

2011 Digital Shootout trip report by Jean Bruneau, Technical Advisor for Aquatica

This year's edition of the Digital shootout was the tenth edition and Aquatica is proud to be among this events oldest premiere sponsor. This time we are back on the Island of Bonaire and attendees where in excess of sixty, that is the biggest attendance ever and right out of the gates, it meant that, we the support personnel where going to have A) a good time, B) a busy time and C) not much time for anything else but diving, prepping up photo gear, diving, grab food, prep up photo gear again, check out the nightly slide shows, punch in a night dive (or two), sleep and... repeat. To say the Digital Shootout is intense would be an understatement, the pace is swift and I was amazed at the willingness of everyone to gladly keep up to it, not because we had to, but because we enjoyed it. It was a blast!

There is something quite beautiful about having so many individuals dedicated to underwater photography in the same spot. There is no small talk, no pretention, they are all there to learn, shoot, learn some more and shoot some more, all week long. You almost forget that, come the end of the week, it is still a photo competition after all, and a nice one at that, with an impressive lineup of prizes to go with it (up in the 45,000 dollars worth of prizes), Aquatica, this time again, offered two of its most popular housings as main prizes, the first, our very best selling AD7000 housing for the Nikon D7000. This housing is loaded with innovative features, including easy reaching controls for the built in flash of the camera, the video capture and its exposure correction access, all of this wrapped in a housing with ergonomics unparalleled in its category.



unrestricted category as well) who, with his lovely daughter Samantha (winner in the compact category) made it a family business to collect prizes in this competition, I guess the old saying that the apple never falls far from the tree has got some truth to it. His winning image of a frogfish is refreshingly beautiful, showing a dynamic angle rarely seen of this unusual fish, using a starkly black background to frame its bright orange subject, his choice of lighting placement also highlight the frog fish tangling bait, something all too often loss or not apparent enough in most photographs of frog fish. It's safe to say there is definitely good talent behind this dive mask. As it so happen Pete and I have known about each other for a while without really knowing about it, He is involved with the mechanics of the Beneath The Sea Show, one of the best scuba show in the continental USA and Aquatica has been an active exhibitor for longer than I can remember to the same show, we kept bumping into each other without really interacting, well we made sure that this was taking care of this time. Cheers to you mate!

The winner of the Aquatica AD7000 was Pete Riekstins, first in the macro unrestricted (and second place in the wide angle

Also offered as a prize was the AN-5 housings for the Sony NEX-5, this small housing, I am kind of weary of saying "compact" housing for fear that people might think it is designed for a compact camera, the Sony NEX-5 maybe be small, but it carry's the same sensor punch as most DSLR APS sized cameras on the market today. I personally use this combo and am always blown away with the quality of the images and the ease of operation, especially the one button video activation, it's straightforward, that's the best description I can give it, no fidgeting. Incidentally, Randy Johnson, a regular at the Shootout, did a cool underwater Panorama with this demo unit, it's a breeze to do this with A Sony NEX-5, just press and swing, and it's all inside the camera, no need for stitching in a software later.



Winning this prize in the compact category is Steve Cheng. His shot of a timid Blenny on a sponge is in a class apart, it has a perfect composition, a trait that we all noticed in Steve's image, the mood is unmistakably intimate, the bond between the photographer and the subject clearly established, that was no lucky accident for Steve, the rest of his work that I have seen does support this assumption.



© Steve Cheng



Now what about that Jeff Honda guy! Jeff who shoots a 7D in an Aquatica, pretty much had something going in every category except the compact cameras, how about this for a line up: grand prize winner of the coveted Jim Watt Award, first, and third place in the Wide Angle unrestricted and to crown it, first place in the video category. Need I say more about his talent!



His winning entry for the Jim Watt award is totally representative of Jeff, he must have spend lord knows how long hovering in the same place with these squids. That is his dedicated to getting the shot side of him, the inclusion of his wife Kristina and their adorable son Akira in the image shows the family man and the importance he puts to include and share his passion with his love ones. Very, very touching image! This photograph will forever stay in my reference book of great underwater images.

(Jeff and Kristina son's, Akira, has been a star of his own in the last two Digital Shootout, please do check the video on day 6 of the 2011 Digital Shootout web page on this adorable kid, it is hilarious !) <http://www.thedigitalshootout.com/bonaire2011/The-Digital-Shootout-Day6.php>

It's the second year I see Jeff Honda at work (there was a lot of repeat attendees this year, BTW), he plans his images ahead of time, that seems to be his secret weapon of mass winning, he has a photograph burned in his mind and he goes after it with a stubborn dedication, he told me that some of this year images where planned all the way back to the Little Cayman shootout last years, did I mention that he planned ahead already!!! While most of us are content on being opportunistic shooter, making the most of what is in front of us, he goes and dedicates himself to getting what is in his mind. There is a lesson to be learned here!

