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TOOLS, TECHNIQUES & CREATIVITY

Calumet's Travelites

Professional Capabilities & Portability

by Ron Eggers and Stan Sholik

Serious lighting equipment isn't just for high-paid commercial photographers anymore. There are a growing number of new, sophisticated, electronic lighting systems available that meet the needs and budgets of most serious photographers, including those who previously would never have considered acquiring professional-type flash systems.

One reason that professional lighting systems are becoming a more realistic option for many photographers is that configurations are changing. Whereas once "bigger is better," the catchwords now are "portability" and "versatility." There's a move toward powerful, self-contained, lightweight monobloc heads. More and more lighting equipment manufacturers are coming up with gear that can be powered by either AC or battery.

PC cords are being replaced with systems that are triggered by radio waves. And increasingly, rather than just marketing individual pieces of lighting gear, companies are bringing out complete pre-packaged lighting sets that include the heads, stands, power packs, and umbrellas or softboxes.

At the same time, most of the new lighting equipment has been specifically designed to be used with digital cameras. Because digital cameras rely on electrical power to operate and capture their images, they present their own design and operational considerations.

One company that has taken the lead in providing both portable and versatile units is Calumet Photographic, with their latest generation of Travelite professional electronic flash systems. They're ideal for both studio use and working on location. For studio work, they provide all the power and versatility that any photographer might need. They're not just applicable as a good back-up gear, they can easily serve as the primary lighting gear system.

They're just as well suited for location work. While, when packed up in the carrying case with stands, power pack, and brackets, they're a little heavier than some of the competing portable light systems out there, their advanced capabilities make up for the marginal extra weight.

There are two Travelite monobloc heads: a 750 watt second (ws) unit and a 375 ws unit. Both offer variable flash output over a five-stop range, from full to 1/2 power, modeling lamp power control, visual flash-ready indicator, built-in slave cell, voltage stabilization, and circuit protection. Both heads are the same size, approximately 15x6.75x5", and both are lightweight. The Travelite 375 weighs in at only 6.4 lbs and the Travelite 750 at 7.5 lbs. Both heads accept either 275w photofloods or 250w Halostar halogen modeling lamps. Two 750s were used for this review.



The Calumet Travelite monobloc 750 is a full-functioning, self-contained head.



Power output is controlled by a continuous dial on the side of the unit.



Most of the unit's other controls are on the back of the 750.



Paired with an umbrella, the monobloc is an ideal primary light source for any studio operation.

Recycle Time

For some photographers such as those shooting weddings and portraits on location, recycle time and flash duration may not be particularly important issues. But for others, such as fashion and sports photographers, they might well be two of the most important factors. On AC at full power, the Travelite 375 recycles in just under 2 seconds and flash duration is specified as 1/900 sec. The Travelite 750 recycles in just over 2 seconds at full power on AC, with a flash duration of 1/600 sec.

Both heads accept the full range of "S-Type" accessories from the Calumet/Bowens line. These include eight direct reflectors ranging from 6" (120 ∞) to 17" (40 ∞), grid spots, light boxes, and speed rings to adapt third-party light boxes.

Control Panels

Considering the compact size of the heads, controls are laid out very well. The main control panel is on the back of the heads. That's where the sync cord connector, the power inlets, the main on/off switches, and the modeling lamp and photocell controls are located. A large rotary dial on the side of the unit controls output power. The photocell, flash-ready indicator, and test/open flash button are also located on the side. A bracket underneath holds the umbrella stem.

Even though the heads are compact, controls are large enough and spaced sufficiently well to make them easy to adjust. Marked in

$\frac{1}{2}$ stop increments, the oversized rotary power dial on the side can be used to set power output to the precise level required.

Really the only thing that might be changed with the ergonomics of the head is the flash-ready light. It should be on the top of the unit, rather than on the side. When shooting with multiple heads, the way it is now, it's only possible to see the ready lights on units that are to the left of you when you're shooting. But that's only a minor thing when shooting in the studio, since it only becomes an issue when the modeling light is off. When the modeling light is on, it can be set to dim when the flash fires and then come back up to full power when the head is ready to fire.

Digital Considerations

Digital capture puts more stringent demands on electronic flash equipment than film photography, but the Travelites are fairly well up to the challenge. The sync voltage is 5v, which is appropriate for use with digital SLRs. Voltage stabilization holds the color temperature at any given power setting to a consistent value. However, the color temperature varied somewhat at different power settings. But it was still close to the specified range of 5600 \pm 300 $^{\circ}$ Kelvin. Measured with a Minolta color temperature meter, the color temperature varied from 5350 ∞ Kelvin at $\frac{1}{2}$ power to 5940 ∞ Kelvin at full power.

Firing Options

The Travelite units can be triggered with a sync cord, through slaves or remotely with Calumet's optional LiteLink Radio Trigger System. Each LiteLink unit is a transceiver that can trigger flash units, film and digital cameras, and light meters at a distance up to 300 ft. Four individual channels are available. The units can be configured so that each channel has a unique ID to trigger different devices. They can also be configured to trigger all equipment within a given setup. Power consumption is very low; they are specified to operate continuously for 200 hours on two AAA batteries. Their operating voltage is low also, about 3v, making them safe to use with digital cameras and perfectly matched to the Travelite heads. The units are 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ x2x1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " and weigh only 4.3 oz.

On Location

While the Calumet heads are ideal for studio work, they also work very well away from the studio. Calumet had the photographer's need for versatility in mind when they put together the Travelite system, which includes compact battery power for location work. Weighing only 9 lbs and measuring 7x4.75x7", each Travel-Pak battery can power two heads simultaneously, for a total power output up to 1500 ws.

