

BOTTOM TIME WITH THE SeXZ-1 FROM OLYMPUS



> WHETHER IT WAS LOVE OR LENS AT FIRST SIGHT I'M NOT SURE BUT WITHOUT A DOUBT, I COULD NOT MISS THE SIZE OF THIS BARE BUXOM BEAUTY. AND AS SOON AS I SAW HER WITHOUT HER LENS CAP ON, HER SHINING BIG IRIS CAPTURED MY ATTENTION AND I JUST HAD TO TAKE HER ON A TEST DRIVE!

I was definitely impressed though, as I'd never seen such a big piece of optics on such a compact package! So as a dedicated underwater compact camera shooter, she may well be the one I've been dreaming of for quite some time now... taking her underwater might measure up to one of my previous relationships; a 50-50 chance encounter... from 2003-2009.

Why do photographers get so carried away by the size of the lens anyway? Is bigger always better? Isn't a lens but a lens as any lens? Well my friend, this is why big (SLR) camera users often spend more money on any one lens than the camera body itself! It's also why a single optical marriage between body and lens is simply not enough – but that's a whole

other kind of relationship...

Peering Through Her Lens

So yes, the lens. Put simply, this is where picture quality comes from; giving sharpness, brightness and speed. To date, most compact digital images cannot compare to SLR picture quality mainly because they lack the image sharpness and lens speed. This is especially important for stunning macro photography. But quality optics comes with a price. So I was very excited about the Zuiko glass – reputed for their lens quality – on the new camera AND at a retail price comparable to other high end prosumer compacts.

Secondly, a brighter lens – again from the 1.8 Zuiko optics – lets in more light which

in turns allows us to shoot in 'darker environments' like indoors, evenings and UNDERWATER where lighting is often limiting for photography. See why I was so excited to take this seXZ-1 for a dip? On my first dive she let me shoot ambient light, without strobes, at F7.1 and with NO blurry impressions. In all my product testing of compact digitals underwater, this was an amazing first for me!

So what about speed? Well there's this threshold shutter speed – traditionally 1/60th of a second – that makes a world of difference to photography and mainly focus. The general rule is that any still subject shot at or anything slower than this shutter speed will yield an unfocused subject – ie. blurry images. So with its lens letting in more light than most, staying away from this threshold in low light situations is much easier. So let's look at how I tried all her buttons to find out how fast and easy my SeXZ toy was underwater!

Getting Wet with my SeXZ friend

Admittedly, my first date underwater with her was a little awkward. But then, aren't most? We just didn't quite mesh. I couldn't find the right buttons. I wasn't sure what was on the menu or what functions she could perform. I felt like a complete camera adolescent – knowing what I wanted to do but not knowing how! But after a few rounds under the waves, I was able to let my fingers do the walking while my pictures did the talking.

The funkiest new feature I found is one that's been criticized by some already; it's inability to lock focus and re-compose the shot. Instead, I feel Olympus has redesigned how to compose shots with this camera through (1) specific focus points together with (2) tracking focus lock. The tracking focus surprised and impressed me the most. Like a locking target on a homing missile, once the shutter is half

pressed and focus is locked (for example on a moving fish) the LCD shows that the focusing tracks the moving fish which made me feel like an scuba Topgun pilot wielding the latest compact technology! Then in reverse, to focus-recompose my frames I'd do the same but by moving my camera once a still subject is focused. I was skeptical using manual focus though without the commonly found millimeter or inch guides but with its relatively fast focusing, shooting moving subjects never seemed so easy on a small digital camera!

The other smart design is the dedicated HD (hi-definition) video record button right next to the thumb. No more fumbling around with dials or knobs and missing the action. Better yet, playback of videos is as intuitive as most DVD players; center

button press to play & pause, right/left presses for fast forward/rewind with extra presses speeding up playback/rewind x2 and faster. Also you can playback frame by frame (wheel controller) or jump to the start or end (up/down) of the video. Finally, an easy way to review videos without waiting impatiently to get through the whole video. Video focus couldn't keep up with fast action but then neither can top end SLRs. However, she did a good job on divers underwater who probably would have liked to pull a fast move on such a seXZ setup.

Peeking Under Her Hood

This seXZ-1 reminded me of my ex-c5050 – fully charged, shooting continuously on two hour dives wasn't a problem. Then after switching her sleep mode to time-in

after one minute, she started keeping up with me for almost three hours and flashing for me all through my dives. Charging her up took only three hours and was very convenient with just a USB connection. This meant I could also keep packing to a minimum as I've always got my laptop with me.

However, she wasn't quite the girl of my dreams as I'd have preferred a more sophisticated menu and a programmable shortcut button to some functions. Hopefully her next firmware update will take care of some of these issues.

Her super macro mode wouldn't trigger the on-board flash either, but regular macro still yielded stunning images with sharper details than most compacts. Adding a 67mm threaded macro

Getting super nudi friendly with regular macro using a super macro magnifying diopter. Anilao, Philippines. Shot with: Olympus XZ-1 in a PT-50 housing. Dual SEA&SEA YS-01 strobes. Subsee 10x magnifier.

Going wild easily with a wet wide lens. Anilao, Philippines. Shot with: Olympus XZ-1 in a PT-50 housing. Dual SEA&SEA YS-01 strobes and an INON UWL-100+dome.



