



So you want to photograph your latest model car to either post on the internet, or enter it in a photo contest, but you don't have a BIG BUCK camera. Well, as long as your pocket digital has a "Macro" function on it, you can take some clear pictures. Set-up a cardboard box in the sun, drape it with a white bed sheet or table cloth (ask your mom for permission first!), and you have a simple, effective backdrop.

Personally, I love photographing in the natural light. There's something about a car photographed outside that just can't be reproduced in a studio. Magazine editors will argue that it creates too much reflection and glare! I think the harsh glare along the body lines enhances and highlights the shape of the body and helps define the curves and sharp edges.

The one problem with shooting outside is the harsh shadows the sun creates. Place your model so that the sun is shining on the side you're photographing. Notice the dark shadow behind the car in the photos to the left.

HOW-TO PHOTOGRAPH YOUR MODEL CAR



What if it's a dark, cloudy, cold winter day? Move your box and bed sheet onto the dining room table. Now grab the "clamp-on" desk lamp from the office and use it to light your model (see photo on the far left). One of the problems is that digital cameras *LOVE* light. If you look at the photos of the cars at the top of the page, (the ones we photographed outside in the bright sunlight), they are much brighter and crisper than the ones to the left. These were shot inside with only the Desk Lamp lighting the model.

Don't get me wrong, these pictures are perfectly fine. They would be good enough for internet posting or entering in a photo contest. If you had a photo program like "PhotoShop" you could brighten them up and doctor them up even more. However, let's take a look at a third alternative...

WITH YOUR DIGITAL CAMERA



By adding two small photo floods you've brought out a lot more detail on the car, and made the car much brighter. These two flood lights came in a kit I'm going to be talking about next. But you can find similar lights at a good camera store. The lights use "Daylight Balanced" fluorescent bulbs that work very well. They put out plenty of light, and yet stay cool. In the old days the bulbs generated a lot of heat and you were always worried about warping or melting a model!

The draw back to this set-up is the harsh glare created by the flood lights. Notice the large white glare running down the top of the fenders on our Camaro. This is actually the reflection of the flood light in the car's glossy paint. Again, I think this is fine. These photos look good enough to use. But let's "step-up" our make shift photo studio to something a little more professional...



This is a photo box I bought from Micro-Mark called the "Photo Studio in a Box" (Part #84628) and it is what I use 90% of the time to do my photos for Model Car Builder magazine. It sells for less than \$100.00 and includes the light box, two lights, a camera holder, backdrop, & carrying case (no camera).



The thing I love most about this kit is that it sets up or breaks down in just a matter of minutes to this easy carry case. The case is the back of the light box. The pockets hold the lights, rolled-up backdrop, and the camera holder. I always stuff-in an extra extension cord with a twin plug (for the two lights).



By having the light pass through the sides of the photo box the reflection on the car is much more diffused. You don't have the harsh reflection we saw in the earlier pictures. The kit only comes with two lights, but the "clamp-on" desk lamp I added at the back helps a lot (see far left photo).



The three close-up shots you see here were taken with my Canon G5, a simple, fixed lens digital camera. The trick is being able to have a "Macro" function for close-up work, plenty of lighting, and ether a steady hand or a tri-pod. There is NO ADDED details to the wheel above. That's the Revell box stock wheel & brakes!



These are the two most important buttons on my digital camera. The red arrow points to the button that turns OFF the built-in flash. The flash is not set for close-up work, NEVER use it! The black arrow is for the "Macro" button. This button is a MUST for close-up work! It allows the camera to focus on objects near the lens.

