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LED LIGHT KIT

LitePanels LED Lighting System

by Stephen Murphy

One of the great things about working in the industry and writing for **TV Technology** is the steady exposure to new tools of the trade that I might otherwise miss due to schedule and financial constraints.

In the past several months, I have had the opportunity to try out some products that I never would have considered essential, yet once exposed, I wondered how I got along without them. The LitePanels Two-Lite Mini Package LED lighting system is a perfect example.

FEATURES

The principal component of LitePanels' lighting systems is the Mini LitePanel LED head, a compact and lightweight unit featuring a 20x7 array of white LEDs.

The LED array is housed in a rugged anodized aluminum enclosure with a Plexiglas lens. The unit radiates very little heat, thanks to the efficiency of LEDs and a substantial heat

sink covering the back of the enclosure.

The Mini LitePanel measures 6.75 x 2.25 x 1.25 inches and weighs less than one pound without the snap-on battery pack; total weight with battery pack is about 3.5 pounds.

In addition to the rear-mounted, snap-on battery pack, the Mini LitePanel head can be powered by virtually any DC power source that provides 5 to 24 V, including a standard camera battery, car lighter or AC adapter.

According to the manufacturer, the Mini LitePanel is three times as efficient as comparable tungsten light sources, drawing just 0.6 Amps at 12 V. The integrated battery pack provides more than an hour of continuous use at full-output level.

The LED array projects a sphere of flicker-free, daylight-balanced (5600K) white light. Each Mini LitePanel includes a collection of 16 color/diffusion gels that easily slip under the Velcro-ed clear plastic lens cover.

The Mini LitePanel head features an output dimmer knob for fine-tuning light levels. At full output, the LitePanel produces 80 foot-candles at a distance of two feet and 18 foot-candles at four feet. The color temperature remains at 5600K across the dimmer range.

LitePanels offers a complete two-light package (reviewed here) complete with road case for \$2,195, or a single light kit for \$749.

The Two-Lite Mini Package includes two Mini LitePanel heads with battery packs plus a comprehensive set of power and mounting accessories. Included in the kit are two AC



LitePanels' light consists of a 20x7 array of white LEDs in an aluminum case. A dimmer is built into the case.

power transformers (with interchangeable international socket adapters), two gel kits, two snap-on base plates, two car lighter adapters, a car lighter Y-splitter, two power cable extensions and a shoe adapter.

The Camera Lite Kit includes a single Mini LitePanel head, gel kit, Anton/Bauer D-Tap power cable and a shoe adapter. Additional accessories, such as a shoe-mount swivel arm (\$175) or ballhead (\$95), can be purchased on the LitePanels Web site.

IN USE

For review, LitePanels provided the Two-Lite Mini Package plus the optional swivel arm, two ballheads and an Anton/Bauer adapter. Upon first inspection, the kit presents a dazzling array of bits and pieces that provides contingency for a range of setups and locations.

FAST FACTS

Application

ENG/EFP

Key Features

LED heads with battery packs; daylight balanced (5600K)

Price

\$2,195

Contact

LitePanels
818-752-7009,
www.litepanels.com

The main elements, of course, are the surprisingly lightweight Mini LitePanel heads and the not-so-light battery packs. Once charged, the battery packs were easily attached to the back of the light head via a four-post snap-on system.

A two-inch cable is required to provide power from the battery to the light head. It is unfortunate that LitePanels did not use the integrated mounting posts to provide the power transfer, reducing the risk of delay caused by a lost cable. Of course, one could always use one of the longer power cables provided in the kit in such an occurrence.

Cranking the dimmer to full, the versatility and power of the Mini LitePanel/battery combo is immediately apparent. Here is a self-contained, low-profile soft-light pack that can be placed practically anywhere, is moved easily and can be handled without worry of receiving a second-degree burn. (It's hard at this point not to recall the Sylvania light that my father bought to go with our Bell & Howell 16mm camera some 30 years ago. If memory serves, I believe I destroyed the light by melting a penny on the lens.)

With battery attached, the Mini LitePanel adds a significant amount of heft for on-camera handheld work; placing the battery in a belt or pocket and using one of the longer power cables is highly recommended for handheld use.

Without the battery attached, the additional weight of the Mini LitePanel head is hardly noticeable. In fact, with the batteries mounted on my belt, I was able to comfortably use two Mini LitePanel heads on a Canon XL1 (one mounted on-camera for front fill and one mounted on the swivel arm and set to a slightly lower output for side fill). This combination proved to be a favorite setup, instantly adding punch and production value to medium- and close-shot subjects without any additional rigging and hassle.

While I appreciated the cool temperature of the light heads, the on-camera talent greatly appreciated the lack of heat projected by the Mini LitePanels' LED array. One subject commented that, in every respect,



Peter Rieveschl, director of photography for the HBO series "Family Bonds," uses LitePanels LED lights in the interior of a vehicle.

the LED lights were, "significantly less obnoxious than typical on-camera lights." A glowing review, if you will.

Although the battery pack is rated by the manufacturer at "one-hour plus," for reference, I found I was getting more than two hours of life in typical real-world use. A significant feature of the Mini LitePanel is that its voltage is regulated to provide a consistent output level, even as the battery power diminishes. That saves some potentially embarrassing moments in the edit room!

Speaking of consistent levels, I found the lack of a power switch on the Mini LitePanel head to be a bit of a disadvantage when using the lights at levels other than 100 percent. In order to ensure I returned to the same dimmer level after breaks, I found myself leaving the dimmer set and constantly pulling the power cable out of the socket to save juice; that can't be good for the longevity of the jack or cable. Another welcome addition would be some hash marks around the dimmer knob for notating and recalling levels used for various shots.

SUMMARY

Overall, I was impressed by the range and quality of light produced by the Mini LitePanels, and taken aback by their ease of setup and versatility. I found myself using the LitePanels at nearly every opportunity during the review period, whether as an on-camera fill, surface-mounted fill or simply hidden within the scene to add punch and separation to an important object or area.

The Mini LitePanels are power-efficient, flexible and long lasting (rated at more than 100,000 hours); most importantly the LitePanels produce a pleasingly smooth illumination without color shifts, flicker or undue heat.

Although somewhat pricey, the Mini LitePanels prove their worth by quickly adding production value with a minimum amount of effort. ■

Stephen Murphy, contributing editor of Pro Audio Review magazine, has more than 20 years experience in audio/visual and broadcast production. He can be reached through his Web site at www.smurphco.com.