



in the *field*

Switronix Powerbase 70

Philip Hinkle



Figure 1. The PB70 mounted on the Canon XH A1

In 2009, I reviewed the Switronix TL-50 LED light (<http://bit.ly/edv-switronix>) and found it to be a better LED light than most that were on the market at the time. I still use it for every wedding I shoot, and it's still giving me good service. In late 2010, I received an email from someone at Switronix, asking if I would like to review the company's new Powerbase 70 (PB70), which attaches on the bottom of a DSLR and provides battery life for the entire day, according to the company. In spite of my past (and ongoing) success with my Switronix light, I passed on the review. I use my DSLR only as an "eye candy" camera—that is, for portions of the prep, wedding, and reception, but not for the entire day. I felt that if I followed my usual workflow, my testing for the review would not really put the PB70 through the paces for the daylong battery life it promises.

In March, Switronix contacted me again about reviewing the PB70. This time I was intrigued with the inquiry because Switronix now has power adapters for all the major brands of video cameras. Now I was interested. I could test the PB70's all-day durability by changing between my Canon XH A1 and the Canon T2i throughout the day. The two cameras combined would be a particularly good test of the battery's capability because the XH A1 will draw much more heavily on the PB70 than the T2i. This time I decided to do the review.

WEIGH-IN

When the PB70 arrived, the first thing I discovered was that it was a little heavier than I expected, which might be a

concern for folks who do a lot of handheld DSLR work. Because I do almost all my DSLR shooting off a monopod or tripod, the weight is not a significant issue for me. The PB70 weighs in at 1.4 lbs., so when mounted on my XH A1, it is a somewhat heavy setup for the handheld work I do with that camera. When I did use the PB70 on the A1 in handheld mode, the battery mounted under the camera actually provided a pretty nice little platform for holding the bottom of the camera, so it wasn't a terrible trade-off.

The PB70 uses a plug-in adapter that mounts securely on the back of the battery. It takes a little work to remove the plug to switch cameras. This is a good thing, though, because it makes it unlikely that you would remove the adapter inadvertently. After a few camera switches, you know what it takes to quickly change the battery pack between cameras. The power adapter has a short wire with the appropriate battery plug for your camera on the other end. The short cable was just the right length, so it didn't get in my way or create a stress point that could eventually cause a failure. All in all, it's a well-thought-out design.

As you can see in **Figure 1**, the battery mounted on the A1 does not affect the functionality or form factor of the camera, other than the additional weight.

In **Figure 2**, you can see the PB70 setup with my Canon T2i DSLR. It does change the form factor significantly with a DSLR, but if you're using a monopod or tripod, this



Figure 2. The PB70 mounted on the Canon T2i DSLR



Figure 3. The PB70, fully charged

should not pose a major problem. As Figure 2 shows, if you have a shorter lens mounted, the front of the battery could possibly obstruct the focus ring. I use vintage lenses that are generally smaller than the new Canon lenses, and it did not create a problem for me. None of the other camera controls on the back of the T2i were obstructed or difficult to access when I needed them.

CHARGE, RELEASE, AND MOUNT

The right side of the PB70 has a port where the battery charger plugs in, and the left side of the PB70 has a battery gauge. To view the amount of battery life remaining, there is a small button that, when pushed, causes a series of four LED lights to shine and show the battery level. In **Figure 3**, you can see the lights indicating that the battery is fully charged.

The PB70 also comes with a quick-release plate on the top of the unit. I received two of these plates and mounted one on the bottom of each camera. This made swapping between cameras very easy and quick. The bottom of the PB70 has a standard tripod mount setup, so it can be easily mounted on any tripod or steady device. For my first day of use, I installed the quick release for my Steddiepod on the bottom of the PB70 and was able to move between handheld or Steddiepod work with ease.

GOING AND GOING

So how did the PB70 hold up? I used a pretty even mix of Canon A1 and T2i shooting for the day. At the end of the night, two of the battery-level LEDs were still lighting up when I checked the battery. I asked a few colleagues who shoot entire wedding days with DSLRs to determine battery life, and without a battery grip, most of them said that they had to change the battery when they changed their 16GB

memory cards. A battery grip should give about 1.5–2 hours of runtime with most DSLRs. With the PB70, your runtime could easily last most of the day, if not the entire shoot.

Because of the weight issue, the PB70 is best suited for those who shoot DSLR with rigs installed. Switronix has also teamed up with Redrock Micro to create packages of DSLR rigs with the Powerbase as part of the package.

What are the pros and cons of the PB70? The pros are as follows:

- It will power your camera(s) for a long day of shooting, saving you from having to worry about battery runtime.
- It should work with most video cameras via available adapters, making it a versatile external battery option for those who need it.

Here are the cons:

- Size and weight could be a hindrance, depending on your shooting style.
- The quick-release plate for your camera has a small amount of wobble to it that can affect a shot from time to time. Switronix is aware of this and is working on a solution.

What's my overall take on the product? I like that it allows me to run for an entire day without worrying about working with a backup battery in my pocket or keeping an eye on the battery meter. It does add a little weight to my setup, but because I shoot very little handheld, I didn't feel it adversely affected any of my shooting. At the end of the day, I wasn't wondering why I would want an external battery on my setups.

Its main flaw is the quick-release plate, which I hope Switronix will improve in the next version. One other issue is the size/weight, which will be a factor for some shooters, depending on their shooting style.

Switronix keeps creating accessory products that just work for event shooters. The prices for its products are also very competitive, with the Powerbase priced at about \$350 at popular online retailers.



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