

Newsletter for week ending 27th August



Collage produced using Pixlr Smartphone App using iPhone 13 Pro Images

I need a re-boot!

Since my last newsletter of the 9th July I have found it more and more difficult to apply myself to anything, let alone any photographic work.

I'm using the heat wave as an excuse as I don't function all that well when temperatures get into the mid-twenties centigrade.

Having been suffering from breathlessness with the slightest exertion for nearly three years now the heat really makes life a little more uncomfortable.

I've been for more lung function tests however they proved inconclusive so it's just a case of waiting for the next step that my consultant wants to try.

We did have the grandchildren for a couple of weeks during this period and again I now find it so tiring to keep up with their demands much as I wanted to join in with their games I just couldn't summon the energy to do so.

Now the weather has broken and it is a lot cooler I can already feel life returning to "normal" for me again.

A couple of 7 mile walks over the past two weeks have shown me just how the landscape suffered during the hottest summer for years. Lots of summer flowers have already gone to seed, green landscapes have turned brown and a lot of trees have begun shedding their leaves. I didn't even get a single photograph on either trip – perhaps I wasn't trying! During the past week I've been taking a look at my camera and lens collection and trying to rationalise what I need for any of the future needs that I might have.

The major camera manufacturers have abandoned bridge cameras, some (Panasonic and Canon) have stated they will no longer produce compact cameras so that signals the end of travel zooms and the like. They all have put their confidence in full-frame mirrorless systems.

I no longer follow the trends – I have the Canon 5D mkIV full frame DSLR and a host of lenses but I have no desire to carry such a system when I got out walking – the weight is far too great. Sure they are great for studio work and I do love the images created but the question is do I really need such a system now.

Image Quality and Camera Systems

Following my evaluation on just which cameras I intend to keep and which are likely to end up being sold to a dealer I did a full set of test images with each camera and lens of the same subject. The results were quite amazing.



Panasonic GH5 mk2 with Leica 12-60mm



Panasonic GH5 mk2 with Panasonic 25mm F1.7

Although probably not that apparent from these images here when viewed at 100% there is a noticeable difference in image sharpness and colour tones – even when using the same camera body but a different lens.

I think the biggest surprise was when comparing full-frame images to both micro four thirds and APS-C camera images.

My ‘go to’ full frame lens has always been the 24-105mm F4 L series lens that I bought to shoot my son’s wedding with the Canon 5D mkIII.

In this series of tests I was surprised to see just how “soft” that lens is throughout the aperture range and especially at the portrait length of 105mm.

Ok the image quality is beautiful with no noticeable noise- even at ISO 3200 and at wide open the background blur is just what you would expect.

It wasn’t a cheap lens but it was designed during the analogue film era where resolution wasn’t as important as it is now with our high megapixel imaging sensors.

There is a new version of this lens which was designed to give superior results with digital cameras. It’s not on my radar!





5DmkIV
24-105mm @ 85mm F5.6

I also noticed that some of the “kit” lenses like the Panasonic 14-45mm lens was also quite acceptably sharp when used at 2 stops down from fully open competing very favourably to the 25mm F1.7 prime lens and the 12-32mm G series lens.

It just goes to show that you should spend the time to find the best apertures from your lenses by shooting a fixed subject at all apertures and evaluating the results.

I think that my own camera and lens choices have been made without thorough evaluation – mainly based on a perceived need rather than actual performance.

I bought into the Olympus system some years ago and have already bought and sold 3 bodies with just the OMD EM1 mkII remaining.

The lenses are of course compatible with the Panasonic micro four thirds cameras that I have.

My justification for the micro four thirds system is the 2x crop factor and lighter bodies and lenses.

The 2x crop factor means that lenses for wildlife are comparatively small when placed alongside full frame lenses of the equivalent focal length. This means a lot in weight saving for days out and about.

One step up is of course the APS-C cameras of which the Fuji XT-4 is the clear winner here.

That’s not to say that the Canon EOS M cameras are to be dismissed – the latest (and last now of this range of cameras from Canon) the EOS M6 mkII with the 30M sensor and dual pixel AF system is a great camera and now that I have the EVF attachment it overcomes some of my earlier complaints about using the camera in sunshine.

It’s likely that my Canon 90D DSLR (which has the same sensor as the EOS M6 mkII) may be one of the cameras that has to go in the next round of my rationalisation.

I even tested the full frame lenses on the original Canon 5D camera and found that apart from that camera under exposing by about 1 F-stop and slightly cooler image compared to my other cameras it still produced images that would still be usable for many situations.

