

RAY OF THE RINGS

BEN OXLEY TESTS
THE RAYFLASH
RING FLASH
LIGHT MODIFIER.

All pictures by the author.

✦ **RIGHT:** While the Rayflash adds some considerable bulk to the camera/lens/flash it is still a highly portable combination.

Inspired by the design of a traditional ring flash unit, which uses a circular flash tube to deliver even illumination around the front of a lens, the innovative RayFlash, which was conceived and developed by a professional photographer from the Czech Republic, modifies the light from a conventional camera mounted flash unit, such as a Nikon Speedlight SB-800, to emulate its distinctive lighting quality.

Dedicated ring flash units are generally the preserve of studio based fashion / portrait photographers, or used by macro photography specialists, consequently the equipment tends to be either very expensive, or large and bulky, often it is both!

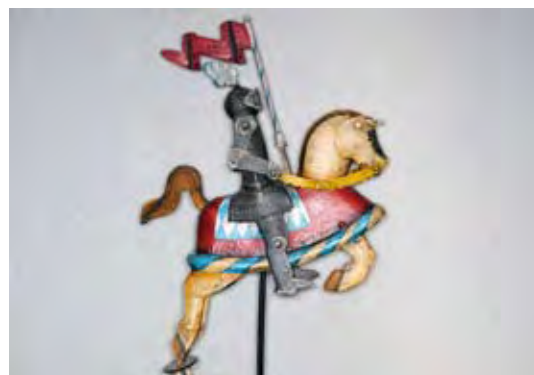
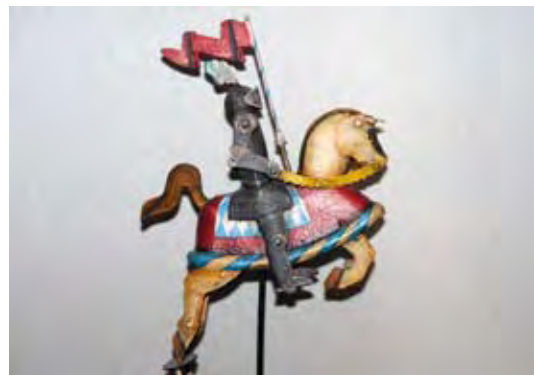
The RayFlash is designed to make the effects of ring flash lighting available to photographers who could not justify investing in such equipment and at the same time deliver it from a relatively small, portable, light modifying device that can be used indoors, or outside. If you are wondering what benefit there is to having light spread evenly around the front of a lens consider the effects of positioning a conventional portable flash unit in either the accessory shoe of a camera, or on a bracket to hold it to one side of a camera – the light from the flash is highly directional. At longer distances this is usually not a problem, since the light becomes more diffuse as it spreads and thus shadow

effects are reduced but at close range, say from 3m (10-feet), or less, such lighting forms distinct, hard-edged shadows that are often distracting, or unwanted and in the case of a portrait usually far from flattering.

The RayFlash adapter is designed primarily for use with either the Nikon SB-800 Speedlight, or Canon EX 580 flash units. It is attached by sliding the head of the flash unit in to the open end of the main shaft of the RayFlash; a friction pad that clamps onto the upper surface of the flash head holds them together. The clamp is a little rudimentary, lacking any indication as to which direction it should be turned to lock, or unlock it but it does the job well enough. By placing some extra padding between the face of the clamp's plate and the head of the Speedlight, the RayFlash can also be used successfully with the SB-600; however, it is not compatible with the recently released SB-900, due to the much larger profile of its flash head.

Once attached to the head of an SB-800 the RayFlash does feel somewhat precarious, with its unsupported weight of 462g (16 ounces) causing the head to tilt down slightly. However, adjusting the position of your left hand, so it supports the bottom edge of the RayFlash at the same time as it holds the lens can restore the user's confidence, regardless of whether the camera is held in the horizontal, or vertical orientation.

