

A lucky reader learns to shoot

high-octane winter sports p8



When most kids dreamt of the soccer boots they wanted, I was looking

> Six ringflash set-ups for getting sexy-looking portraits m106



telezoom tested p102

TEST TEAM The world's toughest tests

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Want soft, even lighting for taking sexy portrait photos? We put the leading ring flash systems to the test lot any flashgun into your hotshoe and you

immediately run into problems with portraiture. They give a hard, unflattering quality of light, and even if you mount a diffusion dome, you're likely to get dark shadows under the nose and chin or to one side of the sitter's head. Ring flash systems use a round tube that encircles the lens, providing soft, near shadowless illumination of your subject. This is not only useful for macro photography but for portraiture too, especially in the field of fashion photography. A

bonus is that you can get distinctive circular catchlights in the

sitter's eyes - and a halo-like hazy shadow around the subject. Options include powerful, complete ring flash systems, converters for studio flash heads, standalone hotshoe-mounting solutions, and adapters for use with standard flashguns. We've tested examples of all four types, each of which has its own pros and cons. Let's take a closer look at what's on offer. [2]

UP CLOSE

FIVE THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR... From power to add-ons, here are the things to consider if

you want to run rings around conventional flash

Power considerations

If you want to compete with the brightness of the sun in outdoor portraiture, you'll need plenty of poke. A really powerful all-in-one system such as the Lencarta gives maximum power.

The size and weight of a full-size studio flash head, ring light

Weight and handling

converter, camera and lens can result in an unwieldy setup that's usually too heavy for comfortable handheld shooting

13 The drawbacks of converters

Ring flash converters for flashguns sap output power, so you'll generally find you have a shooting range of around three metres.

M TTL flash metering A bonus of dedicated ring-type flashguns and flashgun

converters is that they enable automatic flash metering, as well as being much smaller and more lightweight to use. 🌇 Additional lights

For the ultimate in portrait lighting, ring flash is often best used

as part of a group that includes studio flash heads.

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Handling is as natural as it can be for a ring flash system

Ray Flash Adapter € £150, \$200 € www.ray-flash.com

The Ray Flash mounts onto a

flashgun, diverts its output and fires it through a ring around the lens. It does all this without losing an inordinate amount of flash power, so it manages a healthy shooting range, and works with TTL and manual flash settings. The Ray Flash doesn't feel that

robust, but its light weight is good news considering that it's fully supported by the camera's hotshoe. One drawback is that there are four different versions for Nikon equipment, each of which works

flashguns. It can be a pain when you change your camera kit.

with a selection of bodies and

MPhoto VERDICT

PROS... Quick and easy to fit, good shooting reach CONS... Each version lacks wide-ranging compatibility WE SAY ... A good budget choice if you stick to a particular body

OVERALL



The controller unit connects to the ring flash tube via a cable

Nissin MF18 Macro Flash

► £280, \$440 **►** www.nissindigital.com

The self-contained Nissin MF18 has a Guide Number of GN16 (ISO100) and provides slightly greater maximum output than either the Ray Flash or Orbis with a flashgun. It comes with a range of adapter rings for mounting the flash ring tube directly onto lenses with filter threads of 52-77mm, although wide-angle shooting results in extreme vignetting. The flash tube is driven from a

controller that sits in the camera's hotshoe. This has plenty of onboard controls, accessed via an

intuitive menu that uses a colour LCD, similar to that of the Nissin Di866 MkII (see page 114).

MPhoto VERDICT

PROS... Good onboard controls. easy attachment CONS... Notches on the flash tube can be seen in catchlights WE SAY... It produces an even lighting effect

OVERALL



Ring flash kits







► £170, \$200 ► www.rotolight.com

This kit is based on a ring of LEDs powered by three AA batteries. It

comes with a hotshoe mounting adapter and a collection of Lee filters, for balancing the colour temperature and adding coloured light effects. There's no facility to control the strength of the output, so ND filters are also supplied, all of which fit into the lighting ring. The Rotolight kit has two drawbacks. First, the low light

intensity gives a limited shooting distance, making it more suited to macro than portrait photography. Second, the hole in the ring is too small to fit around camera lenses. so it has to be used off-axis.

MPhoto VERDICT

PROS... Constant lighting will

appeal to video shooters CONS... Limited shooting range. won't fit around camera lenses WE SAY... Only really works as a supplemental fill-in light OVERALL









► £181, \$175 ► www.enlightphotopro.com The Orbis Ringflash mounts

directly onto your flashgun. The mounting aperture is pretty much universal. You hold the flashgun with the Orbis attached, and connect it to the camera via a wireless link or remote cable (not supplied). It's easy to reposition the Orbis to surround the lens or to use it off-axis. A sturdy optional mounting arm is also available. Attachment to flashguns isn't entirely solid, and the connection

may need help from some gaffer tape or Velcro strips. Flash power slightly softer and more flattering. MPhoto VERDICT

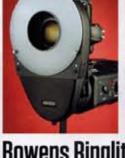
is cut down a little more than with

the Ray Flash, but the output is

PROS... Lovely quality, works with any camera/flashgun combo

CONS... Needs remote flash cord or wireless trigger (not supplied) WE SAY... A superb ring flash adapter at a sensible price OVERALL ***









with two mounting brackets, one

or both of which need to be attached (for landscape or portrait orientation shooting respectively), when fixed to a Bowens studio flash head. For true mobility, you'll also need a Bowens Travelpak rechargeable battery, which costs a further £500/\$600. The system is quite fiddly to set up, and the modelling lamp needs

inch a pro piece of kit. It comes

to be removed from the flash head

before attaching the converter. It's

www.nnhotomag.com

possible to handhold the assembly, with camera, but at around 6.3kg

it's uncomfortably heavy. MPhoto VERDICT PROS... Lots of power on tap for indoor and outdoor shooting CONS... Heavy. Pricy if you don't

own a Bowens studio flash head

WE SAY... Works well, but you'll

need strong arms or a tripod

OVERALL ***







fairly low and blinding via a rotary

Aimed primarily at portraiture knob. There's also a flash diffuser

pros, the Safari kit has been updated to include a Li-on battery

camera via a simple bracket.

Build quality is excellent, and

the power for the 600Ws ring flash

head is fully adjustable between

and shoulder bag supplied. pack, which can supply power for two flash heads (including regular MPhoto VERDICT Safari flash heads) and is just light enough to sling over a shoulder. PROS... The most powerful in the The ring flash head itself retails at group, and great for outdoors £200. It has no built-in power CONS... Costly, but well priced facility, but it's blissfully compared with other pro systems lightweight and mounts to the

OVERALL

WE SAY... When you need real power, this is a great buy

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FAST GLASS

LENS TEST

Nikon's new 70-200mm f/4