I bought the camera as part of my “photography on a budget” series last year along with a few of the early Panasonic GF series bodies.

They too produce images which compare very well to modern systems at normal light levels and keeping ISO values to a minimum. These too are likely to go back on Ebay.



The Robot Cameraman



I was approached by the Chinese company Andycine to review their model S2 Ai face tracking system which is meant to allow you to mount a smartphone onto it and it will follow you around as you make your presentations etc.



Unlike many of the face tracking systems that now flood Amazon and Ebay this one has the feature of vertical movement in the camera platform so it allows you to be “followed” if you bend down or change elevation during your presentations etc.

It doesn't need any app to be installed on the smartphone and is far more versatile than setting up a gimbal (which I have previously done).

It is “gesture” controlled to enable the tracking to take place – an “Okay” gesture made with your fingers starts tracking and an open palm shown to the camera stops it.

It has a payload of 390 grams so I was able to mount other cameras with great effect on the unit – especially useful with the action cameras and the compact Canon G7X mkIII.

With these cameras mounted on the unit and using an appropriate app on your smartphone you can start and stop recording on those. The action cameras can also be controlled by voice command.

There is a little “play” in the stepper motor gearing and this is apparent if you change direction sideways – there is a noticeable jump as the unit moves to re-centre the lens. Similarly with a heavy camera mounted on it the vertical movement also shows the changeover point with a slight jerk.

Overall though it’s quite a fun product and probably will feature in future videos – behind the scenes.

The video review of this product is now on YouTube. <https://youtu.be/fgepLo5sSsA>

Bad Product Design

Andycine market products from a variety of Chinese companies.

I needed a dummy battery for my GH5 mkII camera and wanted to power the camera from a 14v D-tap battery on my camera rig.

Andycine (as well as other suppliers on Amazon) were selling this product.

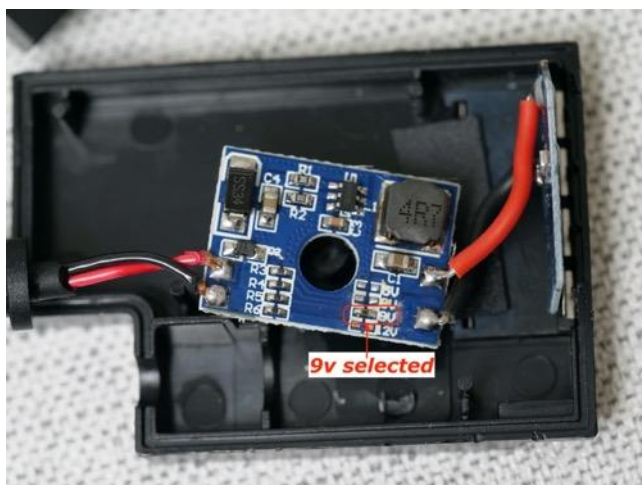


It looked ideal so I purchased one from Andycine and one from Andoer

On arrival I tested the unit to ensure that the battery voltage was within the 8-8.4v range.

To my horror I found the unit to be outputting 9.4volts. This might have damaged the £1500 camera had I just plugged it straight in.

I decide to investigate why the unit was out of specification.



The first thing that I noticed was the fact that the selectable jumper on the PCB was set at the 9V position rather than the 8V position. The soldering of the components was also rather poor.

This device is rated at 2A at the 8.4v output voltage.

Being a step down power supply from 14v it is essential that this device does not fail with a short circuit input to output otherwise the 14v would go straight to the camera

I then put a 1A dummy load on the device to simulate the normal current taken by a typical camera in video record mode.



After just a few minutes the temperature of the switching IC reached a staggering 64C. Remember this was open air – when in use it would be inside the plastic box with no convection cooling.



Raising the load to just before the rated current I found the temperature of the pcb went to an alarming 87C

With this sort of rise the life expectancy of this unit is very low.