The internal diameter of the RayFlash measures 103mm (4-inches), which is more than sufficient to accommodate large diameter lenses such as the AF Nikkor 85mm f/1.4D, Nikkor 135mm f/2D AF-DC, or AF-S Micro-Nikkor VR 105mm f/2.8G. The more important consideration is the relative position of the centre point of the RayFlash ring and the central axis of the lens, as the head of the Speedlight is further away from the latter when used with larger Nikon camera bodies, so it is necessary to choose the appropriate RayFlash



◆ **TOP:** The Rayflash ring flash adapter is designed for the Nikon SB-800 Speedlight.

◆ **ABOVE:** Attaching the Rayflash device is very straightforward; it simply pushes on to the flash head of the Speedlight.



◆ **TOP:** Direct flash from a Speedlight mounted on the camera produces typically harsh, hard-edged shadows.

◆ **ABOVE:** The Rayflash modifies the flash output to a far more gentle, even lighting with a halo type shadow.





- ❖ **TOP:** Flat, direct frontal lighting with the Speedlight off to one side of the camera is far from attractive or flattering.
- ❖ **ABOVE:** The clamp to attach the device is located on top of the sleeve that fits the flash head.

model. For the Nikon system cameras there are two: the RAN 160 that is suitable for the likes of the D700, D300, D200, D90, and D80, while the RAN 170 that has a slightly longer shaft, which is designed for models such as the D2-series, D3-series, F5, and F6.

The RayFlash is extremely straightforward to use, since it just modifies the light from the flash it does not affect the pre-flash output used for TTL flash exposure control by the D-TTL and i-TTL flash systems of previous and current Nikon digital SLR camera models, respectively, and it works equally well with the earlier TTL flash control used by Nikon film SLR cameras that use pre-flash outputs. The only function the RayFlash prevents is the use of any AF assist lamp in either the camera, or Speedlight. The light from the flash head is channelled via a prism down the main shaft into the ring of reflectors and baffles made from clear acrylic, where it is distributed evenly around the ring. Since all the light for the flash exposure is derived from the ring of the adapter it produces virtually no shadows on the surfaces of the subject facing the lens, while the light casts a soft, uniform, halo-like shadow around the edges of the subject. The evenness of the illumination emitted by the RayFlash is commendable with virtually no difference across the frame area. Furthermore, the light output is remarkably clean with no perceptible shift in color temperature.

The level of light output is equally impressive; at ISO200 and a full discharge from an SB-800 you can expect to achieve shooting distance/lens aperture combinations similar to the following: 0.6m (2-feet) – f/22, 1.8m (6-feet) – f/8, and 3m (10-feet) – f/4. As ever it is worth experimenting a little to attain the exact level of illumination you desire, and depending on the nature of the subject and its surroundings it may be necessary to apply some flash exposure compensation.

The RayFlash can also be combined with studio flash heads as part of a more complex light system. In this case you will need to switch the Speedlight to manual flash exposure control to cancel the pre-flash outputs, which could otherwise trigger other flash units prematurely; manual camera control is also to be recommended in this situation as well to ensure consistent results.

It may look rather ungainly, be a little bit of a handful to support, and at £186.00 is not exactly cheap but the RayFlash



- ❖ Attaching the Rayflash device is very straightforward; it simply pushes on to the flash head of the Speedlight.



- ❖ The clamp to attach the device is located on top of the sleeve that fits the flash head.

does exactly what it was designed to do, and it does it remarkably well. If you enjoy using flash and want to extend the creative possibilities of your SB-800 Speedlight the RayFlash can be thoroughly recommended. Finally, in light of the announcement from Nikon that production of the SB-800 has been discontinued I read that the manufacturer already has plans to introduce a version compatible with the new king of portable, camera-mounted flash units, the SB-900. ■



For further details visit:
www.ray-flash.com
 For details of the UK distributor visit:
www.flaghead.co.uk