

Newsletter for week ending 22nd September 2018

As I write this copy of the newsletter I'm on the Isle of Arran, Scotland, sitting in my car waiting for the rain to stop. The storm Ali has been passing over the island now for a couple of days. Some periods of heavy rain and strong winds with the lifeline to the island – the ferry services – suspended just after I arrived on Monday morning. They resumed Tuesday morning but I see the ferry is still at the port and it should have left 30 minutes ago. Gales of up to 70mph are forecasted for today (Wednesday). My thoughts and prayers are with anyone who has experienced the full force of these hurricanes especially in the Carolinas at the current moment with so much destruction and loss of not only homes, businesses and livelihoods but also lives as well.

Out and about on the island

Though the weather has been poor, and has been for the last eight visits to the island over the last 4 years, I've still managed to get out and about looking for new ways to capture pictures. They may be the same view but at different times of day or from a new perspective.

My hopes were to get a lot more aerial views using my Mavic pro drone but that looks out of the question on this trip due to the high winds which will prevent flying.



I've been using the Panasonic G9 on this trip almost exclusively for stills although I've also used the Canon SX740 HS and the Canon M50 for video clips in 4K just to compare quality and performance. As Autumn approaches the decayed wood in the forests encourage a multitude of fungi to grow. I went in search of some.

In the forest on the way up to Glenashdale falls, near Whiting bay, I came across lots of fungi. I haven't a clue what they are but are great subjects to photograph.

They are usually in deep shade (as they don't rely on light to grow) and for getting enough depth of field I had to use apertures of F11/F16 with the 12-32 f2.8 lens. Both the camera and this lens have waterproof specifications so I wasn't too concerned about the rain that occasionally penetrated the forest canopy and landed on them.

I kept the lens dry using my microfibre cloth and wiped the camera exterior dry with another one occasionally. As the light is very flat under these situations the highlights caused by the rain on them added that extra depth.



In some situations, the light was so low that it necessitated exposures of several seconds so I tried a variety of additional flash exposures to try and reduce the exposure time.

As the G9 doesn't have a built in flash I used the little Godox TT3500 flash gun mounted on camera.

This was a last-minute addition to my camera back pack but I didn't pack the remote trigger as I foolishly thought the G9 had a pop up flash that I could use for remote triggering. *Note to self – check in future!*

This meant that my lighting was going to be less than optimal as the light would produce harsh light and strong contrast.

To demonstrate how to overcome such a limitation I used the slow synchro mode of the camera which allows both the ambient light and the flash light to be combined in a single exposure.

The degree of flash can be controlled by using the flash power control under TTL control.

The results were very much improved upon the direct flash result.

I wish I had packed the remote trigger as this would have allowed the flash to be placed higher and to one side to get better modelling.

If time permits before I leave I will return and try again. *(update – no such luck as the weather worsened)*



As you can see here the on camera mounted flash produced quite unpleasant results with strong shadows.



I think you can see that the addition of this extra kiss of slow synch flash-light adds to these pictures.



Update- the winds have picked up now and reaching those forecast gusts in the region of 60mph. The rain is torrential and my car is being rocked by the wind gusts. A few dog walkers have just been caught out by the rapid onset of the storm. I can no longer see the bay here at Brodick. I won't be venturing out any time soon although behind me the skies look clear with some blue showing so there is some hope for later in the day! The forest is out of the question as these high winds in there are known as 'widow makers' due to the chance that older, rotten, trees are often felled under these weather situations. Evidence of fallen trees reminds you of this fact.

And just on cue the sun shines!



Within two minutes the grey skies and rain have gone, the place is bathed in glorious sunshine once again although the wind is still a major feature.