I decided to remove the pcb, wire it direct and power the unit from a straight 8.4V lithium polymer battery on a adaptor plate like this one from Zgcine. The D-tap supplies 8.4v straight from the lithium ion battery

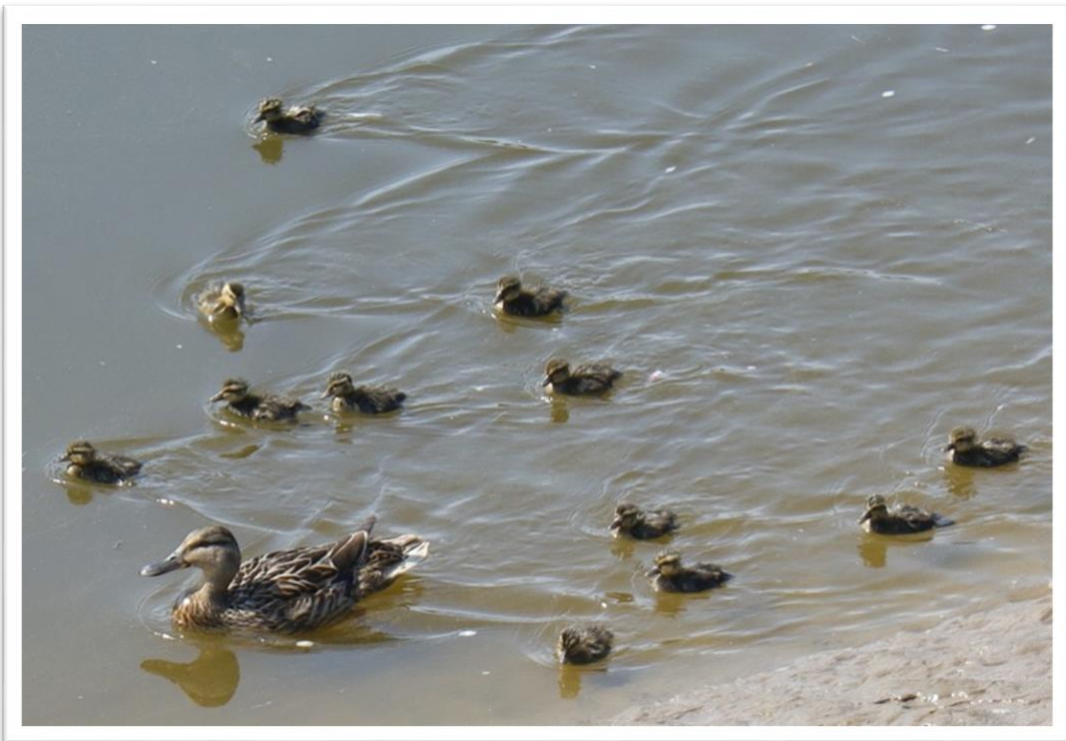
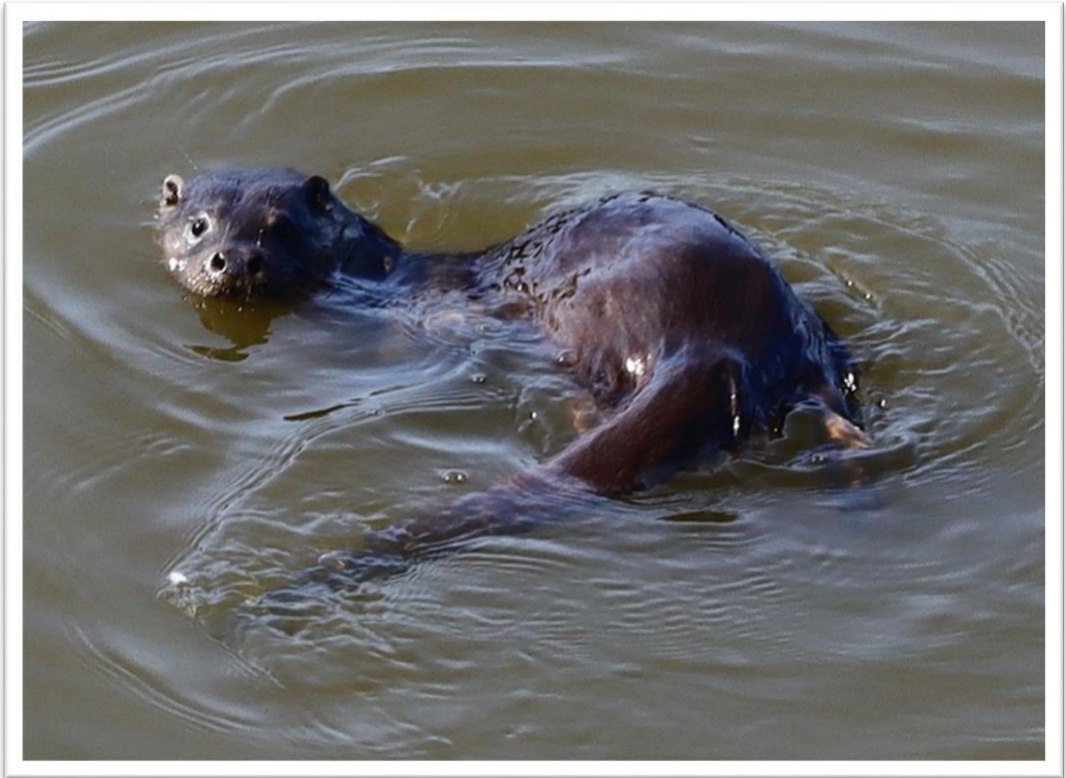


I have contacted Andycine and Andoer to make them aware of the issue with these units.

