

THE SEKONIC L-558 DUALMASTER

by Ellis Vener

The new Sekonic L-558 Dualmaster meter incorporates a separate spot and incident meter into one body. Each meter has its own silicon photo diode light receptor and is capable of reading electronic flash as well as ambient light. This is not a new concept—Sekonic has been making meters this way for a while. Minolta takes this approach with the Minolta Flash Meter VI, but until I started working with the L-558, I had been using separate spot and incident meters. In ambient light at ISO 100, the incident meter accurately measures light intensities from EV-2 to 22.9 while the 1° spot meter measures from EV 1 to EV 24.4. In Flash mode (really flash + ambient) the incident meter range is from f/0.5 to approximately f/175 and the spot meter range is from f/2.0 to approximately f/175. Both meters can be set for any ISO rating from

ISO 3 to ISO 8000 in 1/3-step increments. Both meters are also capable of displaying readings from 30 minutes to 1/8000 of a second. There is a large and easily interpreted LCD display on the front of the meter and the viewfinder for the spot meter displays shutter-speed, aperture and any degree of exposure compensation you have programmed into the meter.

The first thing that got my attention was the ergonomics of the meter. The way it neatly fits into the right hand with the measuring button and “Jog Wheel” placed close enough to each other and just under the user’s thumb, making it no trouble at all to use the wheel to change shutter speed or aperture and take a new reading or use the buttons on the face of the meter together with the jog wheel, to change metering or reading modes. Along the sides of the meter is a rubber grip strip to make the meter easier to grasp.

Below the large LCD display are six buttons grouped into three rows. Each row of buttons is slightly different in size and the lower two rows are in recessed wells. The top two buttons are (from left) a large power on/off button and a slightly smaller button that has three functions consisting of AVE. for when you take multiple readings and store them in memory; ▲EV to evaluate brightness differences and A which controls Quad Zone A when using the optional internal wireless Pocketwizarrd transmitter for triggering electronic flash lighting (more



about this feature later).

The next row of buttons is marked ISO 1 and ISO 2. The benefits of being able to program the meter to instantly switch between two different ISO settings for the same reading will be obvious to any one who shoots film & Polaroid, or two different film types, or possibly with two different digital cameras. Pushing both ISO buttons simultaneously opens a new level of exposure evaluation. You can program the meter for exposure compensation up to 9.9 stops in increments of 1/10 of a stop either over or under the “normal” reading. The degree of compensation is displayed on the large backlit LCD and in the finder for the spot meter. I see this as being very useful for photographers who use the Zone System, as well as filter users (in addition there is a custom setting for filter factors) and for those of us who do long expo-

sure and want to take into account reciprocity failure. The two ISO buttons also control Quad Zone B and C respectively.

The lower two buttons control meter modes and memory clear. The Memory Clear button also controls Quad Zone D when the optional RT-32 Pocketwizarrd transmitter is installed. There are multiple modes for both the spot and incident meter portions of the L-558: Ambient (constant) light modes are Aperture Priority, Shutter priority and EV. The Flash modes are standard cord sync, Auto reset cordless, cumulative multi-flash (both cord and cordless), and Wireless Flash radio triggering via an optional 32 channel LPA Design Pocketwizarrd module that, as mentioned before, fits into the battery compartment.

With an average range slightly in excess of 100 feet (the orientation of the meter can affect the range; held straight up with the LCD screen facing the receiver gets you a lot more range) between the pack and the nearest Pocketwizarrd receiver you are able to dispense completely with sync cords, which have always been the bane of any photographer’s existence. With certain packs like the Profoto Acute 2R, Profoto D4, Dyna-Lite WI packs, the new Balcar Nomad, and certain new Norman packs that have a 32 channel Pocketwizarrd receiver installed inside, you can trigger the flash without needing an external Pocketwizarrd receiver. LPA Design can install a

"Antelope Lovers." Sculpture by Regis Mazarura of Zimbabwe. Lights: Balcar with Pocketwizard triggering system. Three Balcar U heads were used: no light modifier used on key light (1200 watt seconds from about 15 feet away), while a Balcar V-PLB65 was fitted on the accent light on the left and a XS Pro Chimera used on the one to the right, the two accent lights were powered by a single Balcar R600 pack. The V-PLB 65 was feathered so just the edge of the light from that source hit the sculpture directly and the Chimera was aimed at a large flat.

Metering was accomplished using a Sekonic L-558 in incident flash mode. Kodak DCS 645C Pro Bac in DCR capture mode. Exposure: f/9.5, 1/125, ISO 100. Conversion from color to black & White using Adobe Photoshop CS and the Photokit plug-in. Photokit sharpener set to High Res/narrow edge.



32 channel transceiver in Nikon D1, D1H, D1X, Kodak 14N and (soon to be announced) other cameras so you won't need an external transmitter. As with the Pocketwizard MultiMAX, on channels 17 to 32 you have Selective Quad Zone triggering as well. This is a somewhat jargony way of saying that on each of these 16 channels there are four sub channels: A, B, C, and D. What you can do then is have up to four separate flashes all on the same channel which have their own zone lights set to channel 31D, accent lights on channel 31C, the key light on 31B and the fill lights to 31A. Thus you can quickly take any of them out of your lighting mix, or, if you are photographing a large event, have lights in one room set to one zone and lights in other rooms set to another zone.

One reason to hold on to your Pocketwizard MultiMAX transceivers will be greater range: the MultiMAX is generally good for up to at least 1,000 feet from transmitter to receiver. In addition to all of this there are six custom settings: Filter compensation programming; Display or non-display of Exposure Compensation settings; ability to change the increment of the reading from 1/3 to 1/2 to full-step readings; making aperture priority available when the meter is set to read just ambi-

ent light; to make EV mode available (or not); and the ability to turn on or off the cumulative multiple flash mode.

While all of the above are things that can be done by keeping track of filter factors, different media characteristics, lighting ratios, and running around, being able to incorporate these options into one tool allows you to more efficiently concentrate on what is in front of the camera. That all of these functions work for both the spot and incident meter is terrific, but because they are two different metering circuits, data from one does not get passed to the other. The only aspect of the L-558 that I did not care for is the location of the Measuring button when using the spot meter. I think that if the position of the Measuring and Memory buttons were reversed, the handling of the meter would be a little bit better. ■

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