

New Series

Lighting  
Continuous

PM  
Technique



# Feeling light headed

With DSLRs now offering serious movie capabilities, we may need to consider flash alternatives. Continuous lighting is the answer but can it be used for stills work? CRAIG FLEMING finds out with an Elinchrom Zoom Scanlite Halogen head



**M**y first experience of artificial lighting was back in the late 80s with Arri redheads, tungsten lighting that did indeed kick out a lot of light. They also produced a lot of heat which wasn't such a problem when shooting products in a large cold studio. With the advent of current DSLRs came the option of shooting HD video, and oddly I have been asked on numerous occasions to produce short trailers for a couple of clients. What better reason then to give the Elinchrom Zoom Scanlite Halogen head a run out. But before I part with my hard earned cash I need to know whether they can perform the duties that my BXRis do in my main role as a portrait photographer.

One benefit halogen heads have over monoblocs is their size and weight. They are much smaller and lighter than their flashy cousins, which is a plus point if like me you tend to work anywhere and everywhere as opposed to just working in a studio every day. The Elinchrom Scanlites couldn't be simpler in operation. The main on/off switch sits on top of the unit and this operates the bulb itself and merely having the power lead in place operates the intelligent cooling fan – the speed of which is determined by the running temperature of the head. I'm struck by how quiet that fan is on the Scanlite compared to my BXRis. You may think that's a minor point but it would become a major point if you were shooting video and all you could hear was a continuous whirring fan in the background, it's these small things that make big differences.

Another big plus point of the Scanlites is their compatibility with my existing kit. All my reflectors can be utilised with the heads, with the exception of the Portalite Softbox and also the Elinchrom snoot and Fibrelights. This, I imagine, may well be to do with the amount of heat ➔



“ANOTHER BIG PLUS POINT OF THE SCANLITES IS THEIR COMPATIBILITY WITH MY EXISTING KIT”

2



→ produced by the halogen bulbs – but it’s not really an issue for me as I’d tend to opt for a more contrasty, silver metal reflector when using continuous lighting. A centred umbrella fitting also features on the head, thus furthering your light shaping capabilities. You have the option of using either a 300w or 650w bulb in the Scanlites. The unit I have on loan came with a 300w bulb; a quick metering with my Sekonic gave me an exposure of 1/125th at f/2.8, ISO 400 (flood) and 1/125th at f/4, ISO 400 (spot), both at a distance of six feet coupled with my own Elinchrom 18cm reflector. A glass dome protects the bulb itself, which again is a small point but a worthy addition.

You’ll note there the reference to flood and spot. What looks like a power dial on either side of the Scanlite is actually a zoom function with figures quoted on the FotoFlits website as 20 to 50 degree angles when coupled with the 21cm reflector. If you’re confused at this point don’t be. Using Scanlites is an absolute breeze as you’re actually creating a light you can see as opposed to flash which can be off-

4



putting, particularly to anyone new to studio lights.

So that’s all the technical stuff, but I’m eager to see how it performs on a portrait shoot. I’ve employed the services of my model-friend Leanne, and as I explain to her the subtle differences of continuous over flash her eyes glaze over and she heads off to steal from my fridge. Point taken and I shut up.

**Image 1 and 2:** First impressions on the back of the camera are good ones, however I quickly realised I’d left the camera in auto white balance by mistake. I do actually love the warm toned look as indeed did Leanne – who tends to get booked on account of her paler porcelain skin – nonetheless it is a little over the top so I have toned it down in Photoshop. For an advocate of getting it right in camera that may seem a little hit and miss, but I prefer the editorial style we achieved here and I want different lights to give me different looks – if I’d have wanted it to look like flash I’d have shot it using flash.

**Image 3:** It’s difficult to tell on the back of one shoot using the

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5



Scanlites, but in this example I think the halogen light source tends to give better black and whites. I like to boost contrast considerably in monochrome but blown highlights, particularly on the forehead and bridge of the nose, can be an issue. Although here the contrast range seems narrower giving me a greater scope to boost that contrast without losing any of the detail.

**Image 4:** The wider zoom option gives a softer, more even light as well as a one stop reduction in exposure in this instance. Teamed with my undiffused beauty dish I’m happy with the effect. With the head about five feet away from the subject I have an exposure of 1/60th at f/4, ISO 400. This is about as slow as I’ll go for a portrait, but the benefits over flash are the fact that this exposure would allow me to also manipulate any natural light available using reflectors. This is something I often do when shooting in locations such as hotel rooms or country houses. When using flash on duller days, even at its lowest power, I’m not often afforded that luxury. →

1



3







6

## BIOGRAPHY

Craig is an editorial, fashion and portrait photographer based in Sheffield. He enjoys working in a studio and on location experimenting with different lighting equipment, essentially the perfect match for our latest series; finding the best lights for different looks and effects. In his spare time, Craig likes to carry out personal downtime projects to add to his portfolio.

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**Image 5 (previous page):** The shallow depth-of-field when using less powerful light sources compliments my more editorial → approach to portraiture. It isn't as crisp as flash and that narrow plane of focus means you have to be critical when focusing at closer distances, but the overall look is more effective to this genre of portraiture.

**Image 6:** My professional photography career started out exactly this way, shooting products using continuous lighting. Obviously when shooting products for catalogues as such you need to get everything as sharp as possible. Using my 18cm reflector with the head about three feet away, I've managed an exposure of 1/8th at f/22. Such a slow exposure means we're now in tripod territory, but for this medium of photography I'd always use one anyway, so again it's just not an issue.

A possible downside of continuous lighting for portraits is the amount of heat produced. People react differently to heat, especially when wearing make-up and on a hot day in a small, enclosed environment, it could be problematic. There are benefits, however, and as I initially mentioned with video figuring heavily in many photographers' skillsets now, these small powerful lights are an absolute must. If you're used to flash you may see the reduction in power as a negative. But if like me you tend to balance flash with daylight then I think the Scanlites may prove a better option, especially with the lower exposures enabling that balance to be realised and also giving a more natural lighting effect. The price of a single head is £129. As I write this and think adding a couple to my kit will be well worth it for the extra scope it could offer, especially with moving images. I know I keep mentioning video, though this isn't what this article is about, but if you harbour any thoughts of turning professional then it is an extra skill you may need to think about in the future – and tailoring your kit to any eventuality may be something worth thinking about now. **PM**



## Quick Spec:

300-650W Scanlite head | Price: € 369,-  
Size: 245x155x205mm (Single head)  
Weight: 1200g | No. of heads: 1  
Wattage: 300-650W | Fitting type:  
Elinchrom bayonet | Power source: 230

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