

Photography Gadgets

By Gerry Gerling

1. The Body Pod - (Home made)

If your camera and big lens get too heavy to hand-hold the body pod may be just the thing for you. Your arms only have to guide the camera and all the weight is on your body. Your body can hold this weight for long periods without fatigue.

- Required items :**
- a. fisherman's belt;**
 - b. short monopod;**
 - c. ball head;**
 - d. shoulder strap from a shoulder bag;**
 - e. 2 sturdy key rings and good quality tie wraps;**
 - f. cane tip (optional);**
 - g. suspenders (optional).**

2. Gimbal Head - (Purchased)

I know some of you own one of these but some of our new members may not know about them.

- This head works best with a long lens which has a tripod foot and a rotating collar. The rotating collar allows either portrait or landscape orientation.**
- It can be used on a tripod or a monopod.**
- It has an Arca-Swiss mount and comes with a short Arca-Swiss plate.**
- The camera and lens are balanced below the pivot point so you can effortlessly move it around and follow the action even with one hand.**

3. Long Arca-Swiss Plate - (Purchased)

If you have an Arca-Swiss mount such as on a Gimbal head and also a different head on your tripod such as a Manfrotto quick release system you can attach the quick release plate to one end of the long Arca-Swiss plate and not need to change from one to the other.

The long Arca-Swiss plate will also allow you the move the lens forward or back on the gimbal head for best balance.

4. Red Dot Gun Sight - (Home made)

I use this to quickly find and follow moving subjects such as birds in flight with my 150-500 mm lens.

It is an open sight so you can use one or both eyes and have a view all around the subject while shooting.

Most importantly, you don't have to hunt for the moving subject through the viewfinder. It makes all the difference in being able to get the picture of the bird coming at you rather than leaving you.

A red dot sight is not a laser, nothing is projected on the subject.

It fits in the hotshoe of your camera and has to be sighted in. There are both horizontal and vertical adjustments on the gun sight.

When sighted in, the subject will appear in the centre of the picture. The view in the sight is not the same as the view in your viewfinder. You will have to zoom the lens beforehand to where you expect the subject to be.

With practice it is possible to do some minor composition within the sight i.e. place the red dot in front of the bird so that it will appear to be flying into the frame. It is easy to become proficient in its use.

5. Emergency Tripod - (Home made)

This gadget has been around for a long time but some of you may not have heard of it. It is very inexpensive, compact and you can hold it in your fist.

You will need a ring attached to the tripod socket of your camera such as a quick release plate or the one that came with your Black Rapid camera strap. If none of these are available a 1/4-20 screw with a flat washer will do.

You will also need a long piece of sturdy cord. You will have to experiment to get the length right. My cord is 11 ft. long so yours may have to be longer. Attach both ends of the cord to a clasp.

Just snap the clasp onto the ring, step on the cord with both feet about shoulder width apart and pull up on the camera till the camera is centered and the cord is tight.

The viewfinder should just come up to your eye. Fine vertical adjustment can be made by moving your feet closer or further apart.

Movement up & down and left to right will be restricted. For maximum restraint hold your camera tight to your forehead and lean your back against a wall or a pole.

6. Flash Bracket - (Purchased)

The on-camera flash, or a speedlight attached to the camera's hotshoe is too close to the axis of the lens to give flattering illumination to people's faces. The light will be flat with no wanted modeling shadows.

Flash is best located off to one side and up so that there will be some light modeling and give more pleasing illumination to the face.

I have a very comfortable flash bracket which I have had since the 70's. There are many variations of flash brackets but I like this Vivitar because of the comfortable grip.

The speedlight can be removed for handholding if you want to move it higher or further out.

You should have to have a sync cord compatible with your camera.

It is possible to set your camera's built-in flash as the commander and the speedlight as the remote and use the remote TTL system, but the on-camera flash will still give the flat lighting that you don't want.

7. Anti-theft Camera Strap - (Purchased)

I use this when I am on vacation in crowded tourist places.

Thieves frequent these places, come up behind you, cut your camera strap and run off with your expensive camera.

