

# First Exposure

Scott Adams



The Swiss Army knife of electronic flash units.

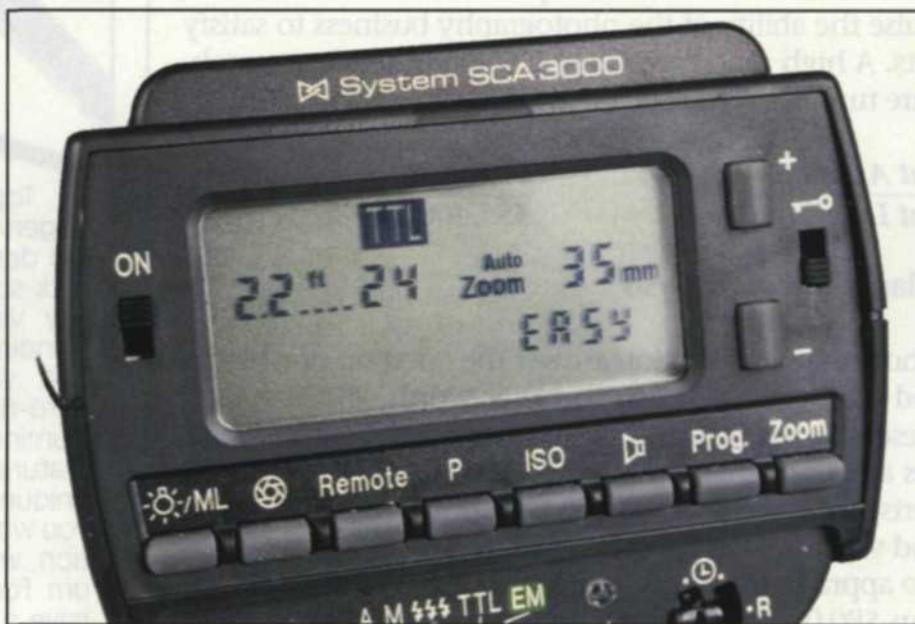


Bounce head reveals lower flash.

## Mecablitz 40 MZ-3

It's funny how one totally unrelated event will trigger a past memory. Recently, while working on a new photo product test report for *Range-finder*, I suddenly found myself reminiscing about my first Swiss Army knife. I knew about the prized knife from all the older kids, and could hardly wait to get mine. It was during my scouting years that I finally got one as a birthday present and I could hardly wait to go camping and give it a whirl. I didn't care that it was 5° F. outside, or that the snow was three feet deep, I just wanted to use all those fancy attachments that came with such a fine tool. It had a screwdriver, file, saw, scissors, punch, three knife blades, bottle opener, can opener and a half dozen other utensils that could do just about anything. It didn't matter that I couldn't use them all. Just knowing that it could do all those things was satisfaction enough.

Skipping back to reality, I find myself holding the Mecablitz 40 MZ-3, an electronic flash version of the Swiss Army knife. This workhorse from Metz is built to accomplish anything a photographer might want from a portable flash, and then some. This heavyweight only weighs in at approximately 9 oz, but it is



Close-up of LCD panel with flash in "Easy" mode.

designed for photographers of all skill levels. The 40 MZ-3 can be set up for fully automatic operation for the beginner, or programmed to accomplish a specific professional application.

### Construction

If you look at the largest moving parts on the flash, you will find that the Mecablitz unit is divided into four distinct areas. The main flash body houses the flash capacitors, operating electronics, most of the controls and the batteries. The flash head attaches to the front of the main body and is so versatile that it can pivot down for macro shots, or turn up to a 90° angle for bounce flash. Located inside the head is a powerful zoom for lenses with focal lengths of

24mm to 105mm. The flash automatically senses which lens is attached to the camera, and sets the proper flash head angle on its own. You can also pull out the unique diffuser panel on the front of the flash head and it will indicate that you can now cover the area of a 20mm lens. The Mecablitz 40 MZ-3 operates off 4 AA batteries and fits on your camera via a hot-shoe that is so sophisticated it even demands its own tech manual!

