

Photographers have long pursued the ultimate in hot shoe flash modifier design. ExpoImaging may have it.

BY ALLISON EARNEST

Eureka

ROGUE FLASHBENDERS

I'm a huge fan of small speedlights. Used properly with the right light modifier, speedlights rival most traditional studio lights. I spent almost two years testing virtually every small hot shoe flash modifier on the market for my second book, "Light Modifiers: A Digital Guide to Sculpting with Light" (Amherst Media), so I looked forward to testing the new ExpoImaging Rogue FlashBenders, which promised to be a groundbreaking innovation.

I was pleasantly surprised to find the Rogue kit comes with *three* FlashBender modifiers, small, medium and large. I typically use at

least three Nikon Speedlights for location portraits, so that's a big plus for me. These little gems have several unique features:

- A convenient built-in strap that fits around the hot shoe flash eliminates the need for auxiliary Velcro. That's a benefit: Like many photographers, I've been living with permanently affixed Velcro on my flashes and other modifiers won't fit over it.
- The repositionable internal rods allow you to shape the modifier to create the desired lighting pattern.
- The modifiers are both durable and



flexible, and lie flat for easy storage. The Velcro strap won't stick to the side of your camera case, either.

I put the Rogue FlashBenders to the test in three separate location shoots. You can see the results in the images here, which I captured with a Nikon D300 or D700 with professional Nikkor lenses and Nikon SB800 and SB900 Speedlights. I'm old school, so I use Photoshop only minimally—the light should speak for itself.

Shooting headshots for an aspiring Los Angeles model, Vance Garcia, proved to be an ideal test for the Rogue. The setting was a shaded area next to a graffiti-covered metal wall, with little reflective light or contrast. The main illumination, placed camera right, was an off-camera Nikon Speedlight with the small FlashBender. I shaped the large FlashBender modifier to mimic a snout, and placed it behind the model, creating nice texture on the wall and separating the subject from the background. I used the sparse reflective ambient light as edge light on the model's right cheek, and controlled it with my shutter speed. The FlashBender modifica-



Figure 1: The main light is a Speedlight modified with a small FlashBender. The background light on the wall was created by shaping the FlashBender like a snout and mounting it on a flash behind the model.

All images ©Allison Earnest



their billing. They gave my images brilliant and natural illumination, pleasing contrast and color, and a beautiful light quality. They were versatile, easy to shape for my desired field of light, and easy to attach to my flashes. Most important, they kept their shape in strong wind; just know that in stiff winds, you'll need to secure your light stand with sandbags, as the modifiers can catch air easily. It's a good practice to secure your light stand with sandbags no matter what modifier you're using. My only recommendation for improvements would be to increase the size of the Velcro strips on the large modifier to enable various snoot openings. Try these little gems and see for yourself if the quality of the light is enhanced in your images, too. (expoimaging.com) ■

Figure 2: The main light is one Speedlight with a medium FlashBender. A second Speedlight modified with a blue gel and a Rogue shaped like a snoot creates interesting light on the tires at top.

tion of the speedlights produced a bright light quality with great color rendition (Figure 1).

The next test, a fun fashion image featuring dancer Shelby Knight, proved to be a challenge. The day was extremely windy and cold. I used the shadow side of an old truck in a salvage yard as a background, and Rogue modifiers affixed to two Nikon Speedlights as my lighting. I used the medium FlashBender on my main light, bouncing light onto Shelby's entire body and creating beautiful contrast. I put a blue gel on a second Speedlight and shaped a Rogue to mimic a snoot to get creative lighting on the otherwise dark and shapeless tires behind the model. I'm not one to withstand the cold, so time was of the essence. The ease and versatility of the FlashBenders was a true benefit in these not so pleasant weather conditions. The quality of the light and the contrast created by the modifier were excellent (Figure 2).

I used all three Rogue modifiers in my third shoot, shaping each to produce the field of light I desired. The only available light in the scene illuminated the bus in the background. The main light, placed at camera right and affixed with a small Rogue on an SB900, lit the model, Riley. A second large Rogue, shaped into a snoot and used with a warming gel to match the color of the setting sun served as the background light, illuminating the ground behind Riley. I shaped a medium FlashBender to mimic a strip light that produced a narrow field of light just behind and to the right of Riley, creating a beautiful separation edge light on model's face and shoulder. A warming gel was used to mimic the color of the ambient light. The color, contrast and light the FlashBenders produced were natural and believable (Figure 3).

The Rogue FlashBenders lived up to



Figure 3: In this image, a FlashBender shaped to mimic a strip light creates the beautiful separating edge light on the model's face and shoulder.