



Fun With a Smart Phone

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Compact digital cameras are fast disappearing in favour of smartphones. How about underwater photography?

Many years ago, manufacturers offered amphibious compact digital cameras. Nowadays, their number has dwindled. As the saying goes, if you can't beat them join them; this is what SeaLife is doing with its SportDiver Underwater Smartphone Housing.

We recently needed a sturdy iPhone underwater housing for a specific project, so we purchased a SportDiver. Here are our impressions....

This product consists of a polycarbonate housing and a companion App that becomes your interface once the camera is locked in the enclosure. It works with iOS or Android phones.

The housing sports a large glass flat port held in place by an aluminium ring. But for the thickest gloves, operating the controls should be fine.

Built in two parts, the housing exudes simplicity. Four buttons on the back door allow navigation through the various menus and adjustments.

The front part houses the electronics, the double AAA battery compartment, the built-in visual and audio moisture alarm, and the vacuum system used to ensure proper sealing before submerging the housing. A dedicated cavity holds a Moisture Muncher capsule meant to prevent fogging and eliminate residual humidity.

Three 1/4-20 threaded holes drilled into a metal plate secure the housing on SeaLife or other brands mounting trays.

Setting up the SportDiver is an easy process. Interchangeable grip tabs secure the phone inside the enclosure, and we love the built-in vacuum system. After closing the back door, a hand pump creates a negative pressure inside the housing. Once proper pressure is reached, the



Photos: Alary-Gilbert/SUB-IMAGES

app shows a 3.5-minute countdown. At the end of this time, a green light indicates that there is no leak. Should there be a problem, a red LED will warn you. There is also a moisture alarm to complement this feature. Imagine, for the price of this housing one can barely buy some vacuum alarms sold for DSLR enclosures!

Ready-Set-Go

The housing comes with a red filter that helps reduce the blue-green tint within the first 15-20 feet (5-6m). The manufacturer suggests using a 2000 lumens light or, better still, two such floodlights to provide sufficient illumination and colours at depth.

Once submerged, you access the menus through the four push buttons at the back of the enclosure. You can switch between still or video imaging, open the Settings menu or use the playback function.

If the camera allows (we used an iPhone 11Pro), you can shoot JPEGs or RAW & JPEG images. Most users will select the former as it provides the easiest way to achieve fast results. The Settings menu provides comprehensive access to key functions.

Although the experience is pretty

Insert: The SeaLife SportDiver housing for iPhone and Android phones

straightforward, we suggest, maybe in a future version, that if the zoom function is not selected, there could be a direct access to the EV compensation for faster action.

The results

We were generally pleased with the resulting pictures during our test dives. These occurred at Blue Heron Bridge in Riviera Beach, Florida, a dive site with limited depth (23ft/7m) and a rather sedimented water column at the time of our visit. We used two Sola Photo 1200 lamps for illumination which proved to be adequate, but we agree with the 2000 lumens suggestion.

Fish portraits and quasi-macro shots (an iPhone 13 or 14 would have allowed true macro) were our best shots. Wide-angle is useable but the flat port induces corner softness, thus cropping becomes necessary.

Like all underwater images, ours needed post processing but the price/quality ratio was more than acceptable.

Caveat for the millennials and younger generations: Social networks are not available underwater. []

This barracuda was shot with the 'normal' lens, i.e., 6 mm (35 mm equiv. = 52 mm).

As you can see, there are enough details, including the diminutive juvenile French Angelfish. The iPhone actually focused on that area of the image, showing one drawback of the system: you cannot select the focus area, although manual focus is possible