Update – after 1 week, no response from either company so I will post my comments directly in the Amazon reviews!

Tag line is not all designs are fit for purpose and all the reviews that you read are not always correct.

Unexpected Sightings



During a recent visit to Preston to have my car repaired (after an Amazon driver reversed into the side of my car on our driveway) I took a walk along the Riverside pathway.

This pathway runs along the banks of the river Ribble which runs through the town.

After just a few minutes of joining this pathway I spotted the otter on a sand bank who was eating an eel. I watched it for several minutes before it decided to go in search of more food. I only had my Canon EOS M6 mkII with 18-150mm lens so I set for maximum zoom and tried to get the best shot even though it was several metres from the bank.

It made several dives before I managed to track it via its bubble stream and then captured it as it surfaced.

A few minutes later on the walk I came across a the female mallard duck with 12 ducklings. I have never seen such a large brood before. Normally on the local canal, broods don't last very long as they are predated by the large pike which can be seen there. I wonder how many are still left in this brood.

Maybe one day I will return there hoping to get a better shot of the otter again as they are one of my favourite animals.

Low Light & High ISO Noise



FZ300/330 ISO 1600 with bright studio light

I've seen a lot of discussion recently on social media about the Panasonic FZ300/330 and the need not to shoot at base ISO as at higher ISO the noise isn't that obtrusive.

Whilst there is some truth in this you have to temper this with the amount of light available to capture the image.



FZ300/330 ISO 1600 with low studio light

When lighting levels are high the exposure times are relatively short, conversely if the light levels are low then the exposure times increase.

It is this increase in exposure time that contributes to the noise generated in the image. The longer the exposure, the more the noise can be seen.

That's why some shots taken at theatre shows where they maybe bright stage lights available etc., can look very good at these high ISO values (needed use faster shutter speeds to prevent subject motion blur).

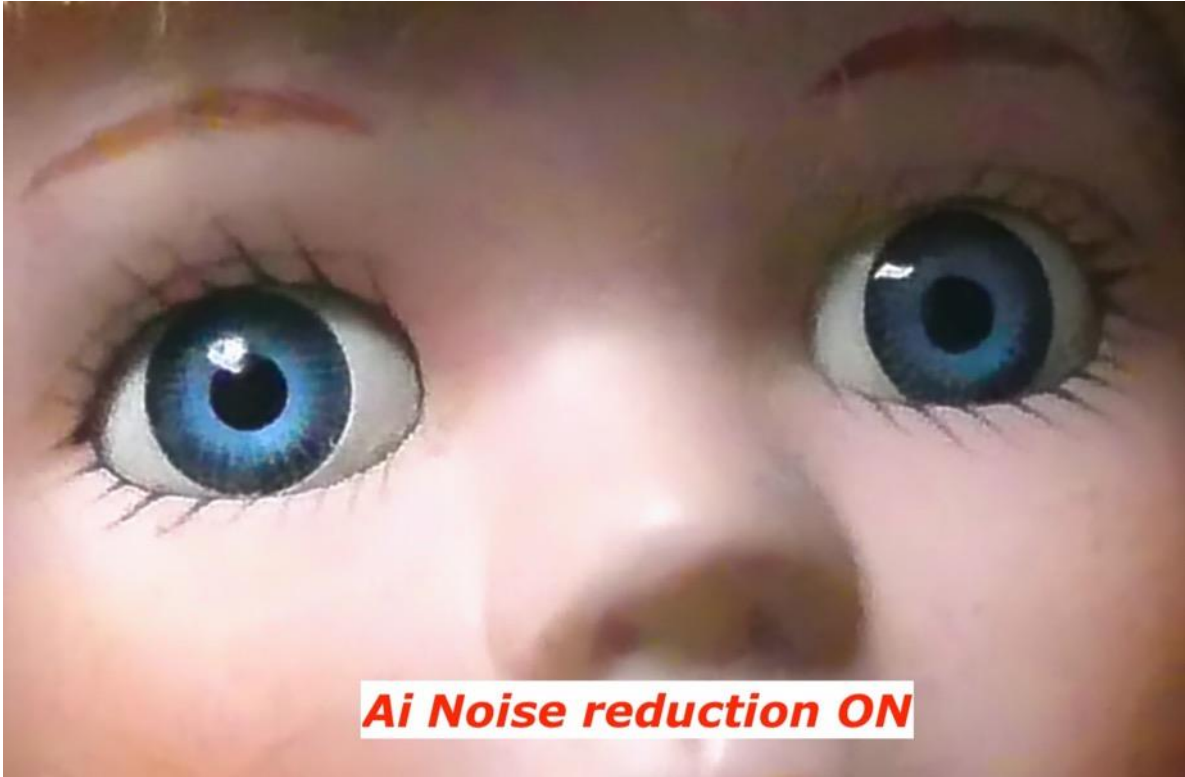
In the two comparison shots with very bright lighting versus low level lighting the amount of shadow noise is quite noticeable in the low light scene.

