

Electronic flash units are more sophisticated than ever. The Metz mecablitz 76 MZ-5 offers a lot of light with considerable control.

BY RON EGGERS

# Light control

METZ MECABLITZ 76 MZ-5 DIGITAL



Electronic flash technology has come a long way since the days of attaching an old Honeywell strobe to a 35mm camera and firing away. With the old strobes, you could change the aperture, but that was about the extent of your control, and the fastest shutter sync speed was usually 1/125 second. Now electronic flash units are sophisticated, computer-controlled devices that provide an extraordinary amount of control over the amount and duration of light they generate. One of the newer, more sophisticated models on the market is the Metz mecablitz 76 MZ-5 digital.

The 76 MZ-5 digital is a full-size camera-mounted electronic flash that provides a strong combination of power and control. Mainly intended for digital cameras, specifically digital SLRs, the 76 MZ-5 digital can be used with a range of camera bodies. The universal Metz SCA flash system consists of a base unit that works with just about any DSLR, and a separate control unit matched to specific camera manufacturers. The control makes it possible to use the same flash with digital SLRs from different camera manufacturers.

Available optional control units include the SCA 3002 Digital Data Transport system, the SCA 300 System and SCA 301 Standard.

The sophisticated 76 MZ-5 digital takes full advantage of a camera's flash setting options. Shooting vertically at full power, the flash provided a bright, even light. Model: Erika Layva



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## THE GOODS: PRO REVIEW

The 3002 series control units enable virtually all of the flash capabilities of the camera they're attached to. The 300 and 301 offer considerably fewer options. All three attach to the camera's hot shoe. Notably, there isn't an option to connect the flash to the camera's PC sync cord. For this review, I shot with a Canon EOS 30D and the 3102 control unit. Olympus cameras take the 3202, Konica-Minolta the 3302 and Nikons the 3402.

After using the unit extensively, I judged it to have well rounded functionality and plenty of power. With an ISO of 100, it has a guide number of 54 at 50mm, 76 at 105mm. At 6 feet, with full power, it metered out at f/22. The strobe's swivel head can tilt up a full 90 degrees and rotate 270 degrees, so you can angle the flash in almost any direction. You can bounce it off the ceiling or shoot it backward to fill the entire room with light. There's a stationary secondary reflector in the base unit.

In my tests, a fully charged battery achieved the manufacturer's rating of 135 exposures. It's possible to increase the total number of shots by adding the optional high-performance Power Pack P 76 external unit, which clips onto a belt and is supposed to provide auxiliary power for another 150 exposures.

When you first attach the unit to the camera, it's critical to make sure the camera, flash, control unit and battery power are turned off, because there's a lot of bi-directional data communications among the camera, control unit and flash. A start-up surge could damage one of the components.

There are only four controls on the back of the flash: the power switch; ready/test light; modeling light button, and a button

that locks the unit's controls. There's a small slider on the side that controls the position of the secondary reflector below the primary head.

The controls on the control unit are considerably more complex. There are only four buttons, but their functions change with the mode the unit is set in. They control everything from the shooting mode to the ISO setting to the aperture. Bi-direction data transfer

ensures that the camera and flash are synced.

Proving its outstanding functionality, the sophisticated 76 MZ-5 digital takes full advantage of the attached camera's capabilities; the broader the flash setting options available with a specific camera, the broader the options available with the flash unit.

A sensor in the front of the control unit measures flash output for TTL flash

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The Mecablitz's automatic TTL capabilities made it easy to balance the daylight on the back of the model's hair with the light required on the face for this candid shot. Model: Heather Munro

capabilities. The illuminated LCD on the control unit displays a wealth of information about both flash and camera settings.

The unit also supports specialized TTL implementations, such as the Canon E-TTL and Nikon I-TTL, and includes advanced capabilities such as TTL flash with pre-flash measuring. The unit can send out an autofocus beam that the camera can focus on; the focusing information is then transmitted to the control unit and used to determine flash-to-subject distance.

The control unit sets special functions like flash bracketing, available in third-stop increments from 1/3 to 3 stops; slow-sync firing for rear curtain shutters; and remote unit assignment. When used with the Metz remote control, the unit can be assigned a remote address of 1 or 2. When not attached to a control unit, the 76 MZ-5 digital reverts to a slave unit.

Another special function is the manual flash exposure correction, which, in the TTL and automatic shooting modes, can be used to make necessary adjustments for either very dark or very light subjects.

In operation, the flash reflector is automatically adjusted to match the zoom setting of the lens attached to the camera, and supports a zoom range of 24-105mm. The system ships with a wide-angle diffuser attachment to extend the coverage to 20mm. The ML button on the flash head activates a short burst of rapid-firing strobe that can serve as a modeling light to check light intensity and shadow angle. It might not sound like it, but this method works very well.

The Metz mecablitz 76 MZ-5 digital generated a color temperature close to the rated 5,600K. The color meter reading was generally within +/- 10K. The flash duration goes from 1/150 second in manual mode to 1/20,000 second at 1/256 light output. Its ISO range

is extremely wide, all the way from 6 to 6,000.

The flash recycles quickly, sometimes in a second or two, depending on the power output. Be careful not to overheat the unit by continually firing it, which could damage the electronics. Metz recommends observing a 10 minute interval after firing 20 consecu-

tive full light output shots to avoid problems.

At more than 2 pounds with the battery installed, it's larger and heavier than I'm accustomed to in a camera-mounted flash. It took me a while to get used to that. But after that, the unit exceeded expectations. ■