

Ray of light

£186

Ring flashes are useful, but very expensive. **Barney Britton** takes looks at the RayFlash ring flash adapter. Can it do the same thing?

ORINARY hotshoe-mounted or 'hammerhead' flashguns are extremely versatile, but the light is directional – either originating above or to one side of the lens. This isn't a problem for everyday photography, but for close-up portraiture and macro work, it can introduce unwanted shadows.

Ring flashes, as the name suggests, are designed to deliver flash coverage in a ring, around the front element of the camera lens. 'Proper' ring flashes, where the flash element is actually

circular in shape, are beloved of fashion and macro photographers, but dedicated models tend to be very expensive, and unless you need to use one very frequently they are uneconomical for the average enthusiast.

The RayFlash ring flash adapter is in essence extremely simple. A series of solid transparent plastic rings, sandwiched together inside a ring-shaped casing, transmit the light from a hotshoe-mounted flash and re-direct it. The adapter fits on the end of the flashgun with a friction lock, and the ring's aperture is wide enough to accommodate even the fattest lens.

Our sample of the RayFlash is designed for the Nikon SB-800, but with a little padding it can also be used with the slightly smaller SB-600. Once locked onto the SB-800, the RayFlash feels a little precarious and the weight of the unit does pull down on the flash, but when I shift my left hand from supporting the lens to supporting the bottom of the RayFlash, the whole assembly becomes quite rigid and can be held in the portrait format without feeling like it will pull the flash apart.

Aside from being fairly unwieldy, the RayFlash couldn't be easier to use. As it channels the light from the flash, the pre-flash system for TTL metering still works, meaning that fully automatic flash metering is possible. For studio portraits I got best results by putting the camera and flash into manual mode, with two studio lights set up as slaves to provide backlight, and



Ring flash is great for dynamic portraits. The near-circular reflections in the eyes show that the RayFlash's coverage is impressively even



Full-frontal flash coverage is really useful for macro and still-life images

using the RayFlash to illuminate my subject. For macro shots the RayFlash delivers enough power to act as the main light source. Depending on the subject, and its distance from the camera, a little flash exposure bracketing may be required, but this holds true for close-up work with every flash system I have used. AP

The verdict

The principle is elegant in its simplicity, but the finished article is rather heavy and very unwieldy. However, the RayFlash delivers the goods where it counts – in even, shadow-free portraits and punchy macro shots. Although £186 is a lot to pay for what is essentially several pieces of plastic in a ring, if you don't use a ring flash often it's much more economical than investing in a dedicated system, and the large aperture of the ring makes it more versatile, too.



The RayFlash Ring Flash Adapter costs £186 from Flaghead Photographic Ltd, PO Box 6143, Poole, Dorset BH12 9AS. Tel: 01202 733123. Website: www.flaghead.co.uk