

Lencarta Atom 180

Power, portability, intuitive handling and versatility are the key selling points of the Atom range. In this test, we try the Atom 180

WORDS WILL CHEUNG

Lencarta is making a big name for itself in lighting circles by offering highly specified, great quality kit at attractive prices. We tested a SuperFast mains flash kit in Issue 32. We loved its brief flash duration, thanks to IGBT technology; having mains flash as brief as 1/20,000sec opens up all sorts of action photography potential. The Lencarta Atom portable flash system also uses IGBT technology, giving flash durations as brief as 1/10,000sec. There are two models in the Atom range, both powered by a separate power pack. The Atom 180 on test here has an output of 180 watt/seconds.

Unlike a typical modern hotshoe-fitting flashgun, the Atom is manual output only, from full power down to 1/128th power. Its IGBT circuitry means that when you're using lower power outputs, the light's colour temperature stays consistent.

The gun itself is much bigger and heavier than something like a Nikon SB-910 or Canon 430EX II. With its size, manual output and choice of light modifiers, the Atom is more at home used off-camera on a lighting stand with a cold-shoe adaptor – included in the kit.

The Atom flashgun has no on-board power source so you need the separate Atom rechargeable lithium-ion battery pack. Two power output sockets mean you can link two Atom units to one battery without affecting recycling speed.



IMAGES The Atom really comes into its own off-camera on a lighting stand and, impressively, you can link two units to one battery.

This battery pack is available on its own and with the appropriate lead it can also be used to power Canon, Nikon and Sony flashguns as well as recharge iPads, iPhones and any other accessory with a USB connector.

In use, there is the option of choosing the manual mode with your chosen output with the flashgun on the camera's hotshoe or synced with a radio trigger. The Atom also has two slave modes that work when flash from another unit is detected. In S1 the Atom fires instantly, in S2 it ignores the first from a master gun and fires on the second main flash. For multiple flash shots, a stroboscopic mode is available, but you can't use it on full or half power.

Probably the most interesting setting on the system is high-sync triggering mode. You need a trigger that allows high-speed sync (and it's not available with the flash on the hotshoe).

I tested output using a Polaris flash meter. At one metre, ISO 100 and with its standard reflector, I got an aperture reading of f/42.2 so that's a GN of 42. The claimed GN is 60 so our test showed the Atom was slightly down, by around 1EV, which is nothing in the world of flash GNs – they are determined in lab conditions. Readings were taken at key power settings, ie. half, quarter, eighth and so on. Output dropped in almost perfect relation to full power. The only exception was the difference between 1/64th and 1/128th power, where the difference was just over 0.5EV, not 1EV.

All in all, an impressive showing, demonstrating that there's plenty of power and creative potential on tap.



THE VERDICT

The Lencarta Atom will not be everyone's cup of tea. There's no automation, not even auto setting of the right sync speed, so it's not a competitor for dedicated flash units. But for £350 you get a one-head battery powered flash that offers output comparable to an entry-level mains flash in a portable form and its IGBT circuitry means you get consistent colour temperature even at the lowest power settings and very short flash durations.

The Atom system is another fine product from Lencarta. Highly recommended.

HOW IT RATES

FEATURES 23/25

Plenty of power, manual output only and IGBT circuitry for short flash durations

PERFORMANCE 24/25

Impressive all-round flash skills

HANDLING 23/25

It's a big unit for on-camera use but otherwise handling rates highly

VALUE FOR MONEY 22/25

A head and battery kit for £350 is good value

OVERALL 92/100

Portability, ease of use and power make for a potent combination

PROS Power, range of modifiers, shooting capacity, consistent colour at different settings

CONS Size may be an issue for on-camera use

AT-A-GLANCE SPECS

STREET PRICES Atom 180 kit £350, 180 head only £285

WHAT'S IN THE BOX Head, flash tube, standard reflector, power pack, charger, soft bag, power pack to flash lead, two stands

OPTIONAL EXTRAS Atom power pack with battery £125, USB Radio Trigger set £70, beauty dish with honeycomb grid £50, STR-1 speedlight to S-fit adaptor £23

CONTACT www.lencarta.com

GUIDE NUMBER 60 (ISO 100/metres)

MAXIMUM POWER 180W/s

COVERAGE To suit a 28mm lens with the standard reflector

POWER SUPPLY Atom battery pack

RECYCLING TIME 0.05sec-2.6secs with Atom pack

FLASH DURATION 1/800sec-1/10,000sec

OUTPUT CONTROL Full power to 1/128th power in 1/3EV steps

FEATURES Focus-assist beam

FLASH MODES Manual, two slave modes, high-speed sync triggering, user selectable stroboscopic flash

OUTPUT COLOUR Temperature 5600K ±200K over entire power range, overheat protection function, audible recharge beep

WEIGHT 2.04kg (complete 180 kit)