

USING FLASH IN BRIGHT LIGHT



RORY LAUBSCHER TALKS ON-CAMERA FLASH IN PART ONE OF HIS LOOK AT LIGHTING IN FULL SUNLIGHT

As a flash user, sooner or later there will come a time when you need to pit your wits against the sun itself. This is not an impossible battle to win, but getting to a point where you're able to consistently produce good images takes practice and a good understanding of the obstacles you need to overcome.

Before we get started, a few small disclaimers: This article is about shooting in direct, harsh

sunlight. Looking for a shaded area to place your model in is a great idea, but that's not the lesson I want to teach today.

Also, this article is aimed at solo photographers working alone with minimal gear.

This first part presents options for shooting with the camera's flash. Next issue will cover options for the budget-conscious photographer shooting with off-camera flash

as well as the photographer who is fortunate enough to have more advanced gear. Sometimes, getting things right means having the right piece of equipment. Knowing why something is used is far better than knowing that it was used.

And a note that my articles build on each other — feel free to go back to previous articles if there are specific concepts that don't make sense. Let's get into it.

PROBLEMS, PROBLEMS, PROBLEMS

Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun, so the song goes.

Aside from the discomfort factor for both model and photographer, there are some very real

issues with photographing in bright sunlight, and they can be immensely frustrating to deal with.

Model facing sun



WHICH DIRECTION TO SHOOT IN?

The question is essentially an easy one to answer. A model facing into the sun is going to squint. Shoot with the sun behind your model. In this case, the sun was behind and to the right of the model. Her face is in shade which is comfortable for her, and also gives me a blank canvas (so to speak) for adding flash.

Shooting backlit



THE BALANCING ACT BETWEEN APERTURE AND SHUTTER SPEED

This is essentially where things go awry for most photographers. There are two very conflicting considerations involved in a shoot like this — shallow depth of field for portraiture and shooting no faster than sync-speed when using flash. Let's explore this.

Before I started I took two images to see what my exposure settings were.

This first image (below left) was taken in shutter priority at sync speed, to get a ballpark aperture. If I want to use flash I cannot shoot faster than sync speed. Unsurprisingly for a bright day, the aperture was pretty small ($f/16$).

The second image (below right) was shot in aperture priority at $f/2.8$. The idea here was to

see what shutter I'd need to use if I wanted the shallowest depth of field my lens could give. And again, no surprises that the shutter speed was pretty fast ($1/5000$ s).

At this stage, a few things are running through my head.

An aperture of $f/16$ is a lot of depth of field, which is not always a great idea for outdoor portraiture. I like the model to stand out by blurring the background to a degree — having everything sharp works against this idea. Not to say that this is always the right thing to do. As with most things in photography it's about personal taste and the intent of the photographer.

The flash (Canon 580 EXII) is probably going to be pretty close to the model. I know this because I know the guide number of the flash (58). If I divide 58 by my aperture I will get the distance in metres where a full-powered flash would need to be placed to correctly expose my subject. In this case it's $58/16 = 3.6$. But that's for a bare flash. The minute I add any sort of modifier I'm going to lose a few stops of light from the flash, and to compensate for this the light will have to move towards the subject.

If I want a shallow depth of field I am going to have to use high-speed sync. This dramatically decreases the efficiency of the flash. >

High DOF: $f/16$, $1/200$ s, ISO 100



Wide aperture: $f/2.8$, $1/5000$ s, ISO 100



WORKAROUNDS

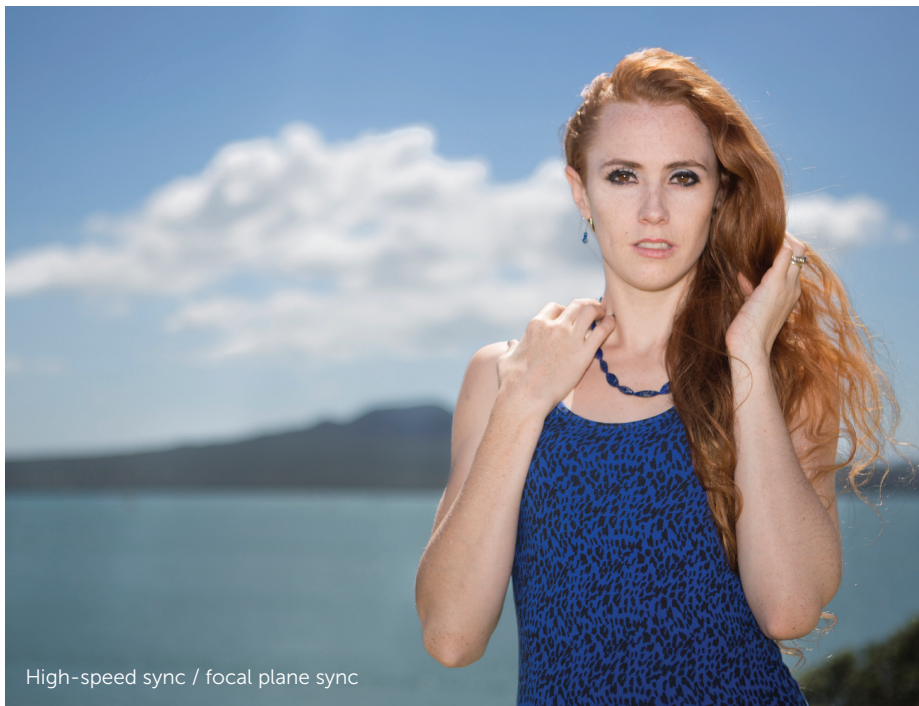
Let's start by taking a look at a progression of images and the thought process behind them.

ON-CAMERA FLASH


This is usually everyone's starting point. The light is always with you and there is no need to lug around a light stand or risk having the stand fall over and damage some pretty pricy gear.

OK, so here we've gone back to the scenario above. Shooting at sync speed of 1/200s means the flash is happy, but this does necessitate a small aperture with resultant increased depth of field. Flat lighting on the subject is certainly not hideous, but doesn't have any real finesse.

Now to the other end of the spectrum — shooting wide open to get a shallow depth of field. Shooting faster than sync speed requires the use of high-speed or focal-plane sync. The loss of flash efficiency when using high-speed sync is a potential issue. In this case it is doing the job just fine at 1/5000s because the wide aperture is letting in as much of that flash light as the lens is able to, and the relatively short flash-to-subject distance is also helping out. If we started moving away from the subject (using a telephoto lens for instance)



things would probably not work well. As always, I hope this has taught you something and given you a better grasp of the fundamentals behind shooting with your camera's flash in bright light — next issue we

will delve into off-camera lighting techniques. If you have any questions head on over to the blog post at www.bit.ly/YuW3Pq and leave them in the comments section. Happy flashing! 

At sync speed



Rory Laubscher runs workshops on flash photography at his Firefly Photography studio in Auckland. Visit www.fireflyphotography.co.nz for session times or to arrange one-on-one tuition.