

SeaLife SportDiver iPhone housing

by Peter Rowlands

The SeaLife SportDiver is a well built and attractively packaged iPhone housing which works with all iPhone® models 7, 7 Plus, 8, 8 Plus, X, Xr, Xs, Xs Max, 11, 11 Pro Max, SE (2nd Gen), 12, 12 Mini, 12 Pro and 12 Pro Max running iOS 13 or higher.

It is simplicity itself to set up once you have downloaded the SportDiver app. This interface enables you to capture photos and video directly to your iPhone's camera roll. The app also allows you to control advanced camera settings, like Zoom, Lens selection, Exposure, Focus, White Balance, Tint, RAW capture, Live Photo and Background Blur, as if you were using a more sophisticated underwater camera.

The iPhone is securely held in place by a sprung loaded grip and the rectangular front port is large enough to accommodate all of the lens configurations and positions. A red filter is also supplied for blue water available light images.

The housing communicates with the app via bluetooth and is powered by two AAA batteries provided. In addition there is a space for a sachet of silica gel to keep the air inside dry and so avoiding any misting up which can happen as the iPhone gets quite warm after repeated use.

There is an internal on/off switch which saves the battery life and this is quoted as up to 50 hours. NiMH rechargeable batteries can also be used.

The polycarbonate housing is a clamshell design with the hinge on the left hand side looking at it from the rear. Once closed the housing is secured by a rotating lever with a safety catch.

The next step is to operate the vacuum system with the supplied hand pump. The app has an indicator gauge to show when the vacuum is correct and then a three minute timer starts to test the integrity of the seal. Once this time has elapsed and the vacuum has held you are ready to go.

The shutter release/Video Stop/Start lever is large and well positioned ergonomically. The housing has four large and well spaced push buttons which are easily operated with bare or thick gloved hands. The on screen display gives useful 5 bar readouts for the iPhone and housing battery levels. This is especially useful for my ageing iPhone X whose battery performance is not what it used to be.

The mode button scrolls through stills, video, settings and playback and, as already mentioned, the settings available help elevate the iPhone from a simple point and shoot to a very capable camera. There is a stepped zoom button which provides up to 10x zoom but as this is merely cropping in on the sensor I limited this to 4x without any serious loss of quality so this is a very useful range.

Unfortunately due to Covid restrictions I have not had the opportunity to take it underwater but



I'm sure that when I do it will be very simple and effective to use.

One particular feature which the iPhone has on land is the Pano function for impressive panorama shots but unfortunately the SportDiver app, like all of the other iPhone housings apps is unable to access to this function. I can only think that this is a limitation which has been inflicted by the Apple software developers which is a real shame because it would enable some amazing underwater images to be shot with just the built in lens. Hey, ho.

The SeaLife SportDiver iPhone housing is depth rated to 40 metres (130 feet) and is available on its own or as a kit with a single or dual SeaDragon video light. There are six models available with differing powers and specs to suit a variety of needs. The angle of coverage of all of them is a soft edged 120° which is more than enough for the iPhone lens angle. The sturdy base tray and arm incorporates a very neat quick release mechanism for hand held lighting.

I think it's fair to say that the majority of smart phone camera users underwater are using them as point and shoot convenience cameras which are small enough to fit in a BC pocket



if not needed. With the advent of the SeaLife SportDiver iPhone housing with its SportDiver app they are able to control the camera functions much more than normal and this should bring an improvement in the quality of images you can produce.

The housing costs €299 or \$299 which considering it comes with a vacuum system and colour correcting filter is very attractively priced.

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