



LAST FRAME

September 2004

St. Albert Photo Club's Monthly Newsletter



Horst Sentara, assistant manager of Don's Photo.

Steadiness is a tripod affair

The use of a tripod can make or break a photograph, both in terms of composition and sharpness. It forces you to slow down in your photographic process. It allows you to fine-tune your composition prior to exposure and it keeps the camera stationary during the exposure.

Due to these two factors,

a sturdy, well-made tripod is the best single accessory you can purchase if you want to improve the quality of your images.

The St. Albert Photo Club had the opportunity to listen to Horst Sentara, Assistant Manager of Don's Photo, demonstrate the current state of tripods and monopods.

One of the first issues

he dealt with was to stay away from "deals"; if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Stay away from them.

Also, stay away from those models with a crank mechanism in the head. Dirt and other detritus can make its way into the gear mechanism, and it will strip away the aluminum, rendering the locking mechanism inoperable.

Most consumer level tripods are constructed of extruded aluminum, such as those made by Giotto and Manfrotto. Those models with a circular leg design are much more resilient than those models with square legs.

Some tripod models feature a variable-angle center column that can swing into almost any imaginable position.

Be sure to purchase a tripod that extends up to your eye level when standing without any centrepost extension. If the centrepost must be extended 10 inches or more to bring it to your eye level, you no longer have a tripod; you have a monopod with a three-legged base.

Ground-Level Usage

To support a camera for ground-level shooting, be sure to invest in a tripod

that has legs, which will splay out flat to the ground with a minimal amount of centrepost extension.

Tripods with a long centre post are essentially useless for low level shooting because the base of the centrepost will limit how low to the ground your tripod will go when the legs are spread.

In fact, some manufacturers, such as Gitzo, gives you the option of either no centrepost (just a mounting plate for a tripod head), or a post slightly less than 6 inches in length.

Other manufacturers justify long centrepost as an aid to those photographers who wish to work just inches off the ground. They recommend inverting the centrepost!

By inverting the centrepost, the camera is positioned upside down. This is a very awkward to photograph and is not a recommended practice.

Carbon Fiber Models

Carbon fiber models are 30% lighter and dampen vibration more effectively than metal tripods.

One of carbon fiber's main advantages, its lack of weight, results in a somewhat more top-heavy apparatus when a camera and lens is mounted on

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the top. Since there is less overall mass to resist movement, they are easier to topple over with an inadvertent knock than are metal tripods.

To alleviate this problem, many models feature a hook below the tripod column to suspend some form of weight, such as your camera bag.

Most of the weight saved in a carbon fiber model is in the legs.

Smaller tripods do not have as much weight to lose but those photographers used to shooting with a large metal tripod with leg braces will notice a substantial loss in weight.

So for general field work, such as day hikes and backpacking, they can be invaluable, often making the difference between a "marathon" and an enjoyable day in the hills.

Tripod Heads

Most manufacturers require you to buy a head separate from the tripod.

For conducting carefully composed landscape images or precise close-up work, nothing beats a tilt-pan head.

In this assembly, movement along two axes, vertical (tilt) and horizontal (pan) are independent. Most tilt-pan heads also permit the user to orient the camera in either the standard "landscape" orientation or a "portrait" orientation.

Trying to recompose vertically without moving horizontally at



The new crop of tripods

all, or flopping to the side is virtually impossible except with a tilt-pan head.

A ball-and-socket head destabilizes the whole system when the main locking knob is released.

Better models, meaning heavier and more expensive of course, have a tension adjustment knob. This lets you change your composition by slight increments by manually setting this tension knob to control the amount of friction in the ball head, instead of using the one main locking lever.

These units are great for following wildlife subjects and for sports photography.

Most tilt-pan heads and ball-and-socket heads are constructed of metal. By placing

one of these units on a carbon fiber tripod will cut into the weight savings you spent big dollars on.

Now many manufacturers produce magnesium heads that maintain strength with reduced weight.

Monopods

Monopods are basically a "staff" with a threaded nut on top, where one can place a ball head.

Monopods are a good compromise between portability and stability, especially when working with telephoto lenses, and are highly utilized by photojournalists and sports photographers.

The mass of a telephoto lens and camera combination is supported on the monopod freeing

both hands to control the settings on the camera itself.

The portability-stability equation is an interesting one: as portability increases, stability decreases, and vice versa.

For the ultimate in stability, a tripod is definitely the way to go.

For shooting on the fly, with better support than just hand-holding your rig, a monopod may be the better solution.



Left, pan and tilt head, centre, ball head, above, pistol grip ball head.

Article - Derald Lobay

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THE LAST FRAME

CLUB MEMBERS WINNING MONTHLY PICTURES



FIRST PLACE



SECOND PLACE



THIRD PLACE