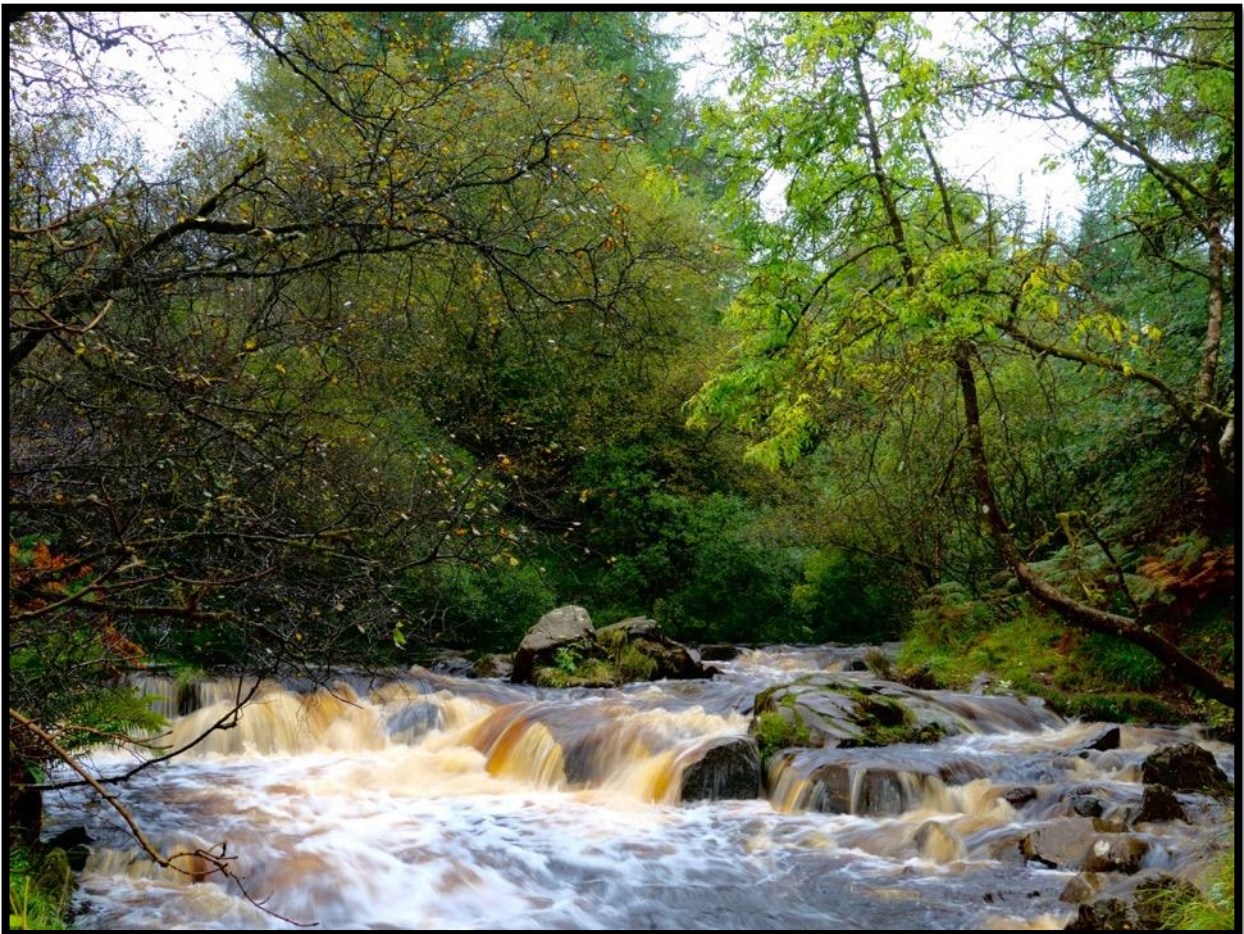


The view from my car window as the clouds finally roll away from the highest mountain, Goat fell. Unfortunately, because of the wind speeds the situation changed once again to overcast and rain threatens again.

Continued.... There were lots of interesting fungi, like this one that looked like stag's horns.



With all the heavy rainfall, of course the rivers were in full spate and this lead to some fantastic images and video.



