

Nikon AF Micro Nikkor 200mm 1:4 D Review

A 200mm macro lens provides essentially the same depth of field (DOF) as a 60mm macro – reproduction ratio, aperture, and sensor/film size being constant. So while a 200mm lens is bigger and more expensive, it does not sacrifice DOF at all, but its narrower perspective helps to blur the background. This and a comparatively long working distance of 26cm at 1:1 make the 200/4D my macro photography workhorse.

As the 55-105mm macro lenses seem to be meant for hand-held shooting (no tripod mount, often extend a lot, low weight, short working distance), their longer 200mm cousin may be built exclusively for use with a sturdy (!) tripod. In fact, the rotating tripod mount is solid and exemplary, contributing greatly to the superior handling of this lens. The Arca-style MPR-73 plate from Really Right Stuff matches the 200/4D beautifully. Construction is mostly metal with a few polycarbonate parts (aperture ring, A/M collar) thrown in, adding up to about 1200g of weight. The A/M collar is reported to develop hairline cracks near the screw, but I have fortunately not observed this on my sample. This may be because I use this lens in manual mode all the time anyway with the big and precise focusing ring or because this was an early-series problem only. Engraved numerals on the body would have added further appeal to this lens. A multi-coated UV-IR filter stays on my lens as does the optional metal screw-on HN-30 lens shade which adds quite some bulk.

The long working distance limits the use of a ringflash for two reasons: 1. Photos taken with such a flash look better the closer the flash is positioned to the subject. 2. The power of ringflashes is usually insufficient when used with high speeds, narrow apertures, and moderate distances. I have not used mood-killing flash in my nature photography in many years anyway. The 200/4 D sports 13 elements in 8 groups, two of the 13 lenses being special ED elements to limit spherical aberrations. Like in the supertele, this ED glass is in the front group where it counts. The 200/4D is somewhat unique in the Nikkor AF lineup in that it employs both close-range correction (CRC) and internal focussing (IF). If I am not mistaken, this tele macro uses the front group for CRC. IF is more than welcome, so the lens does not extend when focusing closely. IF is known to cause color fringing in out-of-focus highlights, but this has never been an issue with this particular lens. The effective focal length is reduced significantly at 1:1.

The nine aperture blades are not rounded, but give a much nicer look to the out-of-focus elements as compared to the 105/2.8 D, though the 200mm perspective may contribute to that impression. Optical quality is excellent and may exceed sensor resolution on my D200 at f/5.6-8 with diffraction starting to kick in at f/11. Be aware, however, that this expensive specialized lens is only good for macro and an occasional landscape as it is corrected for close focus, not infinity which may explain why this lens appears less stellar shooting test charts at ten meters distance. I have been using this lens since 2003 and more so than any other lens. This is my desert island lens, and I continue to recommend it highly if you already own an adequate tripod/ballhead. All 2008-09 macro images in [my galleries](#) were made using this lens. Here is a photo at 100% magnification (pixel level) for your review:



Detail of garden lizard from my "Smokies August '09" gallery, Cades Cove, TN, August 2009, 100% pixel level

Nikon D200 (mod), AF200/4D, 1/40s, f/8.0, ISO 100, MLU, Groundpod/BH-55, Camera Raw

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