

Camera Equipment Review...

Lowepro Stealth AW

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batteries in the field.

Dust has always been the enemy of the modern photographic era. The electronics that are essential to the function of autofocus, matrix metering and TTL flash are all susceptible to malfunction should dust or dirt penetrate their circuits. The laptop issue is one of needing a place to store your digital images once the capacity of your digital film (in whatever form - compact flash, etc) is reached. The laptop issue is twofold - The first concern is one of protection from dust and mechanical damage. The second is one of having a safe way to transport the laptop with you into the field.

It is no secret that I have owned many photography bags in my time. And it is no secret that I have settled on the name Lowepro as the brand that carries and protects the vast majority of my photographic equipment. Wildlife and nature photography, by its mere nature, can be brutal on equipment and I have found time and time again that the name Lowepro has been up to the task. I have never had a Lowepro bag physically fail me in any manner - no rips, no tears, no failed zippers, no problems!

In addition, the Lowepro line of photographic bags is one that is extremely well designed for functional use. These are bags for photographers, designed by photographers. I continue to be dazzled and amazed at how much equipment can be placed safely in the various Lowepro bags I own (in excess of 16 at present - but who's counting?).

So, with that background, let's return to the "Digital Era" that is now upon us in a functional and useful form. As one can expect from a progressive company like Lowepro, they are once again ahead of the curve and have designed a wonderful bag for the digital shooter. And so the Lowepro "Stealth AW" was born.

Initially, the Stealth was designed with the digital photojournalist in mind. When I began extensively shooting digital in the field, I soon found that my other Lowepro bags did not quite fit my needs. So, I searched through the latest Lowepro catalog and found the Stealth. Immediately I knew that this new bag would solve many of the problems associated with digital as I outlined above. When I began using my Stealth, my expectations were quickly realized and I have not ventured afield since without my Stealth in tow.

As I have already stated, one of the features of the Lowepro line of bags is their amazingly well thought out design. The Stealth comes in the form of a backpack that measures a mere 14 x 4.75 x 21 inches and is made of nearly indestructible ripstop and ballistic nylon. It has two main zippers that open the Stealth into three layers of functional and versatile use. The backpack straps are adjustable and the back of the Stealth is padded with a material called "Dryflo" that wicks moisture away from the carrier's back. There is even a pouch for a cell phone on one of the backpack straps - I use mine for holding a variety of small objects such as a lens cleaning cloth, filters, etc.



So, let's take a journey into the Stealth and you will quickly see why I am in love with it. The front cover has two zippered

compartments. The uppermost external compartment has slots that can hold everything from pens and notebooks to business cards and calculators. I am using this pocket to carry a pen, a sharpie, a pad of paper for note taking and two backup batteries for my Nikon D1 bodies. The lower external compartment is capable of carrying a raincoat, a fleece-lined vest or lunch.

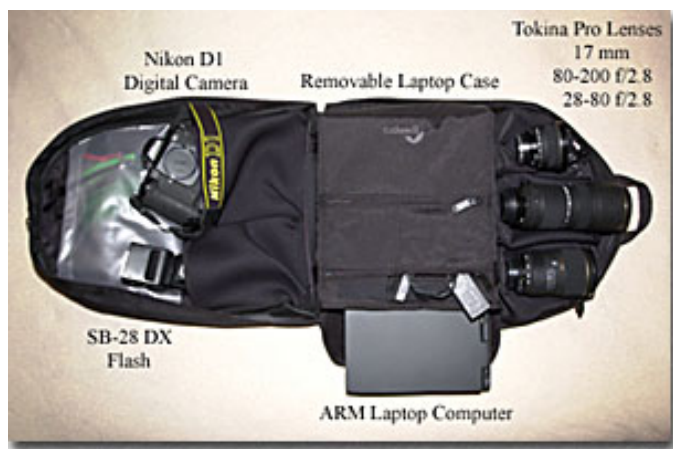


Opening the first of the two "main compartment" zippers reveals a roomy area that has two waterproof compartments, a large mesh pocket for gloves or other accessories and another zippered pocket that is perfect for holding a lens. My Tokina 400 f5.6 ATX fits perfectly in this latter zippered pocket. The waterproof compartments hold my filters and spare compact flashcard (digital film).

When one unzips the bottom most layer, the real heart of the Stealth is exposed. Two open neoprene compartments can be found that easily hold up to two Nikon D1 bodies. Alternatively, these neoprene pockets can hold one D1 and a flash, a laptop or battery charger or a can of air for cleaning equipment. A huge mesh, waterproof pocket can be found above these two open neoprene pockets, into which even more equipment can be placed.

The bottom of the main compartment holds the real secret to the success of the Stealth. A padded and removable laptop case will be found that is large enough to hold virtually any laptop. The laptop case has removable padding so one can customize the size of the case to meet your laptop's dimensions. In addition, three more neoprene pouches with drawstrings will be found sitting next to the removable laptop case. These pouches are custom made to hold three lenses - in my Stealth you will find the Tokina 17mm Pro, the 80-200 f2.8 Pro and the 28-80 f2.8 Pro lenses. This makes a total of four lenses safely carried in my Stealth ranging from 17mm to 400mm in focal length (25.5 to 600mm for the D1). By opening this bottom main compartment, I have immediate access to my D1, lenses and laptop and rapid access to equipment is essential to the wildlife and nature shooter.

Now, back to those three main problems of the Digital Era - power, dust and dirt, and manner in which to carry a laptop. My Stealth has solved each and every one of these problems. I have ample room to carry extra batteries and even a battery charger if needed. (A converter that uses power from the cigarette lighter of my vehicle accompanies me on my longer trips.) Since I have started using my Stealth, the nightly cleaning of my equipment that I religiously perform after each day in the field has yielded less and less dust and dirt on my D1 and lenses. The zippers and ballistic nylon of the Stealth have done a magnificent job of keeping that demon dust from my equipment. A waterproof hood that covers the entire Stealth can be found hidden cleverly on the bottom of the pack in case a sudden rainstorm tries to dampen your day. And lastly, my laptop is safely with me in the field and easily accessible when I need it. Lowepro products "deliver" and the Stealth AW carries on this tradition of excellence in style.



I now have two main systems for my wildlife and nature photography. My F5 and 35mm transparency system is carried safely and conveniently in my beloved Lowepro ProTrekker. And my Nikon D1 digital system comes along in my Stealth. If you are, like so many others, making the plunge into the exciting world of digital photography, whether you are a photojournalist, sports photographer or wildlife and nature shooter, I strongly urge you to take a long hard look at the new Lowepro Stealth AW. Your equipment and your images will thank you.

I rarely make guarantees in this unpredictable world that we live in, but I will make an exception with this statement - you will find the Stealth AW to be one of the most versatile, useful and most creatively designed photography bags that you will have ever seen or used. And a second guarantee - If you shoot serious digital, you will not regret obtaining the Lowepro Stealth to protect your investment in the "Digital Era".

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