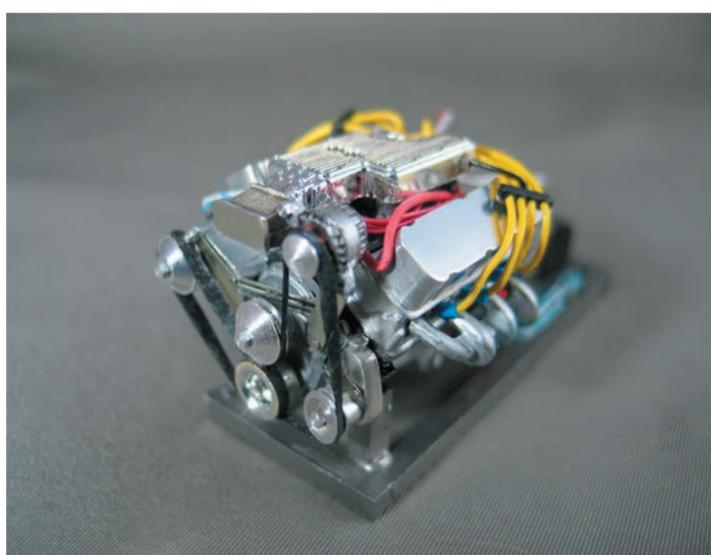
If you read the second issue of Model Car Builder magazine (Book Two, Winter 2010), then you saw my article on "Photo Studio in a Box" (page 31). This is a light box kit used for photographing models. You can order one from Micro-Mark (340 Synder Ave., Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922 or www.micromark.com), Part no. 84628, it sells for less than one hundred dollars and includes: A special heat-resistant diffuser "box" (16"x16"x16") to eliminate harsh shadows and glare, a reversible (blue on one side, gray on the other), seamless polyester fabric for an uncluttered background, two studio-quality, high-output photo lamps with retractable legs, a camera stand with sturdy base and extendable neck, and best of all, an integral 31" long x 15" long storgae/carrying case that everything folds up into! I love it because you can ether set-up or tear it down in just a matter of minutes.



Next to the trigger on most cameras is a "Time Delay" button. It is normally used by photographers to set the camera down, hit the trigger, and go run in front of the camera before the shutter goes off! I use it to get CLEAR close-up photos. Place the camera on a table top tri-pod and use the time delay button.

Micro-Mark also offers several different background cloths in different color combinations. But 90% of the time you're going to want to stay with the neutral grey back ground. I'm definitely thinking about ordering the white/black background for shooting feature cars, to add some variety to the magazine.

I was a little disappointed that Micro-Mark didn't have a third OVERHEAD light in the kit. Digital cameras need a lot of light to get good, clear shots. Since you can't use the camera's built-in flash, you must rely on the lights to fill-in shadows and light your car properly. I'm using a "clamp-on" desk lamp with a bendable neck to provide some overhead lighting. It seems to work very well and is not as costly as a studio style overhead lamp. All three lamps use florescent bulbs. The fluorescent bulbs run a lot cooler than the old floods that we used to use. So you don't have to worry about



This close-up shot of a fully detailed Big Block Chevy motor illustrates how well things work when you use the three buttons we discussed. By turning off the camera's flash, setting the Macro function, and using the time delay button with a tri-pod we get this great close-up shot! All your hard detail work caught on film, no, digits!

warping or melting a model like we did in the old days. Isn't modern technology grand?

A few quick words on using your camera. No.1) Always turn off your flash !! The built-in flash is not designed for close-up work. No. 2) If your camera has a "Macro" function for close-up work, always have it on and No. 3) use a table top tripod for clear shots. If you need to get closer (or lower), try setting your camera on the lens cap. If you're really picky, try using your camera's time delay for the shutter, because when your finger hits the shutter trigger you're actually creating movement in the camera.

If you're shooting pictures for a model car photo contest keep the backgrounds simple and clear. A grey or white back ground is your best bet. Judges want to see your model, not trees and buildings. Shoot a 3/4 front, 3/4 rear, Chassis, Motor, and interior. Be careful if you're going to lay the model on



One of the things I find annoying about fixed lens (non-SLR) digital cameras are their poor depth of field. If you look at the motor shot you'll notice the headers get blurry towards the back, and the chassis above is clear in the middle but slightly blurry at the front & rear. It's something you either live with, or buy a BIG BUCK camera.

it's side to shoot the chassis, watch out for side view mirrors or radio antennas that might break off. If you have opening doors the interior shot will be easier to accomplish, but you might want to think about photographing the interior tub before you put it in the car. If there's something unique on the car be sure to include it in your photos. I hope this article helps, good luck with your photo shoots!

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