To view the winning entries of the 2011 Digital Shootout, follow this link:
<http://www.thedigitalshootout.com/bonaire2011/The-Digital-Shootout-Day7.php>



© Jeff Honda

Here is Jeff winning entry featuring his wife Kristina and the famous Akira along with a quintet of reef squids. To see more of Jeff work and the other participant, visit the Digital Shootout official website at <http://www.thedigitalshootout.com>

As a manufacturer, the Digital shootout is a great opportunity to have an audience attentive to your latest development in underwater photography. This year we loaded up the suitcase with no less than five complete systems, these were available for everyone to try out, and included the following Aquatica housings: For the Canon 5D Mk II & 7D, the Nikon D7000 & D300s and for the Sony NEX-5, all of which had a week long healthy rotation. While my presence there is to show the gear and have people try out our housing, it also is to help current Aquatica (or other brands of housings) owners pull the max out of their existing system, to assist those who misplaced or forgot items back home or lost in transport (bolts for the grips left at home or lost seem to be a recurring theme, BTW), and really, many attendees are happy with what they have at the moment and just want to get a feel of new ports, viewfinder or latest accessories.

There was an impressive amount of Aquatica users this year. A real bumper crop actually, the number keeps growing each year and this really gave me that warm fuzzy feeling, more importantly it sends a signal that we are doing a good job up here, in Canada. Shaking hands and putting faces on name was, as always, one of the highlight for me. The manufacturer, unlike its retailer, seldom has the opportunity to interact directly with the end users, the Digital Shootout format lend itself beautifully to that purpose. And let me tell you that, this makes a huge difference, our products stop being anonymous and they become Tim's AD7000 housing, Shelly's D2x's Macro port, and Jim's 5D Mk II kit. It's the same feeling for all of us here at Aquatica, the better we know you, the more we appreciate you, so come on! Join me on my Facebook page Jean Bruneau Aquatica

This year, I was had the pleasure of sharing my room with Ed Myers, one of the gurus from Canon USA, this guy is not only an excellent roommate, but, holly molly! The man is a walking photography data bank as well!!! Any Aquatica housing or Canon questions... anyone? My guess is that visitors to our room had probably more info bombarded at them than they bargained for, LOL! Chuck (also from Canon) last year attended the Little Cayman edition, but unfortunately couldn't make it this time, something about having a recap job done... on his knees, get well Chuck! And see you next year!

Ed, who shoot his Canon 5D Mk II in a Aquatica himself, was diligent enough to try out the new TTL compliant six pin circuitry for us, this new wiring gives the user access to TTL via the Sea & Sea converter & strobes (Inon strobes can also be used), his shots of a transparent cleaning shrimp on a white anemone is testament to the accuracy of the TTL with this camera/strobes combination, this will be a welcome addition to all Canon users wishing to shoot TTL with a wired system. The circuitry will be soon be made available separately for any Canon users wishing to take advantage of this practical form of strobe exposure.



Here is what Ed had to say on his Digital Shootout blog about it:

Ed Meyers: So far, this trip for me has been about practicing manual techniques for underwater shooting. It actually brought back memories of shooting products with old manual strobes back in the day.....Wait a minute! Shooting all manual IS like work!! Jean from Aquatica introduced me to the Sea & Sea TTL converter which works with the new version of their 5DMkII housing with a 6 pin connector. This new housing makes it easy to work in a TTL world. Shooting TTL was a much more pleasant way of shooting. It's much easier to be responsive and still get exposures that are spot on. It also gives more choices to set the camera on Manual, Aperture Priority, or even Program. Now I can concentrate on focus and capturing that perfect fish smile :)



So there you go, after a week of jaw dropping nightly slide shows, of warm camaraderie, of awesome “till you drop” diving. Yes I can say, been there! Done that! And you know what? I really did get the T-shirt!!!

Next year it's back to Little Cayman! I don't know if there ever was anybody happier to be put up against a wall than me in Little Cayman! I sure hope to see you there.

For info on this year 2011 Digital Shootout or information on how you can join us next year, visit the following link:

<http://www.thedigitalshootout.com/>

<http://www.backscatter.com/>

Aquatica would like to take this opportunity to thanks the Digital Shootout staff, as well as our long time partner, Backscatter and its team of dedicated professionals, for making this world renowned workshop happen.

