

ZYLIGHT Z90

CAMERA LIGHT



Whilst LED has found a firm footing in live production, its uptake in video has been somewhat slower. The Z90 from Zylight could well change this.

By JIMMY DEN-ouden

LEDs have been around for years. Everyone became very excited when white LEDs finally hit the mainstream market – the problem was that they weren't really white. Video relies heavily on white light being the correct colour temperature, otherwise everything between white and black (that's all the colours) looks wrong.

When shooting video outdoors for instance, incandescent lights need to be colour corrected with CT blue gel to make them match the colour temperature of the sun. Take everything indoors and the rules change. Colour matching in video is a fine art, and something which takes a lot of practice to get right. The Z90 makes it easier.



OVERVIEW

The Zylight Z90 is an LED camera mount light, with variable colour temperature. It has a dimmer function, and “white” presets for daylight as well as tungsten. When running in “gel” mode, the colour temperature may be varied in 50K steps between 2700K and 9000K. A third mode allows the user to define and recall two colours – you can scroll between CMY and any variation in between. If you're using more than one Z90, you can set them up over an inbuilt

radio link, so the additional lights will all follow the “master” light.

Some appealing things about the Z90: It's lightweight – you'll not notice a major weight difference with one of these strapped to your camera, especially if it's a serious camera. It runs on 12 volts – so you can piggyback it off your camera power system. It's dimmable, which is a good thing since running flat out it's also extremely bright. It's really easy to use – I still haven't read the instructions and I figured out how to make it do everything

I needed to. The radio link system may require some reading, but I can't see it being that difficult when the overall operation of the unit is so easy.

Whoever reckons LED fixtures don't get hot is wrong – this one does. It's no hotter than an equivalent incandescent camera light, and it's not really surprising given the compact size and light output. The unit is built in two sections – the LED module and the control module. There appears to be a little tiny cooling fan in the back of the control module, and the LED module itself is basically surrounded on 5 sides with big heatsink fins, so the heat factor has clearly been a consideration in the design. The unit we tested came with a power supply with a locking DC connector – it's a little thing but something like a screw connector on a DC plug rather than just a push in (and subsequently “fall-out”) connector again demonstrates some thought has been put into the design of the thing. Our unit also came equipped with a 2 stage articulated mounting arm, designed to fit into the cold shoe mount atop a camera. I didn't find the mounting system great – there are too many adjustable screws and such to achieve a really positive lock. It moves too easily, but then again since this is a sundry accessory it's hardly reason to condemn the Z90 itself. It's not completely silent in operation – when dimming you can hear the slightest of noises (it sounds something akin to an 8 bit space invader game) emanate from the control module. But you need to have your ear right next to the light to hear it, so again it's not really an issue. Really importantly, when we pointed a camera at the Z90 and dimmed it there was no flicker – this is a huge problem for LED fixtures so it was pleasing to see the Z90 exhibit excellent stability.



SO WHAT'S IT GOOD FOR?

Lots of stuff. I used it to light some of the products elsewhere in this issue of the magazine when taking photos, but that's not really the intended purpose. The Z90 is a great little accessory for ENG (electronic news gathering) type video shoots. The dimmer lets you light a subject to match ambient lighting conditions. It works as a key light or a fill light. You could use the user colours for chroma key lighting, or even just colour effect. It's certainly bright enough, and the light field is nice and flat and tapers off smoothly around the edges – it's almost fresnel-like. There are many cheaper LED camera lights on the market, but as none of these is likely to yield the same performance or feature set they'd hardly be a fair comparison. The Z90 does what it does, and does it well. **CX**

BRAND: ZYLIGHT

Model: Z90

RRP: \$1490 including GST for just the Z90 head, with some kit options available starting at \$1769.00.

Product Info: <http://zylight.com>

Distributor: <http://barbizon.com>