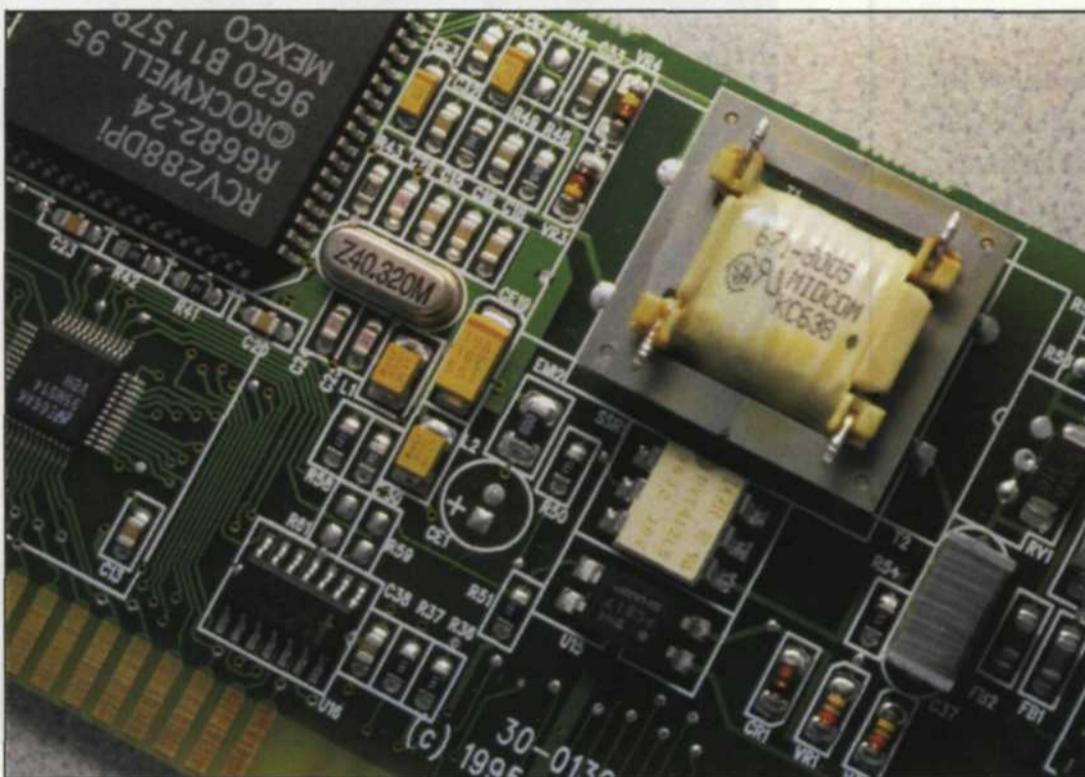
Now comes the best part. Remember all those accessories on the Swiss Army knife? Well, this flash even has a second, smaller flash located under the main flash. When the main head is turned up for bounce flash, you can use this smaller flash to gently fill in the shadows. This lower flash block also houses the auto exposure sensor, and the low-light focus beam. This red grid beam comes on when the light gets too low for the camera to focus. The entire lower package can rotate in a 270° arc under the main flash.

Finally, at the base of it all is the flash hot-shoe system. I remember when a hot-shoe was just a hot-shoe, but not with this flash. Four additional flash controls are located on the hot-shoe and are unique to the functions of the camera brand assigned to that hot-shoe. The hot-shoe itself can be removed and

replaced if you decide to change camera brands.

### Flash Controls

The on/off control for the lower flash is located on the side of the lower flash. All other 18 controls are located on the back of the flash and hot-shoe and slightly resembles the inside of an airliner cockpit. An LCD panel displays all data and helps guide you when operating the flash system. Going through each control and explaining its operation would be like going through the 66-page technical manual that comes with the unit. Instead, I thought I would highlight a couple of typical shooting situa-



Full TTL through small light tent.

tions that best demonstrate uses for the corkscrew, scissors, saw and the other nifty tools.

**Direct TTL Flash:** One of the easiest ways to use the 40 MZ-3 is in the TTL position. Before taking any pictures, check the film ISO rating with the ISO button, and then the exposure compensation on the base of the hot-shoe. Normally the flash will pick up the ISO setting from the camera, so the only change would be if you want something different than the standard ISO. Once the mode switch is in TTL and you have a green light, you are ready. When you take a picture, you should get a steady beep and an "OK" on the back of the flash. This will tell you that all went well and you have achieved a good exposure. If

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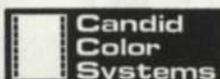
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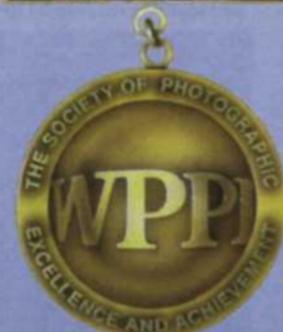
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Direct TTL flash.

not, look at the distance rating on the LCD panel. If the subject distance falls beyond the near/far numbers, open your lens aperture, shoot again and you should get an "OK."

**Bounce TTL Flash:** If you want to try bounce flash, first turn the flash head so that it will bounce off a light colored wall to the side, above or behind the camera. Open the lens up a couple of f-stops and give it a try. If you want a little bit of fill on the subject, turn on the lower flash and both will work in the TTL mode. In order to vary the lighting ratio of the flashes, you can adjust either of the exposure-compensation switches on the back of the hot-shoe.

**Auto Flash:** If you find yourself in a situation where TTL is not an option, switch the mode slider to "Auto," and the auto sensor on the front of the lower flash goes to work. Direct flash, bounce, and remote all work the same as in the TTL mode, except the flash uses its own sensor instead of the one inside the camera that operates the TTL system.

**Manual Flash:** There will be times when the you will want absolute control over the flash. Using the aperture control, you can adjust the effective f-stop of the flash with the +/- controls on the side of the LCD panel. As you jump through the f-stops, a distance for that setting will appear on the left side of the LCD panel. If you want to vary the amount of light from each flash, you can set a partial light output with the partial output button.

