

# Ranger Quadra

**If you are a location photographer, Elinchrom's latest piece of kit could revolutionise the way you work, and prevent back injury in the process**

WORDS Ian Farrell

**S**HOOTING ON LOCATION WITH STUDIO flash is very popular in all kinds of photography at the moment. Although, anyone who has used so-called portable studio flash systems will know that these units can sometimes be far from portable. Battery packs can be rather hefty, resembling something you'd usually find under a car bonnet and weighing upwards of 5kg. You'll need strong arms to carry them between jobs.

This is not a criticism that can be levelled at Elinchrom's latest product though. The Ranger Quadra comprises a battery pack and control unit that weighs just 3kg and can drive two tiny but powerful flashheads with highly controllable asymmetric output. The whole thing fits in a carry case, about the size of a large briefcase.

We had the great fortune of getting our hands on a Ranger Quadra at its UK launch at the Focus on Imaging 2009 show in February, and gave it a good workout, shooting some indoor and outdoor portraits. The control unit, which clips to interchangeable lead-gel batteries, is superbly built with rubberised padding around the edges. The top of the unit is dominated by two connectors for the flashheads to plug into and a digital power display that doubles up as a menu system. Controls for accessing this menu system are accompanied by buttons that increase and decrease output power, switch the modelling lamp on and off and fire a test flash. A simple battery level indicator finishes things off and two carry-strap lugs mean you can have the unit slung over your shoulder or dangling from a flash stand if you wish.

Usefully, Elinchrom's own wireless flash trigger system, Skyport, is built in to the Ranger Quadra, meaning you only need an on-camera trigger to fire the unit and control power output remotely. You can find options for

setting up Skyport in the unit's menu system. A conventional slave sensor is also available and you can connect with a standard sync lead if you wish.

The flashheads themselves are tiny compared to Elinchrom's standard A- or S-type heads (which, incidentally can also be used with the Ranger Quadra via an adaptor). They also come in A- and S-type variations, with the S-type recommended for standard use and the A-type for applications where a very short flash duration is required. An energy-efficient 20W LED modelling light means the units don't sap all your power when you are setting the scene up, although they do have the equivalent brightness of a 40W halogen lamp. By default, the modelling lamp stays on for 15 seconds before turning itself off; this can be changed in the control unit's custom function menu.

As the lamps are smaller than usual they require their own bayonet fitting system, although the existing range of Elinchrom accessories can be used with an optional adaptor. 'Spill-kill' type reflectors are supplied with the heads.

Connecting the lamps to the control unit is easy enough and each one can be secured in place with a locking collar. The Ranger Quadra's output is asymmetrical for versatility: socket A outputs 66 per cent of the unit's total with the rest coming through socket B. By connecting a head to socket A you'll be able to vary power from 25 to 400Ws; connect to socket B and you'll have 8.2 to 132Ws available, which is good for when you need shorter flash durations. Connect both heads at once and you'll be able to vary power in a 2:1 ratio over a 25 to 400Ws range.



↑ Weighing in at just 3kg, this unit can still pack a punch, powering two small and impressive flashheads.

To put this in context, the larger Ranger RX pack may deliver 1100Ws of power, but it also costs a lot more money, is the size of a house and weighs a ton. If you don't need that kind of power then the Quadra is a much better bet.

## Performance

Even though we used a pre-production prototype for this test, the unit we used performed like a dream. Each successive burst was consistent according to our flash meter, and the unit fired without trouble over a large distance using the supplied Skyport remote in the hotshoe of a Nikon D700 or attached via a cable to our Hasselblad 500CM.

The diminutive flashheads are so light that, once mounted on a stand, they weren't anywhere near as unstable as monoblocs or normal flash can be. Nevertheless, we hung the power pack from one of the stands when



↑ For location portrait photographers, the Ranger Quadra offers a lot of flexibility in a small, value for money package.

outside to give it more stability, controlling power from a distance with the Skyport.

Recycling was swift for a power pack of this size, which came back to full charge in half a second after firing one head at half power. From a full power discharge with both heads attached we waited about two and a half seconds. Using the unit outdoors in slightly cold weather and with the modelling lamp on a few times as we set up gave a lifetime of 100 flashes – although we should again point out that this was a pre-production unit so final battery life may be better than this.

With the current fashion for strobism using TTL flashguns like Nikon's SB-900 or Canon's EX550, Elinchrom has waded into an evolving market with an undeniably cool product. The

Ranger Quadra should be on the shopping list of any photographer who shoots location portraiture. The sheer flexibility it gives is amazing considering the level of portability it retains. Plus, if you are already an Elinchrom user, you can use all your existing light-modifying accessories with it.

UK importer of Elinchrom, The Flash Centre tells us the Ranger Quadra system is available in one-head and two-head kits. At time of writing the two-head kit was available to pre-order from the Flash Centre for £1121 inc VAT – significantly cheaper than something like a Lumedyne kit. ■

## Contact

www.elinchrom.com

## SUMMARY

The Elinchrom Ranger Quadra is a great piece of kit for anyone shooting location portraiture. It's light, powerful, flexible and represents good value for money. Destined to be a best-seller.

### PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER RATING

FEATURES	★★★★
HANDLING	★★★★
PERFORMANCE	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★