This anti-theft gadget attaches over the back of the strap with velcro and has two stainless steel cables which are impossible to cut with scissors or a knife.

The anti-theft strap is an accessory to my Black Rapid over-the-shoulder sling strap.

8. Slaved Flash Photocell - (Purchased)

If your camera or spotlight (or both) does not support an automatic flash system you can still use your speedlight wirelessly as a remote with a slaved photocell.

When the photocell sees the camera flash it triggers the slave flash.

If you want to use it in conjunction with an automatic remote flash which is dedicated to your camera's TTL system, you will have to use a slaved photocell with an intensity adjustment so that the slaved flash will not be fired by the commander pre-flash.

9. The Velcro Defeater - (Home made)

Do you have a velcro closer that is more trouble than it is worth?

I found that the pocket flaps on my photographer's vest were difficult to open with one hand so I just attached a loose strip of velcro to one side and the troublesome closer was defeated.

10. Sensor Magnifier - (Purchased)

If you clean your sensor yourself, this is a very helpful tool. The magnifier rests on the camera's lens mount and can be focused on the sensor. It also has LED illumination to make it easy to see if you have cleaned off all the contamination, usually dust.

- Start with a fully charged battery;
- Lock the mirror up and place the camera on its back;
- Position the magnifier on the lens mount;
- Turn on the light and focus on the surface of the sensor;

There are many commercially available swabs and cleaning solutions. Just follow the instructions that came with the kit. If the dust is loose, just blow it off with a blower.

Without the magnifier you would have to take a picture to see if you successfully removed the contaminant. The magnifier lets you see what you are doing so you do it right the first time.

11. Ring Light - (Purchased)

A ring light is most helpful for close-up or macro photography. The colour temperature of the LED lights are equivalent to daylight. The light is not strong enough for anything more than a couple of feet.

- Some ring lights will act as a flash as well as a constant light. The flash feature however is no more powerful than the constant light and constant illumination will give you a nice amount of light to compose your picture.**
- Some ring lights will allow you to choose between full illumination, left side only illumination or right side only illumination. This can be useful if you only want full illumination on one side of the picture and soft shadows on the other.**
- Some ring lights allow you to vary the intensity of the light. In theory this should be a useful feature but in practice varying the aperture accomplishes the same thing and as we know, a smaller aperture gives more depth of field.**
- They usually take four AA batteries which will give you plenty of time for any photoshoot so you can take your time to compose and not have to worry about running out of battery power.**

12. Eneloop Rechargeable Batteries - (Purchased)

We all have items in our bag which require batteries and we have found out over time that it can be expensive and inconvenient to buy Alkaline batteries.

If you are going to do a photoshoot and you are not sure if the batteries will hold out you will probably install new ones. How do you know if they would have lasted? What do you do with those that still have a little charge in them? Throw them out?

Enter rechargeable batteries. Ta Da, you may think your troubles are over. Well, probably not so much. Most rechargeable batteries lose their charge more quickly than you would like and if left in the device, lose their charge even more quickly.

I went through this cycle, trying this brand and that brand, always with less than ideal results. Then I began to notice what the professionals use.

It seems that all the Pro's use Eneloop batteries. These batteries hold 70% of their charge after five years of storage and can be recharged over two thousand times. You can even use them right off the shelf without first charging them.

They may cost a little more but I enjoy the peace of mind of knowing that they won't let me down. They are available in AA and AAA sizes.

13. Focusing Rail -

Any of you who have tried composing a macro picture at a very close distance know how difficult it is to move the camera/tripod a little left or right or a little closer or further away.

A focusing rail will make your efforts much easier. Just twisting one of two knobs will move the camera wherever you want (within limits) without having to move the tripod or loosening the ball head.

You can even use it to obtain manual focus. In fact, if you are doing focus stacking a focusing rail is essential.

Just attach the focusing rail to your tripod and attach your camera to the focusing rail.

Will all of these gadgets guarantee that you will take better pictures?

NO!!!

But it will make it easier to take better pictures and it will probably be more fun.