Glenashdale falls at Whiting Bay

Arran is described as 'Scotland in miniature' as it has all the elements of mainland Scotland packed into it.



A panoramic view of the Holy island from the hills above Whiting bay.



One of my favourite places to visit is the HOLY ISLE, adjacent to Lamlash. The 330 metre hill is a great place to go and climb, especially from the south to north where the ascent is almost vertical on its initial part. Most tourists chose to do it the other way and descend upon their behinds!

I've been coming to the island twice a year, May and September, for the last eight years and love it. This is likely to be the last visit here as there are some other great islands to visit in Scotland all with some unique characteristics and photographic opportunities. I have enough images of the places I love and over the winter I will make them into a 2019 calendar for my brother-in-law (who is from Arran) and a photobook so I can reflect on the places I've visited and the views which have inspired me so many times. It's been a great place to come and be alone, de-stress and relax. It's a real pity that it is so far from my home otherwise I would be back more frequently



A great place to sit and soak up the views. Worth £1m of anyone's money!



Follow your dreams and make your own destiny, for you never know where your own road will end!



They told you in school that moss only grows on the north side of a tree (in the northern hemisphere) and it's quite true. In the forest, only the faces exposed to the south had no moss. Useful if your disoriented.

Thoughts on the Panasonic FZ80/82

Whilst having this camera for a little over a month now and having had time put put it through its full range of features I have formed a few of my own opinions about the camera and offer them if you are considering the purchase of this model.

In the concept of a super zoom it certainly lives up to this claim with a very impressive 1200mm effective focal length lens. The ability to bring distance views closer is a feature that will attract most potential purchasers to this class of camera. Of course, Panasonic aren't the only players in this sector. Sony and Nikon both have camera which meet or exceed the Panasonic specifications.

To some respect this feature is the weakest point of any of these cameras. This focal length can only be achieved through using the 1-2/3 inch sensor without using massive lenses needed with larger formats. To achieve a zoom lens which will operate from 20mm to 1200mm EFL is quite a challenge and some design compromises are made along the way. The lens is sharp enough in the mid-ranges but shows some slight loss of sharpness at the long end of the range. To some people this maybe more acceptable than cropping and enlarging an image shot with a camera with a shorter focal length of lens like the 600mm EFL of the FZ300/330. This is of course a very personal thing and what will suit one person may not suit another.

If you use the camera on a tripod, or other mechanical means of support, this long reach lens can deliver some very nice 4K video resolution clips. Using it hand held though shows the inherent weaknesses of the electronic rolling shutter that all these cameras have.



At 20mm EFL



At 1200mm EFL



at 1200mm EFL



at 1200mm EFL

Because of this long focal length the effective aperture at the 1200mm position becomes F5.9 which does present the user with a few potential problems when shooting either stills or video.

At this aperture, and keeping the ISO as low as possible to reduce image noise, the shutter speed might become very long and result in subject motion blur in any subject that is close to the camera or is moving quickly. This might include any form of nature or sports photography where the subjects may be moving quickly in the frame.

The lack of a rubber covering on the eyepiece of the EVF is particularly bad and it does not afford the best viewing of the image. Also, the diopter adjustment does not appear to hold its setting and the only way that I have found to stop it from changing is to apply a small dab of hot melt glue to hold the adjustment wheel from moving.

Whilst the LCD is now a high-resolution touch panel I still prefer the option to be able to articulate the screen to assist in framing and focussing when shooting subjects that might be close to the ground.

If you shoot video, then then the lack of an audio input socket or the use of any photo style which supports a 'flat' profile – such as the Cinelike D profile – may also be a consideration.

I also found the position of the tripod mounting bush to be a problem. It's too near the battery/memory card compartment and I had to fit an additional mounting plate in order that I could use it on my tripod and still access this compartment.

The rear control wheel is the same one as used with the FZ200 (and others) and in time is likely to suffer from the same failure. This usually causes the 'push in to select' feature to fail at some point. Using the QMENU and the navigation left right keys is worth considering as the alternative way to select options that would be used via this back-control wheel.

