

Review: The EKI Head
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For years I have been wishing for someone to build a quality gimbal head made out of a strong but lightweight material. The original Wimberley Head 1, made out of aluminum, weighed in at 4.2 lb. While this doesn't seem like much, after a full day of working with a sturdy tripod, Wimberley head, pro camera body, flash, external flash battery, and a big 500 or 600mm f/4 lens, every pound adds to the pain. Wimberley followed the original Wimberley Head with the Series II which changed the control layout and shaved weight by one pound down to 3.2 lb. This was welcome news because that one pound reduction was quite noticeable. However, I prefer the control layout of the original Wimberley head where the pan axis was controlled from underneath the head and the tilt axis was controlled from the side. This allows both knobs to be tightened or loosened simultaneously while the new layout forces them to be done independently. I was not willing to go back to the old style though, due the weight savings, and got used to the new Wimberley Head.

Several months ago, a European option appeared on some web sites that looks very similar in shape to the original Wimberley Head and its control layout is the same as the Wimberley Model 1. This new product, called the EKI Head, is made out of carbon fiber shaving the weight down to just 1.6 lb. Its similarity to the original Wimberley design makes it difficult to evaluate the product on its own merits without drawing comparisons to the Wimberley products. On paper this head looked very interesting due to the significantly reduced weight, so NatureScapes began the process of procuring one for testing. Upon return from a recent trip, I found it waiting for me. As I unpacked it, I was stunned by its appearance. It is made of the highest grade automotive finish carbon fiber and is about as beautiful looking and feeling as any photographic accessory I have ever touched. It is perfectly smooth to the touch, has an almost holographic carbon fiber appearance and looks like it was made from the same stock of polished carbon fiber that \$200K plus sports cars use in their interior to save weight while looking very rich. It appears physically slightly larger than the original Wimberley.

I was eager to give it a test but immediately ran into an issue. There was no Arca Swiss style mounting plate. It just comes with a single thumb wheel type screw on the bottom. This is totally inadequate for holding any lens and I believe the intent by the manufacturer is to actually attach a mounting plate to the base. So I went out to my garage and cannibalized an old ground pod that I no longer use which has a long Wimberley clamp – the same one that the original Wimberley Head used. The next problem is that the EKI Head doesn't come with any screws other than the single thumb screw which is essentially useless. So back to the garage I went where I found two Allen head screws that fit and I mounted the Wimberley clamp to the EKI Head. The completed weight is about 2.0 lb – a dramatic savings of more than 37% from even the new lighter weight Wimberley II.

Mounting my 500 f/4 and a 1D Mark II and then lifting reveals a pretty substantial lightening of the load. It's amazing how significant 1.2 lb is, plus I like the control layout better. The feel of the head is very smooth and lens control is light and precise – as good as the Wimberley products. Since the head is made out of carbon fiber, it does not get ice cold to the touch when photographing out in the cold. However, the product did let me down when I went to move the rig. No matter how tight I turn either the pan control or the tilt control, the head will not lock the lens down and I am always able to move the lens in any axis without having to push very hard. This pretty much eliminates the possibility of carrying the assembled rig over one's shoulder which is what most wildlife photographers do. I can certainly tighten it down enough to get a stable shooting platform but it is impossible to fully lock it.



The EKI Head does not provide the capability for raising or lowering the lens on the mount to get the center axis of the lens aligned with the tilt axis of the head. In other words, the base can not be moved up or down like the Wimberley's can. While this is not a problem for me since I prefer to keep the base low and flush with the swing arm to make it easier to rest on the shoulder, many photographers align the lens axis with the tilt axis. This is simply not possible with the EKI Head and adding that capability would add weight and some interesting stress points for the carbon fiber. I believe the designers made the correct choice in making the base fixed due to the material that is used in building this head.

The EKI Head, if further developed to fix the knob tension issue to allow it to fully lock and including the appropriate mount hardware for an Arca Swiss clamp rather than a generic thumbscrew, would be a truly outstanding product. At the price of 1300 Euro (\$1950 US at current exchange rates), this is one expensive tripod head. It is easy to see from the material used and the craftsmanship that this price is not hugely inflated. Car manufacturers charge more than this or the same amount for this quality of carbon fiber. At this price, even if the product shortcomings are fixed, there will not be a large market. But if shaving weight is absolutely paramount, this may just become the solution for you.

For further information, go to https://www.isarfoto.com/cms.php/_pid:27497,l:2761,pp:0,ps:az/en/0/Produkt.htm



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