



Nissin i40 Compact Flash For Sony Review
E.J. Peiker

Nissin is a Japanese company that has been producing professional flash gear for nearly 50 years. While it has been a popular brand in Asia, it has not found a strong foothold in North America, primarily due to cheaper Chinese products and hype over flash units sold by the camera manufacturers themselves. North American distribution for the Nissin line of flash products is handled by Minox, North America. I have wanted a powerful full-featured flash for my Sony a7R since getting that camera in November, 2013. Sony does offer a small flash and has recently announced a flash designed for the a7 bodies to be delivered at some point in the future but these flashes are not full featured. Like other manufacturers, Sony cripples their compact flash units by not offering all of the modes that their very expensive and large high end units do in order to try to move you up to something with higher margins. With the larger units, you end up with a very unbalanced situation where the flash is bigger than the camera. With the manufacturer's compact units, you usually lose high speed sync, or manual flash control. And you always lose a lot of flash power.



Initially I tried using the my a7R with full size flash, I was unsatisfied. The combination is very awkward to use since the flash is bigger than the camera and with batteries is about the same weight as the camera resulting in a top-heavy unbalanced rig. One day while perusing DPRReview I saw an announcement of a high powered compact flash unit by Nissin called the i40. It intrigued me but after looking at the product on the DPRReview pages I dismissed it mainly due to its ancient looking mechanical dials on the back. I continued to use the Nikon SB900 on the a7R. But the very poor balance, caused me to return to the i40 and give it another look. I ultimately decided to order a Nikon mount one since Nikon flashes can be used both on my Nikon cameras and on newer Sony cameras in Auto mode (but without full TTL function) and because the Sony version was not yet available. I received the flash and started using it and absolutely loved it. Finally in September, 2014, Nissin started shipping the same unit with for new style Sony hot shoe used on the current Alpha branded Sony bodies so I added a native Sony hot-shoe version. Not only is it very well balanced on the a7R, it is much better than the built in flash on many DSLRs offering significantly more flash control, including full manual, high speed sync, ETTL, and pretty much all of the capability of the three times as expensive full sized units. The head articulates and swivels in all directions like high end flashes. There is even a small movie light. It is still a lot smaller than Sony's compact flash and is much more powerful with a guide number of 40 meters (130 feet). The i40 ships with the same accessories that high end flashes ship with including diffuser, wide angle screen, bounce card, case, and more. Build quality is first rate and gives up nothing to the more expensive camera manufacturer's flash units.

After using this flash, I have become a big fan of the mechanical control dials rather than a multi button LCD screen interface. Changing flash modes, compensation, etc are instant with a quick turn of the dial rather than a multitude of button pushes. The left smaller dial controls the flash mode, and the right larger dial controls either compensation or manual flash power - it really couldn't be simpler. I am now convinced that our big high end flash units should go back to manual controls like this. If there is one very minor complaint, it's that compensation or manual

exposure control is in half stops instead of 1/3 stops when using the rear dial on the flash. However if you use the camera to set flash compensation, 1/3 stop control is preserved making this a very minor quibble.



The Nissin i40 for Sony is an excellent, size appropriate, flash unit for the a7 series of cameras. The flash works exactly as expected with no compatibility issues. The extremely easy to use interface with the two mechanical dials is refreshing in a world of LCD panels and multi-tiered menus for almost everything.

Disclaimers

E.J. Peiker conducts consulting services and product design services for a number of photographic product companies. Those that know me know I would not endorse a product even for compensation if I did not feel it were a superior product.

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