### Remote Flash Capabilities

If you want to use the Mecablitz as a cordless TTL flash, you will need the SCA 3080 adapter. Merely press the "remote" button and use the unit as a slave flash. You will still need a Metz controller flash on the camera as a trigger, but it opens up a myriad of creative possibilities.

**Rear Flash:** Rear flash can be used by just selecting the "Rear" button on the back of the hot shoe. This setting allows camera and flash to work together at long shutter speeds.

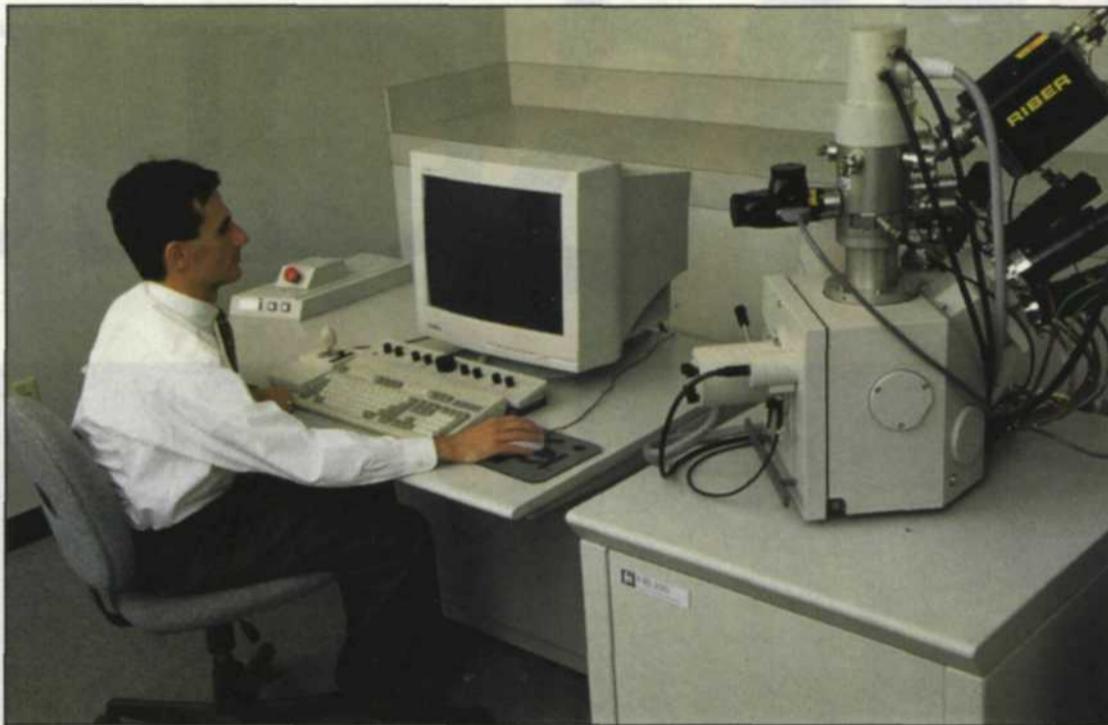
**Stroboscopic Flash:** Creative photographers will love this function. When this position is selected, you can set the number of flashes and speed at which they will fire. If you want to see what the action is going to look like, you can press the ready light on the back of the main flash head, and the flash will strobe as though the picture were being taken. Remember that this function only operates in a manual flash mode, so look at the distance scale on the LCD panel to select the best distance for your selected film speed and f-stop.

### User Program Modes

If you have a favorite combination of flash controls, you can store these values in memory using the "store" and "recall" functions built into this program mode. Up to nine different programs can be installed into available

memory. You can name your programs using special stickers provided that can be stored under the bottom edge of the flash head.

**Easy Mode:** If you want to bypass all the variable controls, the Easy mode will shut down the LCD display and lock all the controls. The basic TTL mode kicks in and all you have to do is point and shoot. If you get an "OK" from the flash, then just keep on shooting. Bounce and fill flash are still possible with the lower flash in the Easy mode. The Easy mode is kind of like the single blade of the Swiss Army knife. You will probably use it the most, but it sure makes you feel



TTL slave mode, bounce flash.

confident having all the other tools at your fingertips if you need them. If that is not enough knife blades or special functions for you, there is a multi-function switch for high speed

shooting, an LCD light, sound control, a back-light-compensation switch and a mode function lock. Now, if you take these functions and all the combinations possible with the 40 MZ-3, you will find more than one million possible combinations! That makes the Mecablitz 40 MZ-3 from Metz, one heck of a Swiss Army knife.

Information: Bogen Photo Corporation, 565 E. Crescent Ave., P.O. Box 506, Ramsey, NJ 07556-0506; (201) 818-9500 or web site: [www.bogenphoto.com/](http://www.bogenphoto.com/).

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Scott Adams is a freelance journalist/photographer living in the Pacific Northwest.

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