

Macro shooting made easy

by Ee wan Khoo

At the end of the day, it's results that matters. Never mind the inconvenience of dragging a 10kg camera system against a 3kt current, never mind the countless times of strobes adjustment and certainly never mind the 40 minutes of searching for an elusive critter as long as I have RESULTS!!

But what if the results remain and all the inconvenience is reduced to a minimum? Too good to be true? Not anymore. The Subal housing and the Inon Quad flash combination is just a pure joy to operate. I first saw the system at Oceanoptics and immediately knew it's potential under water. It makes sense for one thing, when it comes to macro, you would want a system that is as compact as possible without sacrificing results. Naturally I bombarded the guys with tons of questions and finally the only left to find out, is to bring it underwater.

My opening ceremony was in the Maldives. Though not a popular site for macro shots, I brought it along for a tryout. Encased in the housing is a Nikon F100 with a Nikkor 105mm lens. The attention I got from onlookers while loading a roll of slide is simply awesome. I must admit the system is a handsomely crafted device and changing a roll of slide has never been so cool.

I shot 3 rolls of slides with the system in my 2 days of diving; would have shot more but my primary aim for the trip was wide angle photography. In a way it was really a test shot



and I experimented with numerous settings. The Inon has 4 flash tubes and a sliding mask to masked away 2 tubes should you need to play a little with shadows. As I wasn't presented with much macro subjects, I decided to shoot crinoid shrimps and gobies.

On my return to Singapore, I got the slides processed and the results

confirmed my first impression. The colours were brilliant, contrast was excellent (partly due to Velvia), images were sharp. In short, I was a happy man. Armed with this knowledge and the capabilities of the system, it was only natural that I planned my next trip to critter haven – Manado!

A month later, I found myself at Bunaken marine park –



All shots taken on: Nikon F100 in Subal housing with Inon Z-22 quad flash. Lenses used are Nikkor 60mm and 105mm, with 2x teleconverter, Films are Fujichrome Velvia and Kodachrome 100VS.

Manado. A pygmy seahorse has recently made its' appearance nearby the dive centre and I made it my primary 'mission' to shoot it. The only thing I fear is that with a 105mm lens, I may not get sufficient magnification. All that 's left is now hoping that with the aid of the doublet with screws on the front of the Inon, will further magnify the seahorse. Pygmies have a habit of living in deep waters over 30m and with a mild to strong current flowing. This might be a problem as I needed stability when shooting at minimum focusing distant. However I found out I could operate the Subal with one hand – thanks to the ergonomic design and the strapped handle. The pygmy was in a very awkward position for photography and I needed the other hand as an

anchor while I contort myself into the best shooting position imaginable. I shot 2 rolls on it and hope for the best.

As this is macro haven, there were plenty of subjects to choose from so much so some dives were as short as 20 mins- I ran out of films! I still cannot understand why we are limited to 36 shots in a roll when over the years we have invented smaller, faster and more powerful computers.

So do I shoot 6 frames per subject on 6 subjects or 3 frames on 12? Well if there's one thing I learned about underwater photography is that you never never stint on films. The more uncommon the subject the more shots it deserves.

Shrimps and crabs seem to thrive here. I found them on fans, soft corals, hard corals, anemone and sea cucumbers. Each time I shot them I only had to worry about composition. No strobes position to worry about, aperture priority on f22 setting and strobe setting left on TTL.

The compact design of this system also enable me to get closer to shy creatures without spooking them. I guess the absence of strobe arms looked less threatening. The system also allows me



to work in confine places or when you do not have the luxury of space when shooting among sea fans. Both horizontal and vertical composition are much easier as I need not worry about breaking any corals as opposed to a housing with strobe arms sticking out.

The Inon also has a built in focus light. This light is activated when the shutter is lightly pressed. This assists in low light focusing and I found it to be extremely useful especially when shooting shrimps inside tube sponges.

The Inon also can be mounted through a conventional arm system should you want the light source from other angles. I personally have tried hand holding it from a few angles but it's mainly for experimental sake. The recycle time for each firing on TTL is very fast, making it possible to get as many shots as possible when unexpectedly the tiny shrimp poses for you. I could easily get 5 rolls of 36 frames on 4 standard alkaline batteries-size AA, though most of the time I rely on rechargeable NI-MH.

With such ease of usage, I wasn't surprised to find my stock

of Velvias diminishing. Thankfully I had a friend coming up from Singapore and he graciously brought along 20 rolls. I finished them all, he should have brought 30.

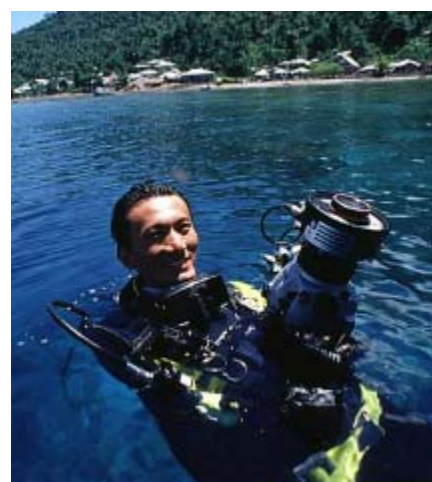
So finally the trip ends and the anxious moment begins. All the ease of usage is nothing if you don't have the results. When the slides came back, I was smiling and smiling wide. It was also a great relieve to get good shots as there were 2 other photographers with me who had doubts about the system. I showed them the results and they just stared at the slides and nodded their head in approval. The results speaks for themselves and a slide speaks a thousand wordsÖÖÖmost of it repetitive – Wow! Wow! Wow!

I have since returned to Manado for another shootout. This time I brought a long a 66mm extension ring. With the extra 'space' created, I could get a 105mm lens with a 2x teleconverter fitted. This essentially gives me a 210mm macro lens. Although the minimum focusing distant increases, it didn't hamper the situation. In fact in for certain subjects, this works very well.

I also experimented with a 60mm lens with a 2x teleconverter and found it to be extremely reliable. With this configuration, magnification improves without sacrificing working distance. Most of my shots were on aperture priority on f/16 and the strobes on TTL.

Of course this system doesn't work for every situation. It cannot get you a whale shark shot nor a manta ray. It's also not for everyone, as I do know of some people who strongly oppose the idea of a quad-flash. However I suggest that you judge it for yourself. For me it's an excellent system for macro shooting.

Ee wan Khoo



Subtronic Alpha

Overspecified and underpriced

This is the Subtronic Alpha.

It is one of the finest underwater flash units in the world.
Yet its costs surprisingly little.



It's equally at home in the hands of a beginner or a pro.

It provides automatic TTL exposure with the Nikonos V and RS and most housed cameras

For more creative lighting you can override the TTL anytime you like and choose from seven manual power settings for fine discrimination. Its up to you.

To ensure you don't miss shots when the action is fast and furious the Alpha recycles in under three seconds.

There's plenty of power with the Alphas high guide number of 28. And you won't need a light sapping diffuser when you shoot wide angle. All of that power is available to you with full 100

degree coverage.

The built in power pack lets you shoot five rolls per charge and recharging via the multi voltage smart charger takes just two hours.

The Alpha has an aiming light fitted in the reflector as standard. Switchable underwater between 7 and 10 watts, it's brighter than many primary dive lights and can be used for night diving. And it doesn't stop there. A safety beacon and slave are standard features on the Alpha.

The gun is hand assembled and protected by a 100 metre depth rated aluminium body.

And you won't even get nickled and dimed on accessories. The Alpha comes complete with charger and cable. **And all for just £799.00.**

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