Lencarta Safari Li-on kit £1000

Most studio lights are designed to be used indoors where there is a handy mains plug socket, while location lighting involves battery power. However, Lencarta believes it has produced a true 'do-all' light with the Safari Li-on – £1000 for a two-head kit.

The unit is powered by a rechargeable lithium battery, the same as might be used in your camera but much bigger. The battery powers a single head at up to 600Ws, as high as many monoblock studio lights, yet it's good for up to 400 flashes on a single charge at full power.

That power rating means it's good enough to be used as a studio head, too, according to Lencarta. Of course, they are not the only manufacturer to do this; Elinchrom, for example, offers the popular Ranger Quadra and Ranger RX systems, while Profoto produces the Acute B2 AirS. However, the Lencarta is a cheaper option than all its rivals and, compared to the popular Elinchrom Quadra, it offers more power and more flashes per charge. The RangerRX and Profotos are more powerful but cost significantly more again.

The Lencarta power pack uses a 24V lithium battery and offers full digital control of output settings. Two outlet sockets allow you to use two heads at once, and in this case the light output is split asymmetrically in a ratio of 2:1 between the heads, and you can't adjust this ratio. So with one head fitted, a maximum of 600Ws can be fed to it, while with two, one gets 400Ws and one 200Ws.

Used outside on a bright day, 600Ws is enough to overpower the sun as long as the flash is within roughly three metres of the subject and any modifier used, such as a softbox, doesn't eat up too much power. We used the Lencarta outside on what seemed like the brightest day of the year and it came through the test well. After each full-power burst it took just under three seconds to recharge fully.

On a more overcast day, there was power in abundance even when using large softboxes. At half power, we got more than 1200 flashes off a single charge. There is a switch to slow down the recycling, too, which makes the battery last even longer.

"We used the Safar Li-ion outside on what seemed like the brightest day of the year and it came through the test well"

ABOVE Proving that 600W/s can overpower the sun this was shot on a very bright day. On an overcast day, we benefitted from power in abundance, even when using large softboxes

The heads come with the popular Bowens S-type fitting, so finding compatible accessories is not an issue. Lencarta offers its own range of softboxes, including a really nice narrow strip box. In strip boxes, there is a lot of light loss between the centre and the far edges, but the internal umbrella fitment on this one actually improves this slightly.

The light heads also come with a daylight-balanced LED modelling light. Lencarta claims you can use this to record video but in practice it's far more use as a modelling light in the studio.

Of course, the light isn't perfect and the biggest drawback is the lack of built-in internal radio control. That means you have to buy a radio remote trigger and cable to plug into the unit; consequently there's no way of adjusting the lighting power from a distance. Instead you have to physically walk up and turn the dial.

Build quality is not too bad, but it certainly doesn't feel up to the standard of some of the bigger brands, from the pack to the heads to the cables. The plug-in cables feel more plasticky and don't offer as good a fit.

One major bugbear of budget kit has ultimately been the quality and consistency of its light output: quite simply, as the power of the light is adjusted, the colour temperature shifts. Our tests showed the Lencarta varied by 250 Kelvin from full power to minimum, which is actually very good and in line with more expensive units. The flashes were consistent in power, too.

The other issue is flash duration, which varies, says the manufacturer, from 1/1400sec at full power to 1/900sec at minimum and that was consistent with our tests. That's fast enough for most general use, although significantly slower than many of the more expensive packs.

Verdict

The Lencarta Safari Li-on is a surprisingly good performer, especially considering its price. Flash duration could be quicker, but the consistency of colour light output and temperature is good. As a compromise for a unit that can work outdoors as well as in, it depends whether you can live with a three-second recycle at full power and a maximum of 400 flashes. If you can then it could be a great do-all system. ➜

PHOTO PROFESSIONAL RATING

VALUE FOR MONEY	9/10
PERFORMANCE	9/10
BUILD QUALITY	7/10

Overall Rating 8