One of the drawbacks of operating on battery power is that the modeling lights don't work. Also, recycle time is about double what it is when on AC power. Without the modeling light to indicate the unit's status and the longer recycle times, having the ready light on top, rather than the side, would really be an advantage.

Even though it's a relatively small battery, in testing, the Travel-Pak was able to power two Travelite 750 heads for close to 200 exposures at varying power levels and still have some power available. For longer location shoots, battery life can be increased with the addition of the optional Travel-Pak Battery Booster. It's

also possible to daisy chain Travel-Pak batteries together. A proprietary cable, one of which is supplied with the battery, is required between the Travel-Pak battery and each Travelite head, so make sure they're packed when going on location. Also included with the battery are a charger and a waterproof carrying case that protects the battery even when sitting in water up to 3" deep, something not recommended but good to know.

The Manufacturer Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) of the Travelite 375 is \$470, while the Travelite 750 costs \$570. The MSRP for the battery, charger, cable, and case is \$550. A spare battery and case is \$400, the booster battery is \$100. An additional Travel-Pak to Travelite cable is \$70.

For location photography, the best deal is to buy a Travelite kit because the kits include a heavy-duty rolling case. The case holds everything needed with room to spare for Travel-Pak batteries or Battery Booster. A kit with one Travelite 750 head, umbrella, light stand, sync cord, and case sells for \$590. The price of the same kit with the Travel-Pak battery kit is \$1000.

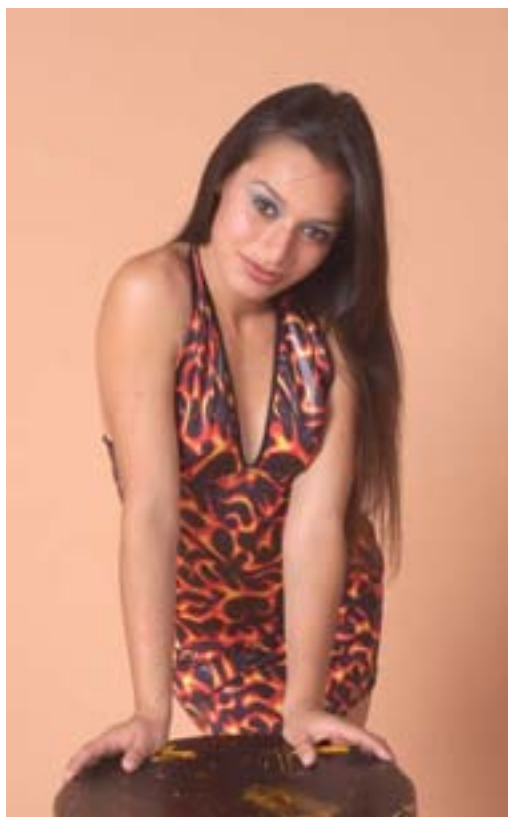
A 2250 ws LiteLink kit with three Travelite 750 heads, three stands, a softbox with speed ring, two silver umbrellas, two LiteLink transceivers, a sync cord, a light stand case, and a rolling carrying case goes for \$1900. There are a number of other kits available priced between these extremes.

More information is available on Calumet's website at: www.calumetphoto.com. You can also contact Calumet Photographic, Inc. at 900 W Bliss St., Chicago, IL 60622; (800) 225-8638, (312) 944-2680. ◀



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Softboxes result in very light shadows.



(Left) Simple portrait lighting with a single light source. (Model: Erika Layva.)

(Right) A dual-head setup, with the primary light above and to the left of the camera and a half-power light on the right.



THE RIGHT CAMERA AND THE RIGHT MODEL MEAN NOTHING WITHOUT THE RIGHT LIGHTING.

TRAVELITE Lighting Kits

Travelite Kits are a great way to get the lighting equipment you need and save money at the same time. All of the Travelite package prices reflect a discount from the "a la carte" prices, some as much as \$540.00! And now, for a limited time, you can save even more! Whether you are a studio photographer or require transportability to go on location, there is a Travelite kit with the power and accessories to suit your needs.



LiteLink Radio Triggering System



1500w/s Two-head Umbrella Kit

Includes two 750 Travelites, two 45" silver/white umbrellas, two umbrella reflectors, two 9' light stands and a carrying case. **CE1452**

1500w/s Two-head Umbrella Kit w/LiteLink

Same as above, but with Calumet LiteLink radio triggering system (set of two). **CE1453**



1875w/s Three-head Portrait Kit

Includes one 375 Travelite, two 750 Travelites, two 45" silver/white umbrellas, two umbrella reflectors, one 24 x 32" Nova white soft box, one 4" snoot, three 9' light stands, a stand bag and a carrying case. **CE1445**

1875w/s Three-head Portrait Kit w/LiteLink

Same as above, but with Calumet LiteLink radio triggering system (set of two). **CE1447**



2250w/s Three-head Studio Kit

Includes three 750 Travelites, two 45" silver/white umbrellas, two umbrella reflectors, one 24 x 32" Nova white soft box, three 9' light stands, a stand bag and a carrying case. **CE1454**

2250w/s Three-head Studio Kit w/LiteLink

Same as above, but with Calumet LiteLink radio triggering system (set of two). **CE1465**

Travel-Pak

The compact Travel-Pak allows you to power up to two Travelites anywhere with a total power of up to 1500w/s. It will bring a 375w/s unit to full charge in under four seconds. The Travel-Pak can be fully charged in three hours and comes with a convenient carrying case. It weighs just 9 lbs. and measures 7(l) x 4.75(w) x 7(h)". The Travel-Pak includes the battery, carrying case, multi-voltage charger and connecting cable. **CE1107**



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