

Reliable remote triggering and electronic advances contribute to the popularity of self-contained monobloc strobes.

BY STAN SHOLIK

Hardy bloc

PHOTOFLEX STARFLASH MONOBLOC STROBE FAMILY

In recent years portrait and wedding photographers, even some commercial photographers, have begun to favor self-contained monobloc strobes.

Photoflex, manufacturer of continuous

light sources and high-quality soft boxes, umbrellas and other light control devices, capitalizes on the trend with the StarFlash family of monobloc strobes: a 300 watt-second (WS) unit finished in red rubber-



based paint; a 650WS unit in blue; and a 1,000WS unit in black.

For this review, Photoflex provided 650WS and 300WS units. It was obvious from the start that these are solid, high-quality strobes. Even with housings of extruded aluminum, they are no lightweights, but the contoured handle on the back makes them easy to carry. The tilt-swivel mount slides into a channel on the bottom of the flash. The mount position in the channel adjusts to balance the weight of heavier soft boxes, Photoflex OctoDomes or lighter umbrellas. Assembled and positioned, the mount locks securely to the monobloc with a large twist-lock grip and to a light stand with a smaller grip. For storage, you can completely remove the tilt-swivel mount.

The StarFlash units have identical controls on the back. These include a rotary power adjustment switch stepped in 1/3-stop increments, from 1/8 to full power. I was disappointed that the units needed to be fired to “dump” power—via the test button on the back of the unit—when going to a lower power setting instead of doing so automatically as some other monoblocs do.



The StarFlash 300 fitted with a 6-inch reflector and fired through a diffusion sheet was powerful enough to capture this ring at f/25, ISO 100.