Another switch that looks as though it is making its way into the top slot for potential failure is the zoom switch around the shutter button. I've had several subscribers reporting this switch to be failing on the bridge camera range.

What I have found the camera particularly useful for is for close-up photography where, if you provide sufficient light or flash then the image quality is very good.

For travel, then probably not high on my consideration due to the loss of aperture at longer focal lengths. It drops quite quickly from F2.8 at the 20mm position to f4 in the mid range focal lengths and f5.9 at the longer ones.

The sensor does have more pixels than say the FZ300/330 and should result in higher image resolution. This is the case when the camera is used at its native ISO of 80 and you have sufficient light to support the type of shutter speed that may be needed for your genre of photography.

A storm too far!



Just got back to the campsite to find that the storm had smashed one of my corner joints in the tent frame and the tent was in a heap on the ground. Had to do some quick temporary repairs using spare guy ropes and tent pegs which, fortunately, I had packed for this trip.

The tent did come with a small repair kit but nothing to repair the fibre glass pole joints. I had anticipated moving to another site on Thursday for the last night but I'm afraid if I dismantle the tent now I may not be able to get it up again! At least the worst has past and the repair should stop the collapse. Little rain is forecast for Thursday so, fingers crossed, I will be OK. I can't complain, I have had this tent for eleven years and I did buy it in an end of year sale. Maybe this is a sign to say 'call it a day' for tenting and just book into hotels for the future?

On one of the caravans here on the site the wind has ripped the awning right off from its track – they will be none too pleased when they return from their day out!

Frustrated with the Panasonic G9

The more I'm using this camera the more infuriated I have become at the 'soft' shutter release that Panasonic have now implemented in this camera.

I've had lots of images captured when I only wanted to focus and recompose by half depressing the shutter button. Also in creative video mode, the shutter button can be used to start and stop video recording. Again, I have lots of a few second clips where I've inadvertently depressed the shutter button.

The camera has lots of potential with lots of creative set up options but now I don't think that I will adapt very readily to this shutter release.

The photographer's universe

Every image that we as photographers take contains a universe that we can control. This is particularly true when capturing night time images when our image becomes a collection of light in that single exposure.

Whatever happens in the subject being captured during the time that the shutter is opened, no matter how briefly, is registered as a single image. This can be light trails, people or objects moving etc.

