



Elinchrom's stylish new ELC Pro HD series flash monoblocs are available in 500 or 1000 joule models. Body casings are made from high impact plastic which is also fire retardant.

Speed Lights

ELINCHROM ELC 500 PRO HD

Elinchrom rethinks the flash monobloc, giving its new ELC models a long list of features, a wide power range with fast flash durations and an efficient menu-based operating system. Report by Paul Burrows.

It's always tempting to think that a category of imaging product has reached the end of its evolutionary road, but inevitably there always seems to be more to come. Take flash monoblocs, for example. Looking at the current crop of models, it's hard to see where any significant improvements could be made apart from a bit of mild tweaking here and there. They do what they do pretty well; namely balance portability and power with convenience and cost extremely well, whether mains powered or battery powered or a hybrid system.

Then along comes Profoto's B1 with its facility for TTL auto exposure control and Elinchrom's ELC Pro HD series with just about everything worked over in one way or another. There are currently two models in the ELC Pro HD line-up – one with

500 joules maximum flash power and the other with 1000 joules – and they share pretty well the same styling, design, size and feature sets. They're mains powered and intended to replace the Style RX models and have high-impact polycarbonate casings (which, incidentally, are also fire retardant) with an integrated carry handle at the rear, set high so it doesn't get in the way of the control panel. A cooling fan vents from the base of the body casing and it's intelligently controlled to operate at variable speeds according to the unit's operating temperature. In practical terms, this means it's often running at very low speeds and, consequently, hardly audible at all.

The control panel has a Broncolor-style membrane covering with backlit buttons and, for the

first time on a flash monobloc, an OLED-type digital display. Consequently, the panel doesn't need back-lighting and, perhaps more importantly, it's still visible in bright lighting situations.

This doesn't just show power settings in both f-stops and in actual joules, but also the flash duration and the status of various settings such as the recycle speed, the photocell, the audible signals and the flash functions (more about these shortly). Equally usefully, this display also shows the group and channel numbers when the EL-Skyport radio remote trigger is being used so it's more comprehensive than anything we've seen before on flash monoblocs. Certainly, translating the f-stop into the actual flash power setting in joules and also showing the flash duration is incredibly useful. Beyond this, up to four user presets can be set up and stored. For most photographers, these are going to work best as subject/scene presets which allow for a particular combination of settings to be recalled via a menu button.

On The Menu

Operation of the ELC Pro HD monoblocs is all menu-driven and separated into chapters for power settings, the photocell, EL-Skyport triggering, audio signals, modelling lamp, user presets and the aforementioned flash modes. Everything is labelled in full alphanumeric terms (i.e. no cryptic abbreviations) and there are no mysterious multiple combinations of keys to press... it's just a logically-arranged menu system with straightforward navigation via left/right keys with a multi-functional control knob serving as the 'enter' key. The control knob is pressed in to save operational settings and turned to change power settings plus it incorporates a multi-coloured indicator lamp. This shows constant green when the unit is fully recharged and



Flash tube is user-replaceable and protected by a glass dome which is supplied with the unit. Modelling lamp is a powerful 300 watts halogen source.

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ready to go, then blinks in green during discharging. The indicator turns to orange during recharging and blinks in red if the monobloc is fired before recharging is completed.

A quick run through the menu system is all that's needed for familiarisation and then flying the ELC Pro HD monoblocs is very straightforward indeed with any changes to settings or the activation of functions performed easily and efficiently. There are three flash modes called Sequence, Delayed and Strobe; each with their own set-up sub-menu. Sequence allows for up to 20 units to be set to fire consecutively and in the desired order. Delay is pretty self-explanatory and it's simply a case of keying in the delay time (after shutter release) between 1.0 milliseconds (i.e. 0.001 seconds) to ten seconds (i.e. 10,000 milliseconds). In other words, first or second curtain sync with all variations in between. The adjustment increments for this can also be varied with a choice of one, ten, 100 or 1000 steps. The Strobe mode delivers multiple flashes set between one to 20 times per second and over a timed duration of between 0.5 to five seconds. As noted earlier, each function's settings is shown in the OLED display panel.

Power Ranger

Beyond its party tricks, the ELC 500 Pro HD delivers a solid set of capabilities. The flash power range can be varied over seven stops (eight on the 1000 joule version) which means the minimum output is just seven joules. Adjustment is in 1/10-stop increments and the shortest flash duration of 1/5000 second is achieved at 53 and 57 joules (corresponding

to f3.0 and f3.1 at ISO 100 and one metre). However, even at maximum power, the flash duration is still a fast 1/2330 second.

