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ON-CAMERA LIGHT

Frezzi MA-18 HMI Light

by Carl Mrozek

Having ample lighting handy for a range of needs is a perennial challenge for all videographers, especially those who typically work alone and don't have access to AC power.

In these cases, a small battery-powered light called the "Sun Gun" is the right hardware, but battery power is a limitation. A 50-W tungsten bulb may be adequate for interviews but not for establishing shots and other ENG applications.

Fortunately, HMI lighting is now available in a Sun Gun package and offers a practical lighting solution for a range of field conditions. That's because HMI lighting delivers several times more light per watt than tungsten lighting.

Until recently, HMI Sun Guns were available only in bulky packages of 50 W or higher and required separate ballasts, which made them heavy and awkward. The higher wattage also meant a serious reduction in battery runtime, which meant carrying extra battery packs in the field.

Frezzolini has a solution to this dilemma with a new generation of low-power Sun Guns that draw less than 30 W.

FEATURES

Frezzolini's HMI Sun Guns are compact and streamlined, weighing only one pound with the bulb. They closely resemble Frezzi's popular tungsten Sun Guns and are designed to be weather-resistant and easily integrate into an ENG-style camera package.

The Frezzi line of mini-HMIs now includes 18-W and 50-W models in addition to the original 24-W model. All operate on 12 to 15 V and are EMI shielded, noise-filtered and reverse-polarity protected.



Photo: Kathy Beck

The MA-18 attaches to cameras that are encased in a rain cover.

A major advantage of HMI Sun Guns is that they are much more efficient than quartz-tungsten lighting, by a factor of four. Another bonus is that they produce daylight-balanced 5600K light, which makes them especially useful for fill lighting when shooting scenes mixed with natural light.

According to Frezzi, an 18-W unit draws 24 W and delivers as much light as a 95-W tungsten Sun Gun: 50 footcandles at five feet with a diffusion lens and a beam angle of 21 degrees. The 24-W Sun Gun delivers 70 footcandles at five feet while drawing 28 W.

All HMI mini-Sun Guns are designed to mount atop the camera, mainly on the handle, either via a 1/2-inch stud or an optional 5/8-inch stand adapter. They can also be hand-held.

All three Frezzi HMI Sun Guns are available either as kits or individually, with hardware to fit most current camcorders. All also work with Frezzi's Mini-Fill and Mini-Arc accessories, including a collapsible soft box kit and optional barn doors.

FAST FACTS

Application

ENG and EFP

Key Features

Lightweight; high light output; daylight balanced

Price

\$950 (fixture); \$1,195 (kit)

Contact

Frezzi Energy Systems

800-345-1030

www.frezzi.com

IN USE

I tested Frezzi's 18-W HMI unit, the MA-18, with a Sony DSR570W 2/3-inch CCD camcorder, powered by IDX Endura 55- and 80-W lithium-ion batteries. The MA-18 is superficially identical to the MA-24, previously the smallest on-camera HMI. However, its self-contained ballast unit can power only an 18-W HMI lamp.

The unit arrived in a lunchbox-sized carrying case, densely padded to prevent breakage. The kit included a Sun Gun with power cord, 18-W bulb, camera mounting bracket with hotshoe, a tungsten conversion filter plus barndoors with diffusion filter.

The barndoor/diffusion unit and tungsten filter are interchangeable. Both fasten onto the outer neck of the Sun Gun via a single setscrew that securely clamps a rotating ring to the face of the unit. The ability to rotate the ring is especially important when using the barndoor assembly.

I powered the Sun Gun with IDX Endura 55- and 80-W batteries, piggybacking them

in different combinations to create 110-, 135- and 160-W battery packs. These could deliver up to three hours of run time for the camera with the MA-18, when used intermittently.

I found that a single 80-W battery was sufficient for most applications, if I powered down whenever idle. The main drawback of this approach is that it takes at least 30 seconds to power back up after a shutdown.

With its low center of gravity, the Frezzi Sun Gun slid easily onto the hotshoe at the front end of the camera handle and fastened securely to it with the adjustable nut. The only difficulty I encountered in mounting the Sun Gun was connecting to the power tap of the DSR570W.

Since I was shooting in bad weather, my camera had protective weather covering that lacked an opening for the power tap. However, once the light was mounted and connected, this was no longer an issue.

Once mounted, using the MA-18 Sun Gun was a breeze. The supplied mounting bracket permitted pivoting in the vertical and horizontal planes, making it easy to pinpoint the beam precisely and get the full benefit of all 18 Watts, which provided the equivalent of about 75 W of tungsten lighting. The toggle power switch at the back of the Sun Gun was easy to find and use, even in the dark.

Wattage aside, what struck me immediately was the beautiful, natural color of the video I shot with the MA-18. In general, it looked as if it had been shot outdoors in

bright, even light, even when backlit or in a fairly dim environment. As expected the results indoors were most satisfying when natural light infiltrated the scene.

Still, I wasn't disappointed when shooting the motley brown plumage of a mounted grouse in the dark corner of a room, or shadowy figures painted on canvas in a dim room on a dark day. The colors and the overall scene still looked as if shot with ample natural light, even at a distance of more than 20 feet.

This wasn't merely a fair-weather phenomenon. During the recent presidential election, I used the MA-18 in soggy weather, including at night, while documenting voting irregularities in Columbus, Ohio. I focused on the long, dark queues of cold, bedraggled voters, many of whom had waited in line for several hours to vote in minority precincts with too few voting booths.

The only supplemental lighting occasionally came from a single faint streetlight or a bit of tungsten light spilling out of adjacent buildings. I was especially pleased with the color and skin tone of the mainly dark-skinned subjects, although many faces were further shaded by baseball caps, rain bonnets and umbrellas.

Once again, despite the actual conditions, the colors were generally vibrant, as if shot in good daylight, except when the spillover from streetlights or the indoors was significant. Despite the dank conditions, the Sun Gun performed flawlessly and enabled me to cap-

ture this potentially historic drama in correct color, with most of the light provided by the Frezzi MA-18 Sun Gun.

SUMMARY

The Frezzi MA-18 HMI mini Sun Gun performed as advertised and even exceeded expectations in some cases. I especially enjoyed its compactness, flexibility and portability.

I was able to fit the light, power cord, filter, bracket and padding into an ordinary fanny pack so that I could have it on hand, instead of having it packed away in a vehicle or hotel room.

Once mounted atop the camcorder, the light didn't impede use of any camera functions or accessories. The main problem in my case was compromising my camera's rain jacket in order to plug into the forward power tap atop the camera head, but this isn't the fault of the Frezzi light.

Frezzi's MA-18 HMI mini Sun Gun packs a lot of punch for its size and wattage, and integrates handily into an ENG or EFP camera package. In my opinion, it is a welcome addition to the field kit of any quality-minded video shooter, especially those who have to go it alone. ■

Carl Mrozek operates Eagle Eye Media based in Buffalo, N.Y., specializing in wildlife and other outdoor subjects. His work appears regularly on the Discovery Channel, CBS, PBS and other networks. Contact him at eagleye@localnet.com.