

UniqBall UBH45 Mini Review

The Uniqball is marketed as a single head replacement for a ballhead, panorama head and gimbal head. It is built in Hungary with high quality materials and has a built in leveling base and a ball that is designed to prevent camera flop from side to side. Both the leveling base and the Arca Swiss style clamp have built in bubble levels

As a basic Ballhead:

The Uniqball works best as a basic ballhead but it works better when the leveling base is used rather than the ball to position the camera, since it does not restrict your range of motion. If the main ball is used, one cannot tilt the head in the direction of the white separating line between the two halves of the ball. The leveling base does not have this restriction but it also isn't nearly as smooth and it doesn't have a good tension control setting. However, after using this head extensively with both a Nikon D810 and a Sony a7R, the head is very usable, stable, and lightweight compared to other ballheads of its size and strength.

As a Panorama head:

The Uniqball simply fails as a panorama head despite it being marketed as having panorama capability built in. While you can independently level the base via it's panning base and then use the top ball to pan, the camera is not locked in all axis except left to right yaw. Therefore, one cannot guarantee perfect left to right panning without the camera tilting or rolling. The roll axis problem can be mitigated by always mounting the camera so that the white stripe on the ball is to the left but one cannot lock the camera from pitching down or up while maintaining level panning capability. Serious panorama shooters use a nodal slide which usually puts the center of gravity of the camera/lens rig way behind the center of the ball. This results in the camera pitching backwards too easily to insure a perfect side to side panorama motion. The only way you can successfully use this head in the way a serious panorama shooter would is to first level the tripod via the legs or via a leveling base built into the trips, then leveling the ballhead's panning base and the ball itself. Next you have to slightly loosen the head's panning base, enough to allow the base to rotate but not the leveling part of the base. In other words, using this head for precision panorama work requires more steps than using a regular tripod and ballhead without a panorama clamp. It is simply much easier to use a ballhead with a rotating



UniqBall UBH45 - review unit did not have bubble level on mounting clamp knob as pictured here.

panorama clamp as this takes significantly less time and is much more accurate with zero possibility of forward or backward pitch movement. If you do plan to use this head for serious panorama work with a nodal slider, I would recommend getting a true panorama clamp for the top of the head. By itself the Uniqball is a poor panorama head and I could not recommend this to anyone that takes panorama shooting seriously.

As a Gimbal head:

If mounting a long lens properly with the center of gravity of the camera/lens properly aligned over the center of the ball and the white line on the ball to the left, this rig is usable for a long lens set-up as it prevents the camera from flopping to the side. However, if you don't have the leveling base tight, the whole rig can take a very hard flop. One must take care to adjust the balls tension carefully to prevent forward or backward flop but with a little practice one can find a good compromise between flop prevention and still being able to freely move the camera/lens combination. One cannot, however, move the camera/lens as fast as one can on a gimbal head unless the tension is kept free enough to allow forward or backward flop. I still prefer using a true gimbal head for this sort of photography due to its completely free range of motion but as a much lighter weight solution and one that takes up a lot less space in luggage, the Uniqball is very capable for this type of photography.

Other Considerations:

I found that some third party mounting plates can be difficult to get into the supplied clamp as this clamp doesn't open quite as far as those from ArcaSwiss, Wimberley, ReallyRightStuff, or Kirk. While I ultimately got all of them to work, it wasn't easy in some cases.

One final issue for left eye shooters - in order to balance a camera properly on this head and to properly orient the camera as indicated on the ballhead with a lens that does not have a mounting collar, one must use an accessory plate on the cameras base to fasten to the camera's mounting plate. The knob has to point to the back of the camera - towards the shooter's face. If you put the knob forward, it interferes with the red ballhead knob. The problem is that this puts that knob squarely in the center of the mouth of a left eye shooter and you risk chipping a tooth. On more than one occasion I tapped a tooth against this knob and in one case I hit so hard that I was scared that I had chipped a tooth. Eventually I replaced the supplied plate with a similar plate manufactured by Wimberley for using a short lensed camera on a Wimberley head as this knob is much lower profile and doesn't extend out into my mouth.

Conclusion:

While the Uniqball tries to do all things for all people, although very usable, it isn't extremely good at any of them. When something tries to do everything it often does none of them as well as dedicated products. That is clearly the case for the UniqBall. This head definitely has a place in photography for photographers wishing to have a single solution for all types of photography and lightening the overall equipment burden in the field. It is well suited for traveling photographers due to this. My biggest disappointment with the Uniqball is for panorama shooting since to really do it right, you will still need to add a panning panorama clamp to the top of the head.