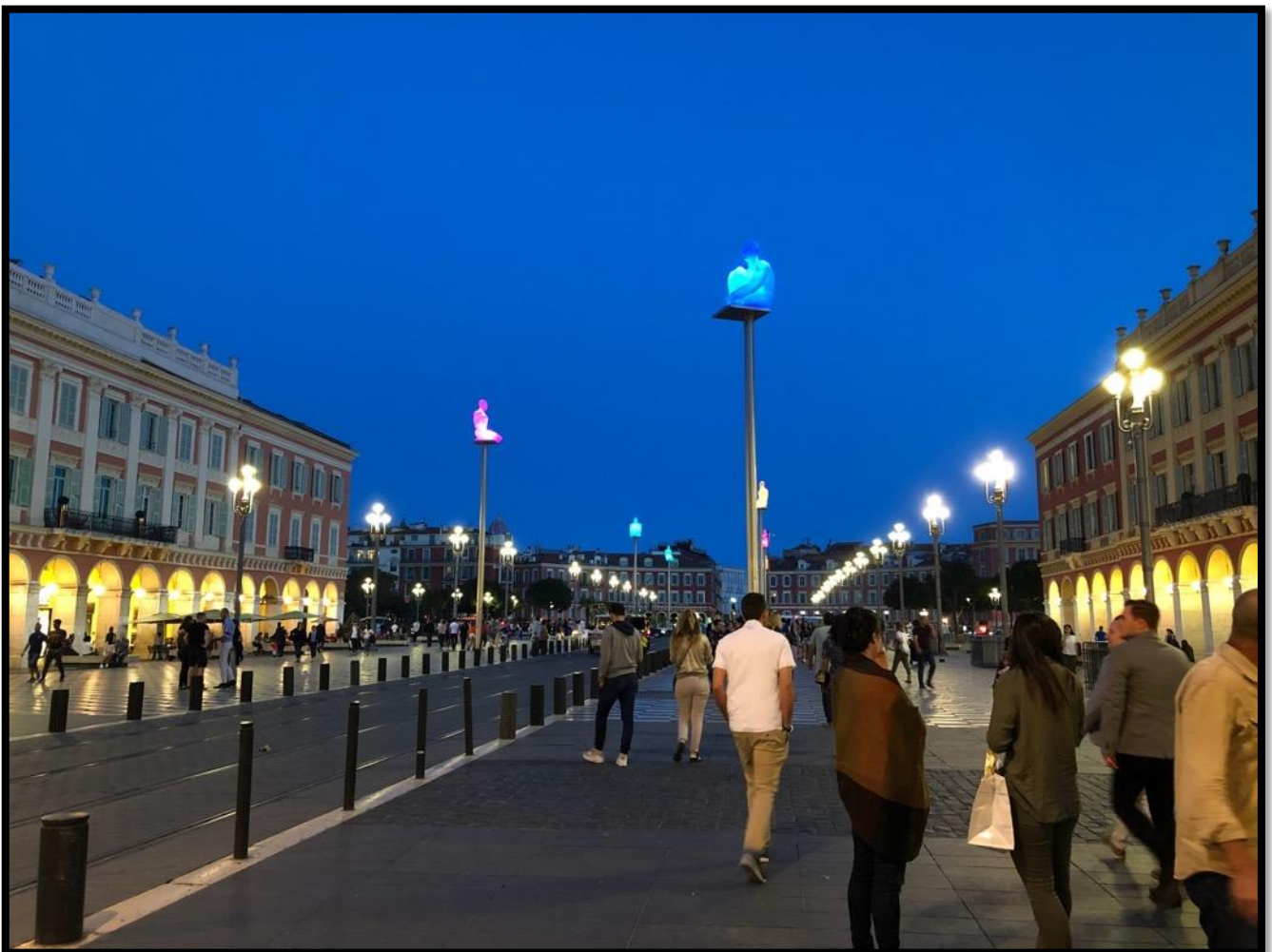
But exposure time alone isn't the only deciding factor for determining a successful image.

For example, the time of the night will control the colour of the sky and the amount of ambient light that will partially illuminate our scene. The weather also will affect the mood of the image. Wet nights augment the image by adding reflections of the lights in the subject.

The artificial lights in the scene will add their own character, older sodium lamps rich in yellow but devoid of just about any other wavelength will vastly change the colour of anything illuminated solely by this light.

In today's towns and cities more and more street lighting is being converted to more energy efficient LED lights which have approximately daylight colour temperature and thus anything illuminated by these will show their true colours.

I think that night time photography is a challenging but fulfilling art form as we must wait for the artificial lights to be turned on, wait for the night sky to be the right colour and/or the weather conditions to be right and all that presumes we have found an ideal subject to photograph.



The so called "blue hour" just before night fall



The transition period between day and night is called twilight where the sun has set but there is still some ambient light left. During this period our scenes illumination is reflected from the sunlit portion of the earth's atmosphere.

The sun is skimming the night sky with light until the earth rotates farther away. The range of hues seen during this brief period vary from purple through blue and then finally a deep blue and then black. The colour temperature rapidly increases - although our eyes constantly adjust to this our camera sensor will have a harder time trying to establish what is white or grey in the scene. It's better to pick one of the camera presets or set a value in the K (KELVIN) scale to prevent weird colours being recorded. (perhaps tungsten or daylight setting 5500K)

Apart from this variation, or mix of lighting types, we often encounter lighting contrasts which far exceed the capability of the cameras sensor.

