OM System TG-7 & FCN T02 review

by Peter Rowlands

It weighs just 400gms including a fisheye to full frame zoom lens; fits easily into most BC pockets, shoots RAW, JPG and 4k video as well as super macro and can be used down to 15 metres without a bulky housing. Throw in a decent manual white balance and tough as nails, freezer proof for good measure. Oh yes, and it costs less than £700 ($900) for the camera and the lens and it's called the OM TG-7 and FCON-T02 lens. So what's not to get excited about?

Well, I guess the 15 metre max depth limit, I hear you say and you'd be both right and wrong. Right because it does initially sound a bit limiting but wrong on so many other levels, photographically.

Think back to all those basic articles about how light levels are highest at the surface and then quickly lose their strength and colour spectrum as we go deeper until after about 20 metres it's almost blue/black in tropical waters and green/black in temperate. Throw in the marine biological fact that coral reefs thrive in warm, clear sunlit water and you end up asking "Why do I need to



go deeper than 15 metres anyway?". Welcome to the 'less is more world'.

A recent trip to Marsa Shagra in the Red Sea gave me the opportunity to test this diminutive duo and my thanks go to OM System UK for supplying the test equipment.

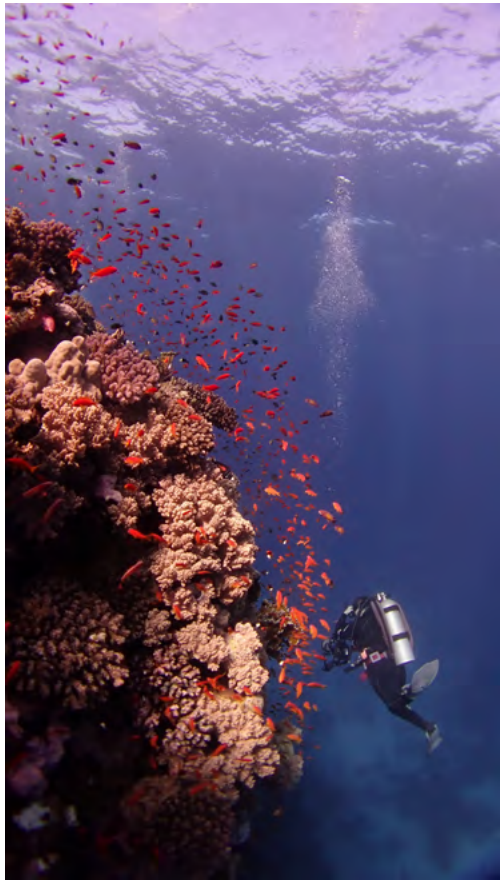
As a life long fan of available light photography both in the UK and overseas I very, very rarely dive with strobes so I am used to diving with just a housed camera or camcorder but when I took the TG-7 out for the first time underwater it felt really odd. Such a small, ordinary looking camera just didn't feel right. Operating the controls just as you would on land confirmed that these compact cameras are almost too small. Normally underwater housings



(Above) Yes, I am using a camera. (Photo courtesy of Alex Tattersall)

(Below) This is Alex taking the above picture. OM System TG-7, FCN T02 at 17mm, 1/160th @ F4, Aperture priority, ISO 100, Manual white balance









(Above) Shallow water is where the light levels are brightest, colours most vibrant and there's far less dive time limitation.
(Left) Going slightly deeper the manual white balance proved a bit 'juicy' but it's easier to mute colours that are there than add colours that are not. And anyway, you always have the option to adjust the RAW files.
(Right) Perfect point and shoot for what we did on our holidays shots.

actually make it easier to handle and control small cameras so the bare camera took a bit of getting used to.

The first job underwater is to remove the FCON T02 lens to remove any small air bubbles. Very simple to do with its bayonet mount and very positive 'click' to confirm secure location.

I deliberately didn't preset any controls prior to the dive so the first few minutes underwater were spent setting the exposure mode to Aperture Priority, ISO to Auto and, my personal preference, -0.7 underexposure (my old habit from film days). Initially I used Auto White Balance and it produced pleasing colours in the shallows but it soon became clear that any deeper and I would have to resort to Manual White Balance. I was very pleasantly surprised to see that this coped very well right down to 15 metres. They looked punchy on the screen underwater but back on my iPad it was clear they had added a bit too much colour which is very easy to desaturate. It's much harder to add colour that isn't there, if you get my drift.

I've never been a particular fan of circular fisheye shots and it's no different with the TG-7 especially as the top and bottom of the image are cropped so you don't get a full circle. The best setting for me was to zoom in to 17mm and this filled the frame and gave what felt like 160° coverage which is reassuringly wide.

It's very easy to drift deeper, especially if you spot an interesting subject, but the TG-7 visually discourages this with a big red warning triangle and exclamation mark on the LCD screen which I found very effective so I moved shallower.

Available light photography is very simple underwater but there are still some basic rules to achieve better images. Firstly keep the sun behind you illuminating the scene in front of you - this will produce much less contrasty light and will produce well lit images. Secondly point the camera slightly more downwards than upwards and this will avoid too much



Keep the sun over your shoulder, aim the camera slightly down and you will get evenly lit colourful images.



The small CCD sensor and a wide angle lens provides excellent depth of focus

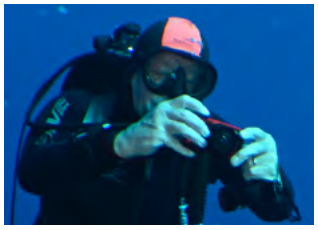
contrast, especially if you are near the surface. And that's about it, really; it leaves you free to fire away and enjoy the ease of operation which this style of photography enjoys.

I stuck with the 17mm setting for most of the rest of the dive but I could have very easily taken off the FCON T02 lens and used the built in 4.5 - 18mm (25-100mm in old money). This is a very versatile range and I look forward to using it in the UK when winter conditions allow.

After an hour in the warm, bright and colourful scenery around the coral pinnacles at Marsa Nakari I couldn't wait to get back to the iPad and show off my images which had so impressed me underwater.

Back at base the images looked good on the larger iPad screen and overall I was very impressed with the capability of this small system. Sure they lack the subtlety and biting detail of a full frame Nikon Z8 but, by the time you house that, it's cost you the best part of ten times as much. To me, that amount of investment and camera capability must make it feel serious whereas the freedom, simplicity and (comparatively) low cost of the TG7 makes it photographically fun and the images were a surprising bonus.

I think underwater photography is very lucky to have such a capable system camera as the OM System TG-7 which suits beginners out of the box but has the capability and the accessories to enable an experienced underwater photographer to take images that will impress all levels.



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