers use the same mount, and most importantly all your expensive snoots will fit perfectly onto the unit too.

So, back to those changes and what they actually mean in real terms. What difference does 4/10th's of a second really make on the recycle time? For the majority of your underwater time probably none at all, but on those occasions when you are shooting on high-power settings in a rapidly evolving scene it can make all the difference. Imagine shooting sea lions playing in the bright sunlit waters of Mexico, you'll need high-power from your strobes to freeze the action and fill in the light... not a place you want to be waiting around for your strobes to catch up with you. In the UK shooting grey seals can offer the same problem, but I chose a static upturned anchor to explain my



Dahlia anemone. Olympus E-M1, Aquatica AE-M1, Panasonic 8mm fisheye, 1/40th, f/6.3, iso640

point. Here I have a YS-D1 on the left and YS-D2 on the right, and I was shooting rapidly into the sun off a shallow beach. It didn't take long for the D1 to fall behind the 'action'... the difference in speeds between the old and new strobes is clear and very welcome.

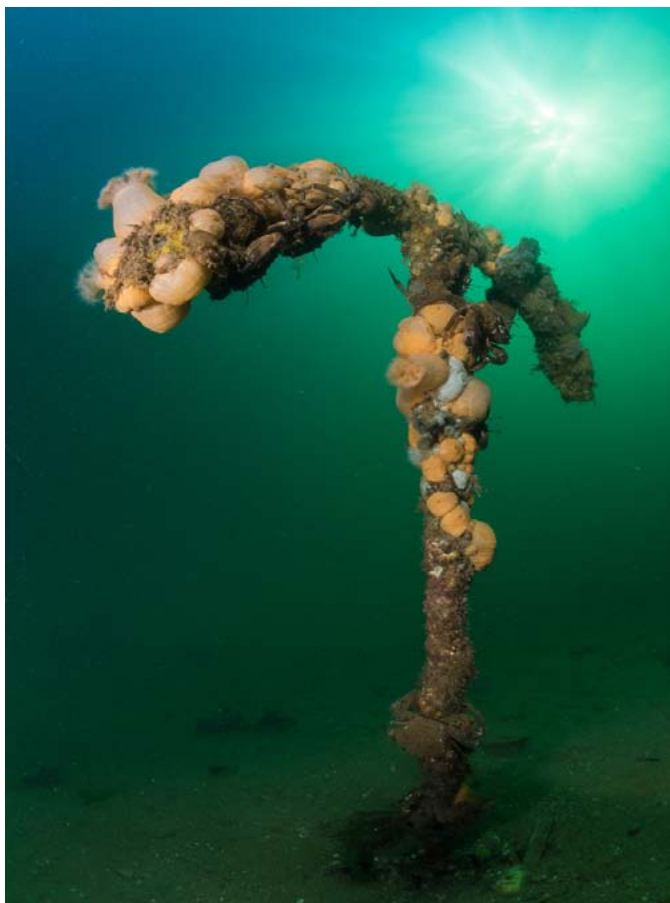
At the other end of the scale, the lower minimum power coupled with the finer control



over the output means you can be a lot more subtle with your lighting. I'm a big fan of my old snoot and I love the challenge of using it for macro – the YS-D2 and an Onderwaterhuis.NL flip snoot are a perfect partnership for the job. This nudibranch and ascidian were both shot with the YS-D2 in DS-TTLII mode with -2.0EV. The effects are different but the method/approach to lighting the same

In use, one of the flaws of the YS-D1 design was that it was all too easy to accidentally knock the camera into the wrong mode or inadvertently change your power adjustment. Simply repositioning the strobe was sometimes enough to move these controls meaning that you lost a shot. I've grown used to it and now always double-check my YS-D1's but on the YS-D2 this issue has been solved totally. The completely redesigned rear control panel now uses very positive-feeling switches and a multi-coloured LED back-light system that tells you what mode you are using. The backlighting is surprisingly effective, but the central mode light it is actually almost too bright on a night-dive!

TTL performance is in-line with the YS-D1,



Plumose anemones on anchor. Olympus E-M1, Aquatica AE-M1, Panasonic 8mm, 1/250th, f/16, iso200

but you now have more control over it with the amount of compensation you can dial in. Optically controlled 'TTL' has truly come of age in the past few years but actual results will vary between camera models and manufacturers. Once you've learned how best to marry your camera to your YS-D2 (by that I mean camera metering modes, on-camera flash output adjustment or strobe output adjustment) then you're all set for productive



Snakelocks anemones. Olympus E-M1, Aquatica AE-M1, Panasonic 8mm, 1/320th, f/18, iso320

shooting. Personally, I never use TTL (apart from shooting for a review!) and can only say that I was satisfied, but not impressed with, the YS-D2 in DS-TTLII mode and my Olympus E-M1. The blame for that should lie with me rather than the strobe because my friends are all very happy with their success-rates from their YS-D2's.

Ultimately, strobe choice is very personal; what might be important to me will be ignored by



Jewel anemone. Olympus E-M1, Aquatica AE-M1, Panasonic 45mm, subsee +10, 1/30th, f/9, iso1250

someone else. I'm a big Sea & Sea strobe fan, mostly because of their simplicity, effective control functions and a design that allows me to use them effectively with 7mm mittens on – I have owned Inon strobes but found myself reaching for the Sea & Sea units almost every dive so they soon ended up on ebay. Whether the YS-D2 will be your next strobe is your choice, but it gets a big 'thumbs up!' from me

Dan Bolt

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