At minimum power, the ELC 500 can fire continuously at up to 20 flashes per second. Power dumping is performed automatically and Elinchrom quotes a stability of +/-0.1 percent. Colour temperature stability is quoted at +/-150 degrees Kelvin. There's the choice of fast or slow recycling speeds with the former pumping the 500 joule model back up to full power in just 0.6 seconds which is fast in anybody's book.

The modelling lamp is a 300 watts halogen source with the choice of proportional control or independent adjustment. The built-in photocell can be set to detect the preflashes emitted by on-camera speedlights or built-in D-SLR (or CSC) flashes which serve as a commander unit. This doesn't go as far as the Profoto B1's TTL flash control, but it does allow the ELC 500 Pro HD to be remotely synched with a D-SLR without using an optional trigger unit (either IR or RF). However, both the ELC Pro HD models have a built-in EL-Skyport receiver for radio controlled triggering. Here there's the choice of four groups and eight channels so a total of 32 units can be remotely triggered this way.



Quick-twist bayonet fitting allows for a fast changeover of accessories.

Integrated carry handle is logically placed for both balance and to avoid any interference with the rear control panel.



LEFT: Built-in cooling fan vents from the base of the body casing and has variable speeds which are automatically controlled according to the unit's operating temperature.

TOP RIGHT: OLED-type display includes useful information such as the flash duration at a given power setting.

RIGHT: Control panel has a membrane covering and the multi-function control knob (bottom centre) incorporates variable colour indicators.



“The flash power range can be varied over seven stops (eight on the 1000 joule version), which means the minimum output is just seven joules.”

At the other end of the complexity scale, the sync cable socket is a 3.5 mm terminal and uses a low five-volt sync voltage to ensure safe and reliable operation with any digital camera system.

The flash tubes are user-replaceable and protected by a glass dome which is supplied with the unit along with a 16 centimetre reflector dish which gives a light spread of 90 degrees. Accessories such as reflectors and softboxes are coupled via a bayonet fitting which has a quick-twist action so changeovers can be completed in a matter of a few seconds. There's a seven-millimetre diameter centre tube for fitting brollies while the stand bracket incorporates a clamp which can be used instead if the shaft is any wider.

The Verdict

Elinchrom has always been known as the 'affordable Swiss brand' of studio lighting, but it's deliberately taken the ELC Pro HD monoblocs further upmarket in terms of their build quality, features and performance. It looks like Profoto's D1 Air models might be in the Elinchrom gunsights, and obvi-

ously the faster flash durations and rapid recycling speeds mean that fashion and action photographers are being targeted as potential customers.

However, the versatility inherent in the power range and the various control functions mean these monoblocs actually have a wide range of possible applications. And although they're exclusively mains powered (with auto sensing for voltage), the ELC Pro HD monoblocs are compact enough to be comfortably portable for use on locations other than a studio.

The OLED display may seem like a comparatively small thing, but the extra information shown is actually really useful, as is its high visibility in any situation. Likewise, the menu system is much more intuitive than is usually the case with microprocessor-controlled studio flash equipment so both set up and subsequent changes to settings can be executed with the minimum of interruptions to a shoot. The Elinchrom ELC 500 Pro HD is not just a speed machine in terms of its capabilities, but also in its operation. And in the highly competitive monobloc market, this is now what it takes to get noticed. **CP**



The ELC series monoblocs have an EL-Skyport radio receiver built-in. Optional Skyport Speed transmitter unit (which is supplied in the 'To Go' kit sets) operates over eight channels with four groups.

Elinchrom ELC 500 Pro HD



Maximum Flash Power: 500 joules.

Guide Number/f-stop: f64.8 (at 1m and ISO 100).

Variable Power Output: Seven stops, adjusted in 1/10 stop increments.

Flash Duration (t=0.5): 1/2330 to 1/5000 second.

Recycling Time: 2.0 seconds to 500 joules. 0.6 seconds in Fast recycle mode.

Modelling Lamp: 300 watts halogen.

Model Lamp Control: Proportional, on/off, free adjustment.

Triggering: Sync connector, photocell with pre-flash detector, radio frequency.

Main Features: Preflash detector system, flash-to-flash output consistency of +/-1.0 and colour temperature of +/-150 degrees Kelvin, Strobe mode, Sequence mode, Delayed mode, OLED digital displays, auto dumping, cooling fan with variable speeds, switchable audible signals, auto mains power detection.

Power Requirements: 90-265 volts AC, 50/60 Hz.

Dimensions (LxWxH): 315x140x210 mm.

Weight: 2.35 kilograms.

Price: \$1350 for single head with flash tube, protective glass dome and 90-degree reflector. EL-Skyport Speed Transmitter costs \$150. \$2695 for 'To Go' set which includes two complete heads, EL-Skyport Speed Transmitter and custom carry case.

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