

# The Lightsphere

## Photojournalist

Mike McNamee  
& Ian Stewart

REVIEW: Lightsphere

This cute little gizmo was brought to the attention of your Editor by article co-author, Ian Stewart. As with so many things, the simple ideas are the best. This is a light modifier, which attaches to your hammer-head or cobra-head flash gun to broaden and soften the light for both fill-in flash and main-source flash work. Such is the construction that it can also double as a lens protector or a macro light tent (although its predecessor was a better light tent for small-scale work).

### Construction

There are a number of models, each of which is specific to a particular flashgun. The construction is a semi-transparent, moulded neoprene, 4 1/2" in diameter and 4" high. It is quite flexible (think neoprene plastic tubing) and fits and holds (by friction) to the front aperture of the flash tube. The test model required quite a bit of tugging to pull it over the gun-head. It is only a couple of ounces in weight.

The unit may be used open or capped off with the new, inverted dome (LS2PJD), which is made from a translucent polypropylene. This cap replaces the original, which protruded from the cylindrical portion and, apparently, sometimes caused flare, because it was too far forward.

### On Test

The unit was tested on a Vivitar 283 cobra-shaped gun powered by a 6v/6Ah waist pack, delivering flashes to within 1/10th of a stop on successive pops. For realism we measured the output in a 15' x 15' x 8' 6" bedroom with a white emulsion ceiling, shooting at a range of 3.6 metres at 200ISO and measuring the light on a well-calibrated Gossen Mastersix flash meter. Such a set-up would be typical of pre-wedding bride's-home shot. It enabled us to measure a realistic guide number for the gun-diffuser combination.

In practical terms, shooting at 3.6m (11ft) and 200ISO gave a working stop between f5.6 and f1 1/2 on full gun-power, ie more than enough. The laws of physics demand that you lose quite a bit of directed light energy as soon as you diffuse the beam. We found that fitting the inverted dome reduced the nominal guide number from 24 (ISO 100 in metres) to between 10 and 13 depending upon the orientation. Using the gun and the Lightsphere gave an aperture of f8 at 10 to 11ft at 200ISO, quite a workable light level for flash-only illumination.

For fill flash outdoors, assuming your flash was to be set for half the ambient light level, would give you around f8 (ie assuming about 1-stop loss due to the absence of a ceiling).

The inverted dome warmed the colour by about 800°K. This would not be a problem if you either bespoke white balanced the flash or were in a RAW file workflow. Others may take the view that the 800°K shift is desirable anyway!

Ian Stewart kindly provided some examples of shots taken using the Lightsphere both singly and in a threesome. The quality of light produced by the unit is difficult to quantify but it certainly spreads the light quite evenly. The three-up use on the large family group is particularly impressive for such a

**BELOW:** Ian Stewart's group shot, see details in the text.

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### EFFECTIVE GUIDE NUMBERS WITH LIGHTSPHERE

Orientation	f-Stop	Distance m	GN 200 ISO m	GN 100 ISO m
Flat-No Dome	13.1	3.6	47	24
Flat-Dome	7.4	3.6	27	13
45° No Dome	6.9	3.6	25	12
Up Dome	5.5	3.6	20	10

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The most distressing thing to hear from any photographer is that they've "Seen it all before". Sad, because that means there's nothing left to see. It's something I try to never say, although I might well suggest great familiarity with it all. Every wedding has a skeletal resemblance, but the musculature is always different. Saying you've seen it all before removes your ability to react to, and respond to wonderful interactions. It makes you cynical. Cynicism is one of the greatest contributors to a lack of creativity. And if you cannot be creative - then how can you gain satisfaction and enjoyment from an occupation based on creativity?

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lightweight and compact lighting set-up. The shot was made with a Canon 580 as the master and a 550EX and 430EX as slaves, all using a Lightsphere. The master was pointed up at 45° and the slaves were pointed vertically. Exposure was 1/60 at f5.6 on a Canon EOS 1D MkII at 17mm focal length and 400ISO. There was a white ceiling at about 20ft height.

In the second example, of a bridal group, a single Canon 580 flash was used on the Strobframe (see below). Exposure conditions were 1/80 at f3.2, 28mm focal length and ISO500 on the Canon 1Ds MkII. Note the good balance between the external daylight and the interior – you can also see the Lightsphere in the window as a reflection (above the bride's head).

### Where to put it?

While there are many answers to this question, the two correct ones are – directly above the camera or high to one side or the other. Using the Lightsphere directly on top of the camera and facing forward is the least desirable, as the catch light is centred on the pupil. Also, locating the flash on the hot shoe does not present it in the correct place for portrait format shooting. There are a number of devices for holding flash gun(s) away from the camera and a quick Google for the topic rapidly scored tens of devices. The trick seems to be finding the middle ground between getting the flash away from the lens axis and leaving the photographer looking like a mobile telephone mast! However, a good flash bracket seeks out the ground between red-eye at one end and the need for an ever-present, tall assistant at the other.

There is also the matter of camera balance. The top-heavy set-up is always likely to fall forward if the photographer bends down (say, to adjust the bride's train). For this reason the thing to look for in a bracket is stiffness, light weight and the quality of the bracketing to interface with your tripod. A good, padded grip for the left hand is also vital.

The Strobframe PressT as illustrated is one of the better offerings and even has a retracting arm so that the assembly may be placed on the ground without toppling over. The unit shown is attached to a Manfrotto compatible plate, which has to be tightened with a coin so that it does not protrude and interfere with the tripod slot.



### FINAL THOUGHTS

Use of the Lightsphere will obviously bear some closer inspection as time progresses, it is only after a period of use in real work that we will be able to evaluate it fully. Reading the comments on the various forums suggests that you have to work with it for a while to exploit it fully, but on the evidence so far it seems like a very effective method for controlling your light when circumstances force you to work with lightweight, portable systems.

Contact e-mail address for UK and European enquiries is [orders@bbjimports.com](mailto:orders@bbjimports.com)

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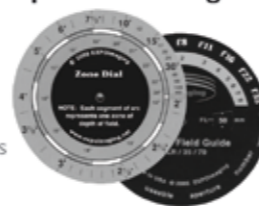


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