

A LIGHTER TOUCH

Adam Woolfitt reviews the Elinchrom D-Lite RX ONE and discovers that, while this new kid on the block may be small, it's perfectly formed, and incredibly economical



As digital capture has matured, a significant advantage has emerged. Modern sensors work incredibly well at ever higher ISOs. ISO400 and 800 settings on recent DSLRs are now almost noise free and eminently usable - giving the kind of results that you would have had to shoot at ISO 50 or 100 to achieve on film - meaning digital requires less light to achieve a given *f*/stop than film did for comparable noise/ grain.

So an ID portrait, desktop still life or modest interior that would have needed large power packs to light on ISO64 Velvia, can now be shot using much more compact, less costly, lightweight flashes.

Much of my career involved flying around the world with enough flash to shoot interiors, museum objects and food, on Kodachrome 64 - and it was a pain. It cost my magazine clients a fortune in excess baggage, and aroused deep suspicions when laid out along the customs bench in arrivals. It also required two airport trolleys and an assistant, neither of which I ever had.

So the introduction of a new, small and highly portable Elinchrom unit, the D-Lite RX ONE is very timely for those who travel, even if it is only by tube to a vestry or a por-

Above: Two flash heads, each with a Portalite Softbox, were used to light this living room. Each was set to a maximum power (100 W/s), and exposure was 1/4 sec (to record the ambient light) @ *f*/10. Canon 5D Mk2 at ISO200. 24mm T&S lens.

trait session in a boardroom.

The D-Lite RX ONE enters the fray at the bottom end of Elinchrom's professional range. It kicks out a maximum of 100W/s but can be turned all the way down to a remarkably tiny 6 W/s in 1/10 stop increments. Flash speeds vary between 1/1100 sec and 1/2200 sec, depending on the output level set.

D-Lite RX ONE twin head kits can be bought with either umbrellas or softboxes. Each kit comes complete with two stands, mains leads, a new EL- Skyport Universal Speed transmitter, and a generous 5m synch cable.

RADIO CONTROL

Tethered shooting with full control of all lighting and all camera functions is clearly set to sweep the industry, and Capture One Pro and lighting systems such as Profoto already offer versions of this. It certainly beats climbing a step ladder to reset the flash output, change the *f*/stop or check focus, any day.

Importantly, like their big brothers, these new RX heads incorporate a receiver and all the circuitry needed to take full advantage of Elinchrom's EL-Skyport Radio Trigger System. This 2.4 GHz remote radio system allows control of any head within the extensive RX range, from a tiny transmitter that sits on the hotshoe of the host camera.

The new Universal Speed transmitter is said by Elinchrom to enable cameras to synchronise with flash at up to one stop faster than that designated by the camera manufacturer, and can be programmed to work with the extremely short exposure times achieved by the latest generation of bladed medium format shutters (1/1600 sec) and the even shorter exposure times that compact digital compact cameras now deliver (down to 1/2850 sec).

Alternatively, an even wider range of control is possible via a USB dongle and dedicated Elinchrom software. A third option is the Elinchrom Skyport WiFi trigger, designed to run the dedicated Elinchrom soft-

ware with iPads or iPhones. This facility is available across the entire RX range of monoblocs and studio packs.

The EL- Skyport Universal Speed transmitter is tiny, and runs from a lithium CR2430 battery, slotted into a tray at the front of the unit. The Open Flash button on the top surface enables the transmitter to fire all RX equipped flash units, or selected flash units that have been set up into one of four groups, set to any one of eight separate frequencies.

The flash output can be controlled in $\frac{1}{10}$ stops with the + and - buttons. Extended pressure on the + button sets the modelling lamp to full power, and then toggles it on/off, both as an aid to remote focusing, and to combining the warmer modelling lamp with low power flash as a creative lighting option. It is also particularly useful in preserving power with battery operated flash units on location.

An optional Skyport USB dongle allows you to control up to 64 RX units from your computer. The Mac or PC software is free to download from the Elinchrom website, and this remote USB system offers many additional features, including sequential firing, second curtain sync, shutter delay, and so on. Not all the functions are applicable to all RX units, and some are specific to RX battery packs.

A lesser level of control is also available remotely from an iPhone or an iPad, using the Elinchrom Skyport WiFi transmitter and the dedicated software package. Setting this up takes a few moments, and is the only complicated thing about it.