specs: Photoflex StarFlash 300, 650, & 1000

POWER: 300; 650; 1,000 watt-seconds

POWER ADJUSTMENT: full to 1/8 power

RECYCLE TIME: 2 to 3 seconds; 4 to 5 seconds; 5 to 7 seconds

MODELING LIGHT: 250 watts

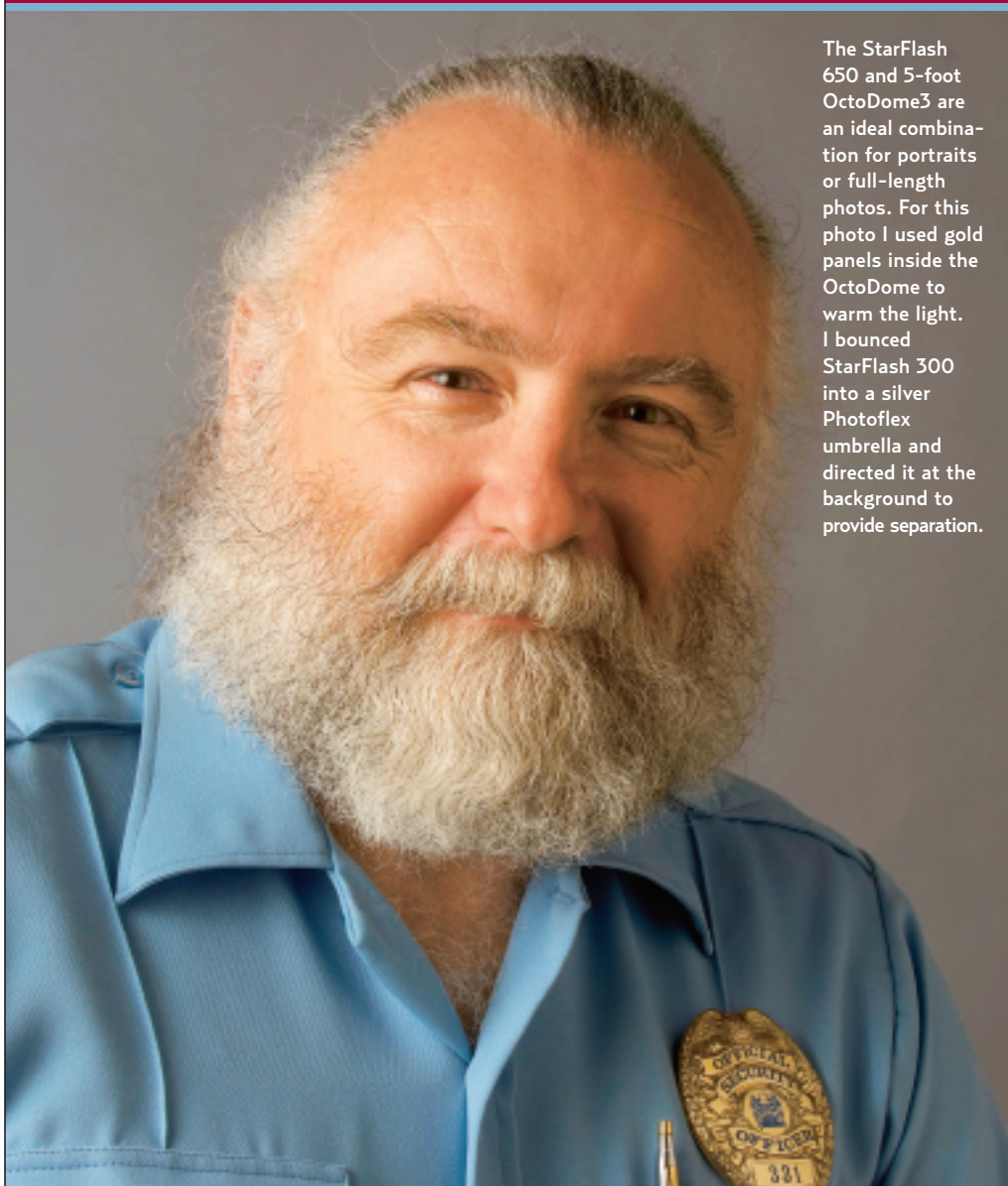
COLOR TEMPERATURE: 5,600 ± 290 K

FLASH TRIGGER: infrared cell (slave), sync cord, manual

COOLING FAN: yes

WEIGHT: 6.5 pounds; 7.1 pounds; 8.3 pounds

MSRP: \$344.95; \$599.95; \$799.95



The StarFlash 650 and 5-foot OctoDome3 are an ideal combination for portraits or full-length photos. For this photo I used gold panels inside the OctoDome to warm the light. I bounced StarFlash 300 into a silver Photoflex umbrella and directed it at the background to provide separation.

A charging light and a flash-ready light indicate the readiness of the units. An audible beep (which you can switch off) signals that the flash is fully powered. A rocker switch on the back sets the 250-watt modeling light to full power or power proportional to the flash output, and another rocker switch turns the built-in infrared slave on or off. The control panel includes a receptacle for a power cord and a phono plug-type sync cord. Both cords are provided, both are heavy duty.

For transport, Photoflex provides a cover to protect the German-made circular flash tube and the modeling light at the center of the flash tube. Pressing a tab on the top front of the unit and rotating it about 1/16 turn removes the cover. Accessories are attached and removed by the same mechanism. I was impressed how securely this quick, simple method held the 5-foot OctoDome3.

Umbrellas are attached by sliding the shaft through a hole in the tilt-swivel head and securing a small locking screw. Initially, the hole was partially blocked when the locking wheel of the pan-tilt head was securely tightened. A couple of washers on the locking wheel solved this. I would have liked a larger locking screw for the umbrella. After I tightened it down securely, I had trouble gripping it well enough to release it.

Once I'd set up the StarFlash units, they were a pleasure to use, both for a commercial shot for a jewelry client and for a studio portrait. For the portrait, the StarFlash 650 and the 5-foot OctoDome3 were a perfect combination. Recycle at full power took 4 seconds (2.5 seconds at half power), more than adequate for this subject. Recycle for the StarFlash 300 was just over 2 seconds. (The specified recycle for the StarFlash 1000 is 7 seconds maximum.)

The color temperature of the new flash tube in the StarFlash 650 was 5,870 Kelvin,

so I used gold panels inside the OctoDome to warm the light. The color temperature of the flash tube varied from 5,400K at 1/8 power to 5,870K at full power, well within the 5,600 ± 290 Kelvin specification. Results were similar with the StarFlash 300. I've always worked with power pack and flash head systems, but it's obvious why monoblocs are popular. There are certainly fewer cords running across the floor, and it's easy to position the cords out of the way of traffic. Monoblocs eliminate the wear on plugs and the potential of shorting-out a head extension cord (and head!) when it's plugged into a power pack. And monoblocs make a compact bundle for storing and transporting.

If a monobloc system is in your future, the Photoflex StarFlash family deserves a serious look. ■

PHOTOFLEX STARFLASH KITS

Photoflex offers 24 different StarFlash kits, grouped in two general categories: Mercury (one-head kits); and Gemini (two-head kits). There are seven available kits with the StarFlash 300, 10 with the StarFlash 650, and seven others with the StarFlash 1000. The StarFlash 300 Mercury Umbrella Kit includes a single 300WS monobloc, 6-inch umbrella reflector, 43-inch silver umbrella and 7-foot light stand. The kit lists for \$524.95; purchasing the components individually would cost \$584.95.

The StarFlash 650 Gemini Umbrella Kit with Bag comes with two 650WS StarFlash strobes, two 6-inch umbrella reflectors, two 43-inch silver umbrellas, two 8-foot stands and a large carry bag for the components. The kit lists for \$1,574.95, versus \$1,749.95 total for the individual components.

At the top of the line, the StarFlash 1000 Gemini Large LiteDome Kit with Bag includes two 1,000WS heads, two 36x48-inch soft boxes, two 8-foot stands and a carry bag. The list price of the kit is \$2,227.95, versus \$2,475.95 if the components are purchased separately.

See the Photoflex Web site for other combinations and introductory sale pricing: www.photoflex.com.