



Above: The D-Lite2 with a 16cm reflector. A kit comprised of two heads, two of these reflectors, two brolies, two stands, plus bags is available for under £400.

Welcome delight

Goodbye to Prolinca, welcome in the D-Lite. Elinchrom's new range of budget-priced lighting impresses Steve Hynes

The Prolinca studio flash units have enjoyed a long and successful history as competent and reliable studio kit, albeit without many frills. Made by Elinchrom in Switzerland, the Prolinca units were aimed at the entry level market, an area in which they stood out from the crowd for their decent build quality.

But all good things must come to an end, and the Prolinca lights have now gone. However, they have been replaced by a new range of heads bearing the Elinchrom name and selling for similar prices to the heads they

replace, despite having many more features.

The new D-Lite range is made up of three models. The base model is the 100 Joule head, simply called the D-Lite. Next is the 200 Joule D-Lite2, and at the top of the range is the 400 Joule D-Lite4. They use the same accessory ring as the more expensive Elinchrom Style heads, allowing an upgrade path without having to buy new accessories.

Construction

The heads are lightweight and compact, the 100J model measuring just 16cm long and

12cm in diameter. The 200 and 400J models use the same casing and measure 21cm long and 16cm in diameter. They weigh 900g, 1100g and 1300g respectively.

The compact construction is helped by the fact that they don't have cooling fans – a point that needs to be kept in mind if using accessories that impede heat dispersal, such as honeycomb grids. In such cases the modeling light should be used sparingly. A thermal cut-out prevents things from getting dangerously hot.

All the models have power output variable in 1/10-stop

increments. The D-Lite goes from full to 1/8 power, giving it a minimum output of 12J. The D-Lite2 and D-Lite4 can go down to 1/16 power, giving them minimum outputs of 12J and 25J respectively.

Settings are controlled by membrane buttons, which are located on the back panel. A pair of buttons marked with arrows raise or lower the power output, which is displayed on an LED panel located above them. The power management system includes an auto-dumping feature that drains excess power from the capacitors when power is decreased.

The power display flashes while power is being dumped and, if the flash-ready bleep is enabled, it sounds when dumping is complete. Flash firing is not disabled during dumping, so it's important to wait until the process is complete.

The modelling lamp has settings for minimum, maximum, proportional and off.

The remaining three controls are the flash test button (which doubles as a flash-ready light), a button to switch the flash-ready bleep on or off, and one to enable or disable the photocell trigger.

At the business end is a push-in flash tube that can be changed by the user and a 100W screw-thread modelling lamp. It's worth noting here that all the D-Lite heads use the same modelling lamp. This should be kept in mind if mixing heads of different power, as the lamps will not accurately represent the relative output of the heads. For example, if you were using 100 and 400J heads both set to half power, the modelling lamps would deliver equal output, while the flash outputs would differ by two stops.

Recycling times at maximum power are two seconds for the D-Lite, 0.7s for the D-Lite2 and 1.3s for the D-Lite4. Flash durations, based on the $t=0.5$ standard, are 1/1600, 1/1200 and 1/800s respectively.

Performance

The heads reviewed here were the D-Lite2 model and measurements may or may not apply to others in the range.

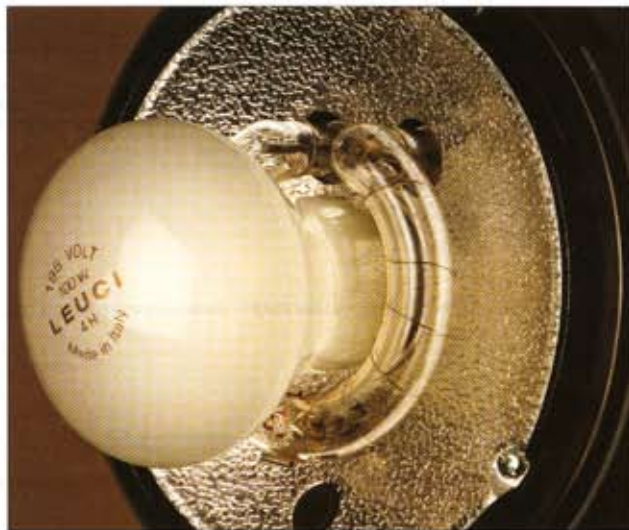
Power output was measured directly using a flash meter calibrated in increments of 1/10 stop. The claimed output of the D-Lite2 covers five stops, or four stops of spread. This turned out to be pretty well spot on. The meter indicated 3.9 stops, which is a negligible variation. The variation from stop to stop was also within 1/10 stop.