THE SeXZ-1



Using regular macro focus of two harlequin shrimps in Davao, Philippines. Shot with: Olympus XZ-1 in a PT-50 housing. Dual SEA&SEA YS-01 strobes.

magnifier was easy enough though, and produced even more stunning photos!

Protecting Her Underwater

The Olympus PT-50 housing gave me full access to push all her buttons and twiddle all her knobs. I only wish she had dual o-rings for double protection once things got wet and wild at the dive site. Now if Olympus could re-model her front dial ring knob to the right hand side... then I probably could turn her on and perform all the necessary functions with just one hand instead of two!

But after such a long time, it's nice to be able to just screw on my 67mm lenses from the front without the need of other add-ons. Who needs all those extra accessories when a simple threaded screw will do the job?

However, if you don't have any strobes or heavy wet lenses to go in front, then with

only the housing, she's slightly buoyant in salt water, so put her on a lead diet to prevent a runaway ascent to the surface. If you feel that you want to get rougher and go deeper with her underwater then keep an ear to the ground as I've been told that she'll have an alloy outfit housing coming out soon from Nauticam as of this writing... with nothing naughty here, promise!

"I do" or "I don't"?

Having one of the brightest and sharpest lenses on the compact market today definitely yields superb photos on land and underwater. Then, as well as being petite and affordable, this hot new thing surely will be on the top of my hit list. So if you want to get wet with one of the SeXziest compacts on the market, give this gal a try and you might just fall for her at first sight!



photography with compact cameras. www.aguapictures.com

Lawrence Alex Wu is an underwater photographer and scuba instructor based in SE Asia. Teaching since 1996, he dived into 'underwater' photography with the digital camera revolution in 2003 and hasn't come up for air since. With over a dozen international underwater photographic awards since 2005, all his underwater work has been with only digital compacts and he now teaches other divers the techniques of scuba

MARINE ANIMALS PREVENT REJECTION OF TRANSPLANTED ORGANS

Studies of the small sea squirt may ultimately help solve the problem of rejection of organ and bone marrow transplants in humans. More than 110,000 people are currently waiting for organ transplants in the US alone. Currently, only one in 20,000 donors are a match for a patient waiting for a transplant. These grim statistics drive scientists to delve into the cellular biology of immune responses. Studies of the *Botryllus schlosseri*, a type of sea squirt & descendant of the vertebrate ancestor, shed light on the complicated issue of organ rejection. These sea squirts begin life as swimming tadpoles with primitive backbones, nerves, and musculature that are similar to all vertebrates, but soon transform into stationary creatures. They latch onto intertidal surfaces and look like flat flowers, with each 'petal' being a separate, but genetically identical, body. When one sea squirt lands next to another, cells in the sea squirt's fingerlike edges recognize the neighboring sea squirt as 'self' or 'non-self'. When the other sea squirt is related the two colonies fuse; otherwise they reject each other. Scientists have identified the gene controlling the choice between fusion and rejection. Now they are trying to manipulate the process, which could lead to being able to teach our immune system to simply ignore certain things.

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AUSTRALIA TAKES WHALE FIGHT TO THE HAGUE

Australia has filed its written submission in the whaling case against Japan at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The filing of 'the memorial' was the next step in the case to put an end to Japan's whaling program in the Southern Ocean, Attorney-General Robert McClelland said in a joint statement with Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd and Environment Minister Tony Burke. In particular, Japan had breached the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, they said. 'Despite Australia repeatedly calling on Japan to cease its illegal whaling activities, Japan has refused to do so,' the ministers said in a statement. That was why the government had taken its case to the International Court of Justice. The decision to launch legal proceedings was not taken lightly, the ministers said. 'The government disagrees with Japan's decision to continue whaling and this is the proper way to settle legal differences between friends,' they said. Japan must file its counter-memorial by March 9, 2012.

www.skynews.com.au

GARBAGE-SORTING ROBOTS

A robot that automatically categorises waste from construction and demolition projects could enable valuable raw materials to be recycled instead of ending up in landfill. Industrial robots normally excel at precise tasks in controlled environments, such as assembling cars. More chaotic and hazardous tasks have fallen to humans - for example, sorting through piles of waste in search of precious raw materials that could be recycled. But perhaps not for much longer. Researchers at ZenRobotics in Helsinki, Finland, are hoping robots can take over waste recycling. The company's Recycler robot uses data from a combination of visual sensors, metal detectors, weight measurements and tactile feedback from a robotic arm to pick out likely pieces of refuse and categorise them. Though engineered for construction waste, the robot could one day sort household waste as well.

www.newscientist.com



CHECK THIS OUT...

Visit Joe Romeiro's YouTube channel to check out a great video of expert shark handler Cristina Zenato. The video is entitled '333 Nina Salerosa'.

www.youtube.com/user/JoeRomeiro333

2012 will see shark fishing banned in Sabah, the first state in Malaysia to impose such a ban, in a bid to bolster tourism & conservation.

www.smh.com.au

DID YOU KNOW?

50% of water cultures from hands free faucets in the US tested positive for *Legionella* bacteria, compared with 15% of cultures from manual faucets.

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