The noise also lowers contrast in the image.

Luminar Neo adds Ai Noise reduction plus other extensions to follow.

Luminar Neo is a powerful image editor for Mac and Windows, powered by Ai technologies that can simplify complex photo editing tasks, making them fast and fun.

From the ISO 1600 low light image I tried this new feature and made a significant crop from the image to see the results, if any.



However can this noise reduction be achieved with conventional programs like Photoshop?



Well you can get some pretty decent results. Remember most programs process noise resulting in the softening the image. You may be able to add additional sharpening after noise reduction to improve perceived sharpness.



With a little sharpening added after noise reduction

Luminar and Neo are programs that require very little user interaction to achieve some dramatic results. There are “conventional” editing tools available within the program however the interface is really designed to use pre-set adjustment to achieve the results. Operations like sky replacement are just one-click events.



It’s a great program however it can be frustratingly slow for some operations. More and more Ai operations are planned for Luminar Neo during the latter part of this year.

Are you still running Windows XP and don't have internet access?

Since support for Windows XP officially ended in 2014 there have been many users that have found that many of their existing programs that would no longer work on the upgraded versions of Windows and continued to use XP. I have legacy programs running on XP based laptops as I cannot find any similar functionality on Windows 8 and beyond.

This week a friend of mine had a failure on his XP laptop and pleaded with me to try and fix it as he didn't want a "modern" machine. XP worked fine for him running Microsoft Word 97 and Powerpoint which is all he really wants. He admitted that internet access was now not possible.

It was his hard disk that had developed many bad sectors and throwing up the usual BSOD on power up.

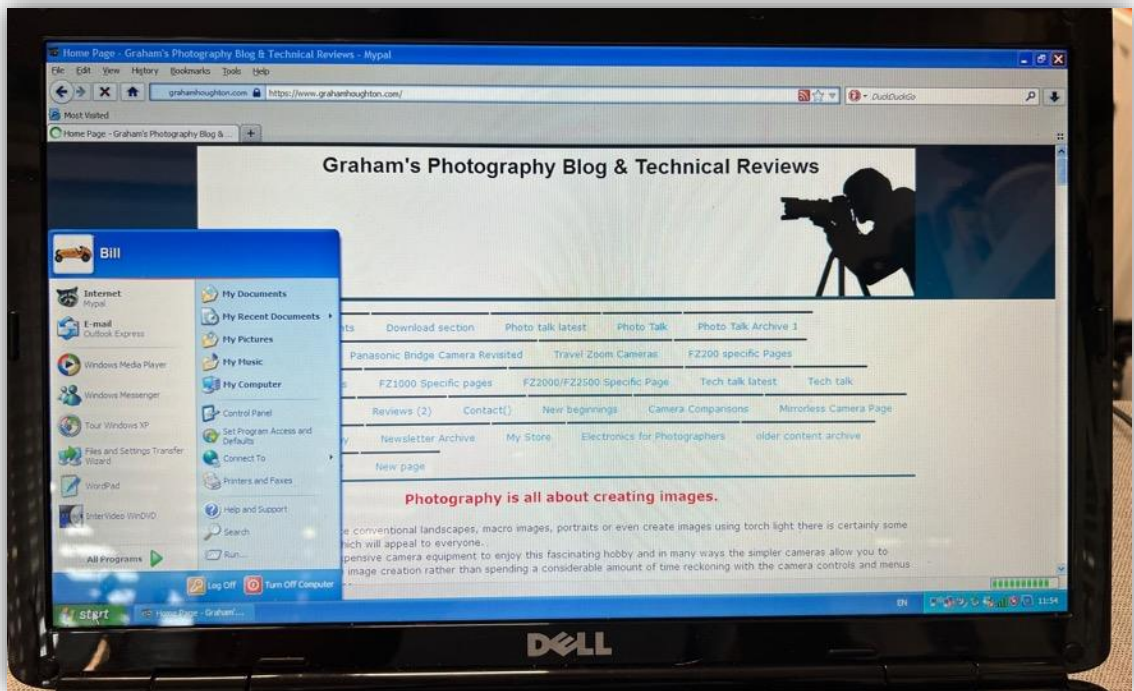
I fitted a new 2.5 inch drive and reloaded his version of XP. After hours of searching I found all the drivers needed to support the architecture of his Dell Inspiron.

