

Olympus TG-Tracker

by Jussi Hokkanen

If you are familiar with the Olympus Tough range cameras then you already know how the TG-Tracker feels and looks. The TG-Tracker is a miniaturised version of the tough camera that has been turned on its side. It feels very sturdy but also light. The first thing you will notice of course is the screen. The screen can be folded against the side of the camera or used as a more normal video camera flip screen. It is small and not necessarily the greatest quality screen I've seen but extremely handy thing as long as you resist poking it as unlike GoPro ones the TG-Tracker screen is not a touchy one. This is due to the fact that it needs to be able to take 30m pressure as the whole unit is waterproof as it is without any extra casings. It goes without saying that the Tracker body is also shock-freeze-dust-etc-proof, so it is ready for some rough handling.

The Olympus TG-Tracker is called TG-Tracker because it tracks what you are doing. Built-in to the camera there are sensors for Altitude, Depth, Temperature, GPS location and Acceleration. You can see this data live when logging or later as a log file that you can download and view with Olympus' free to use app for smart phones. Even if you are not filming and in case you are lost in the wilderness you can still use the TG-Tracker, for example as your compass.

Another interesting feature in the TG-Tracker, that is missing from GoPro cameras, is the built-in electronic image stabilisation. After a quick test I can say that the image stabilisation works but it's

not really comparable to the proper Olympus PEN image stabilisation systems. Remember that turning the stabilisation on will limit your angle of view.

The TG-Tracker camera angle of view is wide! When not using it in its 4K mode and image stabilisation turned off the angle is 204 degrees (diagonal). That's crazy wide as the camera actually sees behind itself. It quickly became apparent during my test that the 204 degree footage has some extreme fisheye looking distortion, which is not necessarily anymore pleasant in a moving image. Any movement of the camera makes the periphery of the frame wobble weirdly. This was especially visible in video which had straight lines



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near the frame edges. The TG-Tracker's "narrow angle" mode without the stabilisation is more traditional GoPro-like 150 degrees, dropping to 125 degrees respectively with the stabilisation on. I found both these modes more pleasant to use. For underwater none of the above modes are unfortunately usable.

As mentioned earlier the Tracker can be taken underwater down to 30m depth without a housing. I'm used to dive with proper O-ring sealed housings so a small jump of faith is needed with the Tracker as it only has small gasket around the battery compartment door. There is also another waterproof seal to consider as when taking the

camera underwater you will need to interchange the standard convex lens port for a flat underwater one (supplied). The convex port for topside use sits too close to the camera lens and once in water will result in a blurry image. Some might remember the early GoPro issues with domed housing ports and many 3rd party fixes that popped up from nowhere to deal with the issue. The problem here is the same; The TG-Tracker is myopic underwater with the standard port. Once the flat underwater port is attached and sealed you are ready to go. Your view angle however is limited to 95 degrees once in water. So still quite wide, about the same than GoPro and comparable to about 20mm lens (in old world terms).

Like all Olympus waterproof cameras the TG-Tracker also comes with an underwater white-balance mode. This is a valuable setting as currently there are no filters available for the camera. Olympus should really make an underwater filter as an accessory. This way they would have at least some hope of catching the diving market, which is currently almost totally held by GoPro. The TG-Tracker underwater mode works reasonably well near the surface but will peter out when going deeper.

The Tracker has a normal tripod socket so using any standard underwater trays or lighting systems will be easy. It's also supplied with a small mount that allows the use of any GoPro compatible mount or grip or adapter etc... However you don't have to buy a handle straight away as a very nice pistol-grip is provided with the camera.

Unfortunately the TG-Tracker is not able to



compete in image quality with GoPro cameras. The resulting files are mushy and high-contrast colours somehow make the images look dated. GoPro footage has always been famous from its natural flatness, which keeps the highlights from blowing out and leaves lots of space for post processing. Not the case with the TG-Tracker.

Did I mention 4K? Well the Olympus camera is able to record 3840 x 2160 resolution video on 30 and 60 frames per second on paper but when comparing the footage for the standard TG-Tracker 1080p file I do not really see much difference. I compared the Tracker 4K footage with GoPro Hero4 black 4K and you can't escape the fact that the Hero video quality is by far superior.

Of course we need to remember that the Hero4 Black is about £100 more than the TG-Tracker but still. The more fair comparison is the latter 1080p comparison with the Hero4 Silver.

The super wide-lens of the Olympus TG-Tracker is an interesting touch but in practice I think



it might just be too wide. Due to the huge barrel distortion the footage looks unnatural and the "narrow" 150 degree mode should be well enough and more useful in day to day filming. The Tracker lens also has an atrocious amount of chromatic aberration in the super-wide mode which is visible in all the images

Olympus has brought out something completely new in to the action camera market place: A fully waterproof, tiny, mega-wide video camera which can dive with you to 30m and back and even record the depth. This little thing will fit to any BC pocket and is easy to use as it does not need a clumsy underwater case. I forgot to mention it even comes with built in video light which also works as a torch in case you just need to find your keys. The "massive" 60 lumens output and the position just above the lens does more harm than good for underwater filming but can be handy in some dark topside close-up situations.

As a first generation model it's surprisingly



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well thought unit. There are a few niggles in the menus which I'm sure will be polished out in the future models (hopefully there are going to be some). Like the completely bonkers up-side down recording feature, which is hidden in to the angle of view menu. It took me good 10 minutes of desperation trying to find the feature as it is so easy to turn it on accidentally. (Hint: look at the little upside-down arrow in the field of view menu)

However the substandard sensor resulting in bad image quality is a major mistake from Olympus. How can they think they will be able to compete with the market leader that

already has 99% slice of the pie if you don't give it an up-to date sensor? Isn't Olympus a company known for high image quality cameras? I've used and reviewed a pile of amazing Olympus cameras over the years. Let's hope the TG-Tracker 2 comes out quickly and has a decent sensor and a better lens. I know Olympus is capable of doing this!

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