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- artist profile
- equipment

## IMAGEPOWER

- gallery
- new releases
- shop
- links

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- e-mail
- guestbook

## HOME

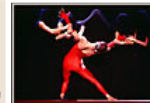


AF DC Nikkor  
135mm 1:2 D

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- + very good optical quality
- + excellent AF and MF
- + first-class finish
- + built-in lens hood
- DC feature problematic to use



When I finally changed from Canon FD to Nikon AF in 1996/97 I linked my lens purchases tightly to the numbers of publications I achieved with the corresponding Canon FD lenses at that time. The Canon FD 135/2 was one of my top scorers, that's why the AF DC Nikkor 135mm 1:2 D had to be on top of my list.

To cut a long story short: I have had much less publications with that lens up to now than I expected. This is not due to its optics nor its built quality but only to the appearance of the AF Nikkor 80-200/2.8 D. I have never had such a lens from Canon as they have never produced any for their FD line. They only provided f/4 as a maximum aperture with their 80-200s, so I had to buy a 200L/1.8 and a 135/2.0 for action photos. When I switched to Nikon a new world was revealed by this 80-200/2.8 lens. Whenever possible I use this lens (actually the AF-S version) instead of my 135/2 because f/2.8 is sufficient in most cases. However, there are situations where my 135/2 (or 85/1.4 respectively) becomes essential: theater & ballet performances, concert gigs, sport meetings in dimly lit gymnasiums. Here even pushed film requires f/2 or larger in order to freeze actions. On the other hand pro-digital cameras like Nikon's D1H or Kodaks 720x will make those highspeed primes more and more superfluous because their quality at ISO 6400 and higher has been unrivalled by film.

This is a pity because Nikon's AF 135/2 is an excellent lens! Extremely robust and still easy to operate (compared to my AF-S 80-200/2.8) I'm fond of combining it with my AF-S 28-70/2.8 when shooting wedding ceremonies or other festivities. 135mm offer essential discretion and f/2 are fast enough to work with your fill-in flash; thus it is very easy to combine natural and artificial light sources in perfect harmony.

In the corners you will detect a lack of contrast but this is no problem really as you will center most of your models anyway. And there in the center resolution and contrast are breathtaking. Should you happen to prefer to shoot test charts which are sharp from corner to corner simply stop down to f/4. In order to achieve an equal quality you will have to stop down your AF-S 80-200/2.8 to at least f/8! The perfect built-in, lockable lens hood should always be used to avoid flare in your photos. MF action is a real hit as I can find almost no difference to my Canon MF 135. AF is fast and responsive, too, although never as quiet and trustworthy as Nikon's Silent Wave Motors.

No, no, I didn't forget why Nikon keeps praising this lens: the DC feature (Defocus Image Control). To be honest in my opinion it's nothing but a gimmick. Actually I would have preferred AF-S instead or a cheaper version of this 135 without DC. DC enables you to defocus the background or foreground. While pushing the DC ring lock release button, you can rotate the DC ring toward the R (rear) to blur the background, or toward the F (front) side to blur the foreground. To effectively do that you have to make sure that the f-number on the DC ring (aligned to the DC ring index) is same as the aperture in use. This effect of defocus image control is subject to conditions such as subject-to-background distance, subject-to-foreground distance etc. And don't forget that DC should always be performed BEFORE focusing, otherwise your subject will be out of focus. Moreover, Nikon states that the effect of blur cannot be verified in the viewfinder, you have to get some experience by taking a series of shots at various settings first. Well, this is not exactly what I need when shooting fast action...

A nice by-effect can be achieved if you turn the DC ring beyond the aperture in use: you will gain a classic soft-focus effect. Again, this is only visible wide open, so always check with your DOF lever before releasing the shutter. Actually I prefer my Canon and Zeiss Softars for portrait work because they are effective even when I have to stop down to f/8 or f/11 in studio situations. And I can adapt them to different lenses...

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