

a flash of inspiration

Simon Stafford takes a look at the range of flash modifiers designed by David Honl. All words and pictures by the author.

It is often said that the best ideas in life are the simple ones, which epitomizes the Honl Photo Speed System of lightweight, durable and affordable light modifiers for small, camera-mounted flash units. Devised by professional photographer and photojournalist David Honl, this range of grids, snoots, gobos (short for 'go-betweens'), and lighting filters provide all the essential tools to deliver studio-style lighting control with such flash units, regardless of whether the lighting system is used in a studio, or on location.

Honl's career has spanned more than twenty years and his work has been published in the *Newsweek*, *National Geographic*, *People Magazine*, and many other well-known titles. He conceived of his range of flash accessories as a solution to the typical problems faced by many photojournalists, who often have to shoot against the clock, in less than ideal conditions and with little space.

The evolution of modern flash units, such as the current crop of Nikon Speedlights and the Nikon Creative Lighting System, with its Advanced Wireless Lighting feature, allied to the instant review provided by digital cameras has seen the popularity of such lighting equipment expanded tremendously in recent years. The Honl Photo Speed System extends the versatility and potential of these flash systems to the point where they are limited only by the creativity of the photographer.

■ THE SPEED STRAP

The cornerstone of the system is the Speed Strap, which provides the mounting for all the Honl Photo Speed System accessories. Comprising a broad strap covered in hook and loop material on one side and a rubberized surface on the other, it is simply wrapped tautly around the head of

the Speedlight. Once in place, the rubberized face of the strap grips the surface of the Speedlight firmly, providing a large area to attach any of the Honl accessories quickly and yet allowing them to be removed in seconds.

I do recommend you follow the advice in the instructions about positioning the Speed Strap, so that it protrudes about 1/2-inch (12mm) beyond front of the flash reflector window, as it is important to protect the lighting accessories from the high temperature of the flash tube; bear in mind the internal temperature of the flash tube in an SB-900 can reach 500-degrees Celsius when worked hard!

■ THE SPEED GRID

The Speed Grid comprises a series of honeycomb cells that narrow the beam of light emitted from the flash unit to produce a concentrated circle of light, which can be ideal for lighting either a subject, or a background with a spotlight effect that has a soft edge to it.

The circular shape of the beam is quite different from the rectangular spread of light produced by a typical camera flash unit without any modification of its output, so it does not matter whether the camera is used in a horizontal or vertical format.

The grids have a usable honeycomb area of approximately 89mm x 58mm (3.5" x 2.25") and are constructed from ABS plastic and a polycarbonate material. There are two versions, a 1/4-inch grid pattern and an 1/8-inch pattern, with the beam produced by the 1/8-inch grid being about 30% narrower in diameter to give a more focused light, with less dispersion at the same distance compared with the larger grid.



“Simple, highly effective and well-made, the Honl Speed System is to Nikon Speedlights, as cream is to strawberries – the perfect complement!”



◆ **Previous page:**
The accessories attach to the Speed Strap via hook and loop material

◆ **This page small:**
The colour correction filters attach quickly and securely

◆ **This page large:**
The Speed Strap attached to an SB-900 Speedlight



◆ The straight shot taken using just ambient light



◆ Two SB-900 Speedlights: one with a 1/4-inch Speed Grid and 1/2 CTO filter to the left of the camera (main light) and the second set to -1.0EV output compensation, with a 1/4 CTO filter, positioned behind the subject lighting the background. A Speed Gobo was used to shade the lens. Nikon D3, AF-S VR 105mm f/2.8G

■ THE SPEED GOBO

Made of a tough black ballistic nylon on one side and a highly reflective off-white polymer on the other, the semi-rigid Speed Gobo is approximately 100mm x 190mm (4" x 7.5") in size. The off-white makes an ideal, colour-neutral bounce card for reflecting light from the flash and producing an attractive catch-light in a subject's eyes, while the black side can be used as a gobo, for example, to shade the lens from the flash when it is positioned in front of the camera, or prevent light spill from a flash on to a subject. I have also found the Speed Gobo to be very useful for shading the sensor window of a Nikon Speedlight used as part of an Advanced Wireless Lighting setup when shooting on location in bright sunlight, where the high level of naturally occurring infrared (IR) light can affect reception of the IR control signals from the command flash/SU-800 command unit.

■ SPEED SNOOTS

Offered in two sizes, 5-inch, or 8-inch, and similar in construction to the Speed Gobo, the Speed Snoots are faced with a soft diffusion material that produces a soft diffusion of the light, and backed with a tough ballistic nylon material. However, the snoots are more flexible compared with the gobos and can be rolled to form a tube to concentrate the light to achieve a very narrow spotlight effect with a characteristic hard edge, or shaped to produce a curved bounce surface/reflector (I have found them to be equally useful on their own as small reflectors). Just as with the grids, the circular shape of the beam produced by the snoots when rolled in to a tube means that the camera orientation is irrelevant.

■ COLOUR CORRECTION / COLOUR EFFECTS FILTER SETS

Shaping light is one form of control but there will often be occasions when it is necessary and/or desirable to mix light from a flash unit with ambient light. The light from the flash has a consistent colour temperature, typically 5500K but other light sources, natural or artificial, produce light with a wide variety of colour temperature values. The Colour Correction filter set allows the user to adjust the colour temperature of the light from the flash to match that of the ambient light, producing a more consistent colour balance across the image.

The Colour Temperature Orange (CTO) filters can be used to either match the flash output to incandescent lights, or produce a warmer tone in flash-lit pictures, while the Colour Temperature Blue (CTB) filters are useful when using the flash in conditions where the ambient light has a very high colour temperature, such as in open shade, or under a clear blue sky. The Full Plus Green filter, which is equivalent to CC30 green, can help to match flash output to typical fluorescent type lighting. For the creative photographer there is also the Honl Colour Effects Filter set comprising of red, yellow, blue, and green filters plus a diffusing filter.

The Honl lighting filters are manufactured by Lee Filters, using high quality polyester. Each filter has a usable area of approximately 60mm x 100mm (2.5" x 4") and has hook and loop strips attached





◊ The straight shot taken using just ambient light



◊ Two SB-900 Speedlights; one with a 1/4-inch Speed Grid to the right of the camera (main light) and the second set to -1.7EV output compensation positioned behind the subject lighting the background with a Speed Gobo to shade the lens. Nikon D3, Micro-Nikkor AF-S VR 105mm f/2.8G



◊ **Previous page:** The Speed Gobo can be used for a variety of roles; here it is shown as a bounce card

◊ **This page:** The 5-inch snoot can also be unfurled to produce a large bounce/reflector panel

on each long edge, so it can be attached directly to a Speed Strap, or used in conjunction with any of the light modifiers (if necessary the filters can be trimmed to fit individual flash units). As mentioned above it is important to position the Speed Strap so it extends in front of the front face of the flash reflector, otherwise these gel filters will soon become distorted due to the effects of the high temperature generated inside the flash tube. ■



◊ The Speed Gobo can be very useful for shading the sensor window (see arrow) from direct sunlight when using Speedlights, such as this SB-900, as part of a wirelessly controlled lighting system.

SUMMARY

Having used the Honl accessories for a few months now I can vouch for just how versatile and easy to use they are. Since they take up very little room, they go everywhere I carry my flash – providing a truly portable studio. Simple, highly effective and well-made, the Honl Speed System is to Nikon Speedlights, as cream is to strawberries – the perfect complement! ■

For more information on distributors visit:

www.flaghead.co.uk
www.expoimaging.net

To see David Honl's work visit:
www.davidhonlphoto.com