All the programs were reloaded and everything worked fine except for the included Internet Explorer. I needed to find a current browser that would work.

Apparently the last XP-supported versions of Firefox and Chrome work fine in most cases, however there are some websites that would no longer display properly. Most bank and credit card websites use newer security protocols that no longer work on the XP-supported versions of those browsers or give you some warning about using banking services etc.

I did find a XP version of Mypal internet browser that worked fine for most websites.

<https://www.mypal-browser.org/> It is available for the 32 and 64bit machines and is based upon Mozilla Firefox so is likely to encounter issues with financial sites like banks/



The repaired laptop running Mypal browser – opening my website with no display issues.

I really have to convince my friend that browsing the internet with these now outdated search engines with lack of security is probably not the way to be working as exposure to threats is probably more elevated.

Since I managed to copy off all his images and documents from the damaged hard disk and put them on a portable hard drive he can always import them to another machine should he decide to go that route. Getting him to make that leap of faith from XP to Windows 11 is going to be some challenge.

I may try loading a portable version of a Linux based distribution onto a bootable flash drive purely for the purposes of internet to see if he can manage that first of all

Is there anyone one of my readers still using XP and have had any internet issues, please let me know [mailto:ghough12@yahoo.com?subject=XP user response](mailto:ghough12@yahoo.com?subject=XP%20user%20response)

iPhone Filter kit by Nisi – is it necessary?



I saw this review of the New Nisi filter kit for the iPhone - it is very expensive and is it necessary?

Quote DPreview:

Filter company NiSi has announced three filter kits designed for smartphone photography and video. The new smartphone filters look like NiSi's larger filters for full-size camera systems, including a filter holder and small rectangular graduated neutral density filters.

The three kits are designed for iPhone and are compatible with many iPhones, including the latest iPhone 13, 12, and 11 series, plus X/SE/8/7/6 iPhone models. Each kit is built around the NiSi IP-A holder, which clamps onto your phone and covers your phone's rear camera array. This accessory attaches to your phone and works with circular filters. If you attach the P2 holder, you can also use rectangular filters.

While each kit comes with the IP-A holder, they differ in their included filters. The Landscape Kit comes with the P2 holder, a polarizing filter, a medium graduated ND and a 6-stop infrared blocking ND filter, plus a carrying pouch.

The Filmmaker Kit uses round filters instead of rectangular filters and includes a 1/4 Black Mist filter, a True Color ND-Vario 1-5 stop filter and a pouch. While a variable ND filter can be useful for landscape photography, it's essential for filmmakers trying to achieve a specific shutter speed in changing light conditions.

The third kit, the Cinema Kit, is similar to the Filmmaker Kit but adds Allure-Streak Blue and Allure-Streak Orange filters. These specialized filters allow users to simulate the look of anamorphic lenses, including their trademark lens flares.

The new system promises improved build quality and usability, although sacrifices compatibility with a wider range of smartphone manufacturers.

NiSi's latest filter kits are available to order from NiSi. Kits range from \$70 to \$200, with individual filters available for \$20 to \$90. The two filter holders are \$25 each.

I agree that smartphones are making a tremendous impact, especially for casual video however is there a need for this professional grade of filter system on a consumer grade smartphone?

There are many 37mm filter systems that cover some smartphones and other specialist cases which will allow up to 52mm filters to be used. Personally I haven't tried any of these systems as yet but as I am beginning to appreciate the video quality and ease of use of the Samsung Galaxy S22 ultra I may start to look at ways of mounting my existing filters (many of which are magnetic mount and 72mm size!)

As usual thanks for taking the time to open this newsletter.

Until the next one 15th October

Graham