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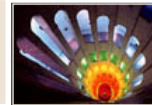


AF-S Nikkor ED
17-35mm 1:2,8 D IF

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- + outstanding optics
- + excellent AF-S and MF
- + very robust
- relatively chunky and heavy
- increasing play of zoom ring



Originally we owe the fantastic AF-S Zoom-Nikkor 17-35mm 1:2.8 IF-ED just like the AF Nikkor 14mm 1:2.8 IF-ED to D1 users who were longing for an equivalent to the Canon EF 17-35/2.8L as the D1 CCD sensor requires a multiplication of all lenses by 1.5 in order to get the appropriate focal distance. As a result users of an analog F5 or F100 got the option of a dream lens. By the way, if you think 3mm between 17 and 20mm is not much, you should go to your local dealer's to find out that this is a rather distinct difference of an angle of 10°. In the telephoto area this corresponds with the leap from a 105mm to 180mm!

Optical quality of the AF-S 17-35 is in line with very good primes. However, resolution and contrast are not the main criteria (here the 20-35/2.8 did also very well) but what really impresses me again and again are little distortion and fall-off in the corners. Resolution and contrast can be excellent but if the lens displays disturbing distortion and light fall-off even an amateur (like my chief editor?) will recognise the lens' poor optical quality. Distortion of the 17-35 is not detectable at 24mm, hardly visible at 35mm (0.4%) but clearly visible at 17mm (0.9%). For comparison: AF Nikkor 18-35 and AF Nikkor 20-35/2.8 show least distortion at 35mm increasing to 0.9% at 18mm and 20mm respectively. Thus the 17-35 leaves significantly more freedom in the ultra-wide-angle field. If I need absolutely perfect lines (architecture or horizon of sea) I will stick around the 24mm area of the lens. Of course you should stop down one or two ticks in order to attain higher contrast and resolution, especially near the corners. D1 users have no problem here as their CCD sensor does not take the corners into account anyway.

A further advantage over my trusted AF 20-35/2.8 is the AF-S drive. Not so much because it is far more responsive and near-silent but above all because you can always override it manually. In most of the cases my focus is set on the rear AF-button (by CF #4) enabling me to focus manually. Whenever I'm in a hurry or the light is too low for MF I press the AF-button for instantaneous focus. There is no need to switch a lever neither on the camera nor on the lens.

When it comes to build quality the 17-35 is another outperformer. No problems in heavy rain and snow so far. Unfortunately it is relatively chunky and heavy due to its new AF-S drive which makes it much less handy than my old 20-35/2.8 on a F100 for example. Moreover Nikon applied a new magnesium alloy which looks very nice (if you do not scratch it on your first mission) and feels very solid (just like my old MF lenses did). However, the longer I use it the less I like it. In my opinion the former plastic covering provided much better grip. Meanwhile most of the new lenses get this alloy (4/300, 80-400) and as this feature sells well Nikon will not refrain just because of some pros' sweating hands. They rather offer more pro lenses in a trendy but utterly useless light grey finish...

A little bit irritating was the fact that the play of the zoom control (if you change directions of turning the ring) increased the more I used this lens. This added a rattly note to an otherwise perfect lens. NPS stated that this was normal and would not become worse once a specific point is reached. I do hope I have reached this point by now! However, if I am thinking of my colleague's heavily used Canon EF 17-35/2.8 which can easily be controlled with one finger, I might be getting nervous...

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