THE D-LITE RX ONE IN USE

D-Lite RX One flash heads are very neat and tidy, and make extensive use of dark grey polycarbonate in the structure of the casing, tilt head and secondary umbrella claw which is incorporated into the swivel. The heads are pretty diminutive, weighing at a mere 900g (with a standard short reflector). I found it slightly ironic that the excellent and nicely made 2.4m light stands supplied with the kit, weigh 1600g - very nearly twice as much as the flash heads themselves.

In use, the heads worked well, with some caveats. They are not super fast to recharge, even at lower output levels; 0.44 secs to 1.5 secs. However, it is remarkably useful that their output can be turned down 5 f/stops from 100W/s to a minimum of 6 W/s. I could not detect any colour shift between these extremes, despite the exposure duration ranging from $\frac{1}{1100}$ sec to $\frac{1}{2200}$ sec.

The D-Lite RX One can accept the whole vast range of Elinchrom light shapers, reflectors and umbrellas, which lock onto the head with a very positive sliding catch. A tube within the depth of the light head accepts umbrellas with 7mm stems while, for fatter broolly stems, a secondary 8mm umbrella claw is incorporated into the swivel head below the lamp unit.

The 7mm shaft enables you to locate the umbrella in the centre of the head. This shaft also provides a location for the Deflector Set, a system of inner diffuser and reflector



Left: The D-Lite RX One with softbox fitted. The blue latch locks lightshapers in place, and secondary umbrella claw is sited below locking handle.

Below: The Skyport WiFi controller allows you to control lighting functions for groups of flash heads from an iPad running the dedicated Elinchrom software package.



Above left: Rear view, showing the power input cord and other principal controls.

Above right: The Skyport EL Speed radio control unit sits in the camera hot shoe. It can be programmed to control flash output, modelling lamps - proportional or 'on-off', and four groups of lamphheads.



discs that, fitting inside the accessory, can transform the lighting options from all softboxes and most reflector accessories.

While a good range of 7mm brollies is available, the 8mm connector is for larger brollies with the larger shaft. It is flexible to prevent excessive force on the head, where a brolly may be too large.

I found this alternative provision a bit clumsy, as it necessitated loosening the swivel enough to fit the umbrella stem, and then re-tightening the whole thing to re-set the angle of the light.

SOFTBOX KIT

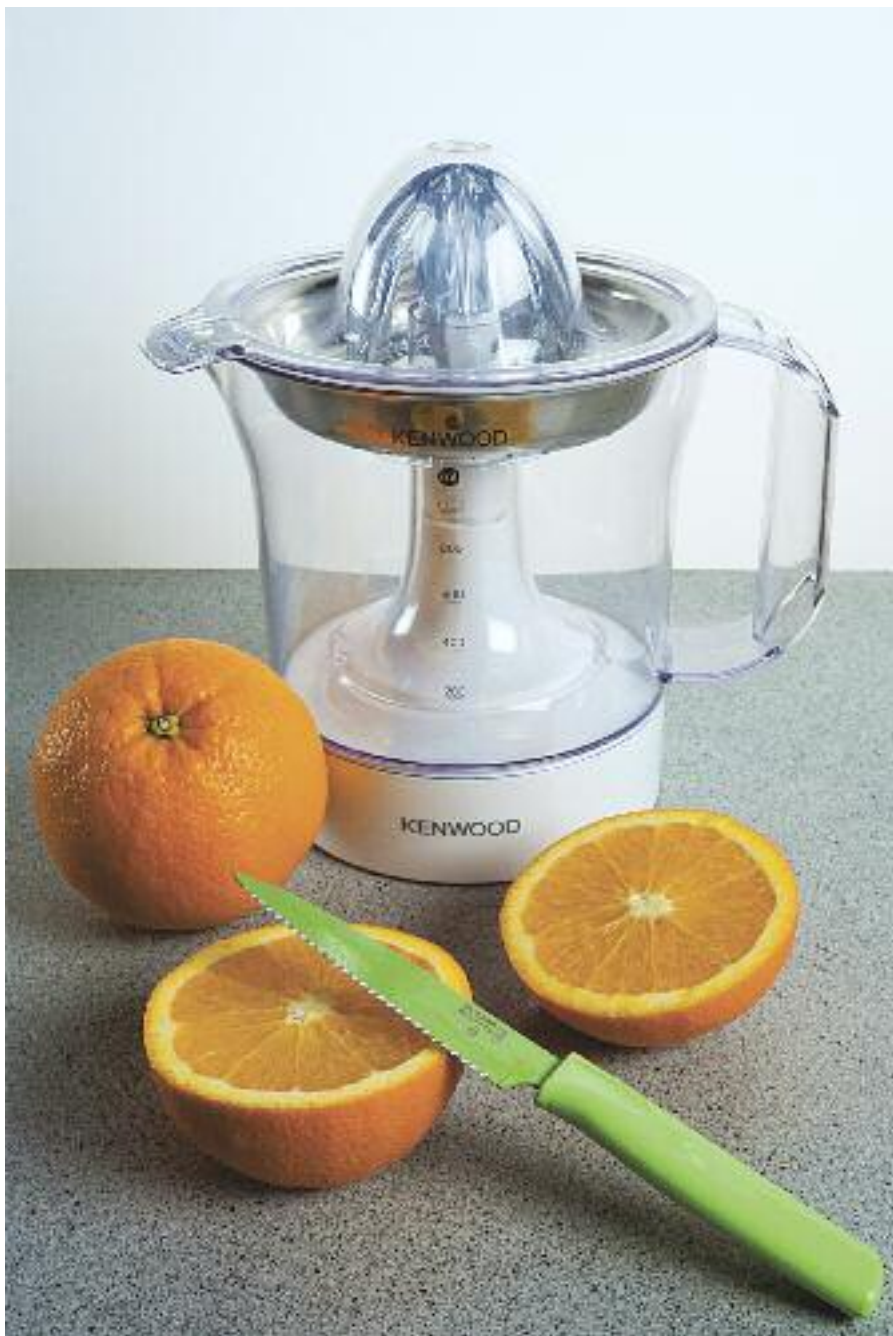
I opted to review the softbox kit on purpose, because I hate setting up softboxes. They always fight back, and the 60cm Profilitone proved no exception. The Portalite softboxes in the kit are designed to be the most portable, but they will take a couple of minutes to set up. I found it fiddly and recalcitrant, and I wouldn't care to do this with an impatient managing director or a grumpy bride watching. However, it would undoubtedly become easier with practise.