To put some real figures on output power, a measurement was taken from three metres using an 18cm reflector. At full power, this gave a shooting aperture of f/11.6 at ISO100. Fitting an Elinchrom 70cm softbox reduced this to f/8. For those who like to think in guide numbers, that's 35 and 24 (m), or 116 and 80 (ft).

The colour temperature is

quoted as 5650K across the board. The 200J heads showed impressively constant colour temperature across the power range. This was checked by shooting a Macbeth chart at each power setting with the camera's white balance set manually to the nearest Kelvin value.

In this case the nearest setting was 5600K. The resulting images showed no detectable colour variation across the power range and were close to neutral, with just four Photoshop points too much blue. Setting the camera to its



Above: The flash tube can be changed by the user. The 100W modeling lamp is common to all three models. Picture © Steve Hynes.

'The 200J heads showed impressively constant colour temperature across the power range.'

next highest setting of 5900K produced totally neutral images. This small discrepancy could be due to variation in either the camera or the lights – such a test should be carried out with any new combination of lights and camera. Importantly, the colour temperature does not change detectably with power.

Prices and kits

Prices for the kit, excluding VAT, are £129 for the D-Lite, £179 for the D-Lite2 and £229 for the D-Lite4.

A number of kits are available that offer better value than buying the items individually. The supplied kit included two D-Lite2 heads, two 16cm reflectors, a silvered reflective brolly, a shoot-through brolly,

two stands, plus a bag for the heads and one for the stands and brollies. This package sells for £395 + VAT.

These are extremely competitive prices, low enough to compete head-on with the cheap and nasty stuff that has been coming out of China. But their performance and build quality are in a different league.

To make such low prices possible, the D-Lites are manufactured in India, not in Elinchrom's Swiss factory where labour prices are among the highest in Europe. But high

standards have been maintained and no corners have been cut.

Conclusions

These are arguably the best value entry-level flash heads on the market. They perform well by every measure and appear to be built to deliver years of reliable service. They also offer features not usually found on budget models. I can highly recommend them. **BJP**

Contacts

For more information visit www.elinchrom.com. Elinchrom products are available in the UK via The Flash Centre – for details visit www.theflashcentre.com.

COLOUR STABILITY

Exposure and colour temperature is very stable across the entire output range.



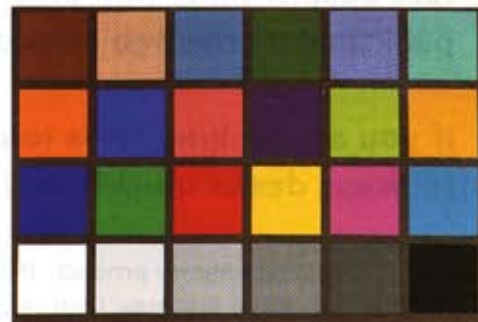
Full power.



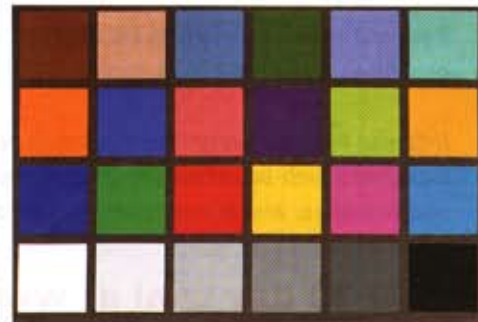
Minus 1 stop.



Minus 2 stops.



Minus 3 stops.



Minus 4 stops.