The bigger sensor cameras (those with larger pixels that is as well as physical size) capture more dynamic range and fair better in this type of photography.

There are some techniques that you can employ to reduce this condition such as selecting a portion of the scene which gives the impression that the scene is more evenly illuminated. In some cases, you may be able to use flash (or multiple flash bursts) to fill in the shadow areas.

Contrary to what you might think inclement weather can make your night time images better.

Fog and mist can add beautiful halos around pin point light sources such as street lights and add extra depth to your images as the further away objects are lighter in shade.

Rain provides a mirror like reflective surface to fill in those otherwise dark areas. You will find that subjects that disappear when photographed against a black sky will suddenly silhouette against an overcast cloudy sky.

Wrap up and keep warm and use an umbrella to protect your camera and lens in the rain and go out and try some night time photography- you may be surprised at what you find.

Choice of shutter with Panasonic Cameras

With digital cameras, no longer do we have the same mechanical shutters found in the older film based DSLR's.

In the 'bridge camera' the shutter is in the lens and this explains why we can have flash synch speeds throughout the whole shutter speed range.

The compact system camera (CSC's or M4/3) have a combination of both mechanical and electronic shutter.

I'll try and explain the various uses of each type of shutter.

On some CSC's we have the option of:

Mechanical shutter MSHTR

Electronic First Curtain EFC

Electronic ESHTR

The mechanical shutter, in all M4/3 cameras up to the G8 the shutter was an electromagnetic spring operated device which opened and closed to reveal the sensor to the image from the lens. This unfortunately led to some degree of what was called "shutter shock" with some lenses and certain shutter speeds. To reduce this phenomenon Panasonic changed the design of the shutter so that the final movement of the blades was dampened and the speed reduced electromagnetically. This happened with the GX85, G85 and later cameras, I think.

The fastest shutter speed available in the MSHTR mode is 1/4000 sec with the fastest flash such speed of 1/160sec.

To overcome the risk of this shutter shock still further the EFC shutter can be used.

This starts the exposure electronically and then ends the exposure with the closure of the mechanical shutter.

The fastest shutter speed is 1/2000 but all the lower shutter speeds can be used for flash speeds (as in slow speed sync).

The ESHTR is totally silent (if you turn off the beeps in the menu) and will never cause the incidence of shutter shock however it does have some limitations.

Firstly, shutter speeds longer than 1 second are not available, neither is there any flash synchronisation.

It also can show the signs of banding in some artificial light (will depend upon the type and mains frequency

As the sensor is "read out" typically at 25 fps this shows up as 4 dark bands with 50Hz UK mains powered fluorescent lights.

The advantage of the ESHTR is that it can be used with speeds up to 1/16000 sec on some models.

You will notice the "rolling shutter" or slanted verticals on any moving object more when using the ESHTR.

There is also some suggestion that the dynamic range is reduced by about 1 f-stop and if you must lift the shadows in post processing you will experience more visible colour noise.

In the AUTO mode, the camera resorts to using MSHTR until you dial in more than 1/2000 sec in S priority mode or the exposure calculated is more than this in P or A modes.

So, which is the best to use: well not ESHTR if you want the best results unless you need the silent mode for operation of the camera in places such as galleries, churches and museums. Either EFC if your camera supports it or use the MSHTR.

There are several M4/3 Panasonic lenses which are reportedly more prone to shutter shock and I guess this is to do with the OIS lens element being sympathetically pulsed by the shutter closing. One is the 14-140mm and the other is the 45-175mm. It might be worth performing an evaluation of third party lenses if they too have OIS implementation.

Fair well Arran and storm Ali

Well I'm completely refreshed after a week here on Arran even though the weather has thrown everything at me. On closing this newsletter on the ferry on the way back to Ardrossan on the mainland, the sun is shining over the island – it's just like its having the last laugh on me.

Still it will be good to get back home and edit some of the images and video and of course see my family again.



Goat fell clears from the clouds just as I prepare to leave!

Graham