Rotalux softboxes meanwhile are a system upgrade. They are available in a wide range of shapes and sizes, are said to take seconds to assemble, rotate, come in their own bag, have double diffusers and a system of accessory options, but they are a bigger separate bag.

I find umbrellas are quicker and more amenable to use, and though they don't give quite the same quality of light, they are hassle free to set up. However despite the front cover of the softbox consisting of a single layer of diffuser material, it gave a very pleasant, broad and surprisingly even spread of light.

The only other problem I found was the fan noise. The fan cuts in when the heat sensor demands, but it is distinctly noisy, and several lampheads switching on and off at different moments would not make for a calm portrait session.

At 100W/s, Elinchrom claims the RX One flash head is more powerful 'than most speedlights'. This is hard to verify, as most speedlights quote their output with the heads zoomed right out for a 200mm lens, yielding



Top left: D-Lite RX One without hood, showing the mushroom shaped 'domestic type' modelling lamp. Above: Two flash heads were used to light this table top still life. The main head was set to maximum power (100W/secs) and the background light was set at 25W/secs.

a very concentrated area of illumination and a suitably inflated guide number.

The D-Lite RX One certainly kicks out enough light for modest interiors, headshots, and small still life photography meanwhile, even when a softbox or umbrella soaks up much of the total output. The heads also offer modelling light, which no speedlight does.

Speedlights that might be thought comparable are the Canon 600EX-RT, around £375, or the Nikon SB-910 AF at around £345! Both feature built in radio transmitters for triggering up to 15 remote units, and various other sophisticated control functions.

But with the twin head Elinchrom umbrella kit costing just under £350 (or £399 for a Twin head Softbox kit) the cost advantages

are startlingly clear.

While the kits as they come are mains powered, portable power can be supplied by an optional Innovatronix Explorer unit, available from The Flash Centre for £390.

I proved to myself that the new baby Elinchrom can cope with pretty grown up tasks, but if I bought a kit it would be to supplement my existing Elinchrom lighting kit. One or two D-Lite RX kits would be invaluable as tiny accent lights on big interior set ups - small enough to pop behind a sofa or pot plant in a room set, bright enough (and light enough) for a hair light on a boom.

The D-Lite RX are very versatile, very dinky and in today's pricing structure, very economical too.

Adam Woolfitt