



## **Underwater Wildlife Video and Editing Courses with Jeff Goodman and Cameras Underwater.**

### **The Sony HDR-XR550 with Gates Housing**

I have just returned from 2 weeks in the Red Sea running a series of 5 day underwater wildlife video and editing courses. For demonstration purposes to students I used the Sony HDR-XR550 in a Gates housing.

I must confess to being a little reticent to using the AVCHD format over the good old trusted DV tape but very quickly I was delighted with both quality of the images and the relative ease in editing material.

Looking briefly at the camera, it has a very useful wide angle G lens (26.3mm stills, 29.8mm video) which is full facilitated by the Gates housing. There is a 10x optical zoom and a 12MP photo facility.

There is a 240GB hard drive which will give around 101 hours of full HD movie. Controls and menus are easy to understand and use and the 3.5in touchscreen LCD is beautifully sharp, with good contrast and colour as well as being nicely touch sensitive and really nice for low light shooting.

So, the camera is great but there is still the question of editing the AVCHD format on most consumer edit softwares. Many systems will not happily deal with the files and so crashed programmes and jerky playback can be a real issue. A good solution is to keep recording all your original material in the AVCHD mode and then convert the files to a more useable format for editing. It won't be long before AVCHD become directly and easily playable and editable, but for now I find converting to avi or Mpeg2 makes life very easy and compatible with most Adobe edit software. Try the free flv video convertor.



The gates housing for the XR550 fits snugly around the camera and is extremely easy to use. It is neutrally buoyant in the water and the soft grip handles either side give a good stability. As already mentioned, the housing dome port gives full use of the cameras wide angle lens and is easily removable for replacing with a flat port if desired.

I do like the simplicity of the controls. It used to be that the Gates manual camera links were often liable to slip, but that seems to have been resolved.

The specs say - Controls: Power, Mode (Video/Photo), Zoom, Record, Photo, Assignable button and Roller, White bal / Tele macro (via touch screen), Internal flip filter. All true and easy to use.

There is a nice simple lever on the front to select the manual or automatic function of the cameras exposure/focus ring. The adjoining control rod then rotates that ring very

precisely. This 'ring can be reassigned to other functions while still in the housing which makes the whole unit very user friendly.

The zoom lever operates the touch screen and is very precise and smooth. So what's left? There is an easy push control rod for on and off, the run button is well placed next to the right hand grip as is the 'photo' button which allow you to take a good quality photo while still running video. I love this. The photos are recorded on a separate memory stick.



Other nice features are that you can remove the memory stick while the camera is still in the housing. You can also connect the usb lead for download to your laptop while at the same time re-charging. The camera itself, once screwed lightly to a base plate will slide in and out of the housing with great ease and precision, being the locked into place by a simple cam lever. All in all a very good unit.

Lastly a quick mention of lighting. I have been using the Ikelite ProV8. What a lovely little light.

Light source: 3 x 5W high intensity white LEDs. 350 lumens.

Colour temp: 4500 - 5000K (daylight)

Coverage: 45° without hot spots.

Power source: 8 x C-cells, Alkaline or NiMH. Which one set lasted me 2 weeks worth of diving.

Burn time: 10 hours without intensity fall-off.

Depth rating: 90m

Good Diving

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