

# Soft and easy



**A Speedlite flash unit and a Lastolite Ezybox combine to give a portable lighting system. David Newton explores how it can be used to best effect. Images by Gerard Maas.**

Lastolite is well-known for its range of collapsible reflectors and backgrounds which, with a twist of the wrist and some clever man-handling, fold up into a fraction of their full size. More recently, the company has developed a line of softboxes that fold up in much the same way, producing an easy-to-use, portable, soft-lighting solution.

In a photographic studio you will see a

**Above** The soft, flattering lighting on the model's face suggests that this photograph was taken in a professional studio – but the image top right shows it was shot in a home environment.

variety of light modifiers for the professional lighting system, but the great advantage of the Lastolite Ezybox Hotshoe is that it is as portable as a Speedlite.

The softbox measures 38cm x 38cm and is suitable for all models of Speedlite. It is designed to soften the light from your Speedlite, enabling you to be more creative and give a flattering lighting for your subjects.



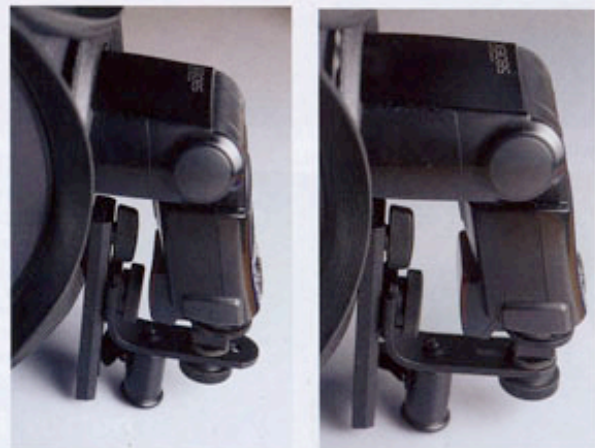
## Off-camera flash

Although it would be possible to use an Off-Camera Shoe Cord with the Ezybox, it is actually not very practical as the length of the Off-Camera Shoe Cord is too short, restricting the manoeuvrability and placement of the light. For that bit of extra freedom, the Canon Speedlite Transmitter ST-E2 infrared flash transmitter is hard to beat, allowing you to place the light wherever you want.

When using the EOS Speedlite wireless flash system, you don't need to make any more adjustments to your flash settings than if you were shooting without the Ezybox. Because the wireless EOS system still retains E-TTL/E-TTL-II flash control, the flashgun will automatically alter its power to suit.

The only time you need to intervene with Flash Exposure Compensation is if your subject is brighter or darker than a mid-tone and therefore requires positive or negative flash exposure compensation respectively.

**Left** Shooting portraits in your subject's home can be problematic if you're using a large studio kit, especially if space is limited. Hand-holding the Ezybox with the Extended handle allows continuous adjustment of the light source for greater lighting control, even in a confined space.



## Flash bracket

When setting up your Ezybox hotshoe with a flashgun, make sure that you mount the flashgun as far back on the bracket as possible. This has two advantages; firstly, by increasing the distance between the infrared receiver on the flash and the back of the bracket you will help ensure that the E-TTL flash controls from the ST-E2 flash transmitter can reach the flashgun without interruption; secondly, the light will be spread over a wider area, softening so the light as much as possible.

## Speedlite transmitter

The Speedlite Transmitter ST-E2 (right) is basically the Speedlite 550EX without the flash head. Instead, it has an infrared transmitter which communicates with Speedlites 420EX, 430EX, 550EX, 580EX and 580EX II.

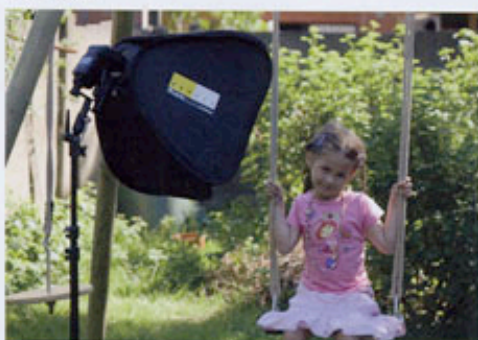
Attach the ST-E2 to the hotshoe of your camera and it will act as a master unit, controlling one or more Speedlites.



## On location

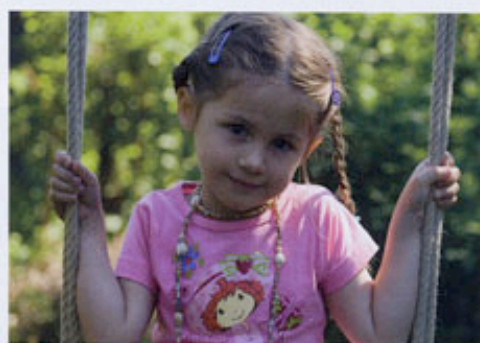


with flash



setup

Taking pictures of family and friends is not always easy; you want to make them look their best, but they are not usually willing to stand around while you set up your equipment. The Ezybox, however, is quick and easy to manoeuvre. Since the flash is battery powered, you can take the set-up anywhere, even into the garden.



without flash



To avoid the harsh light of the midday sun, the wedding couple were positioned in an area of shadow. The ambient light exposure was then underexposed by one

stop, using exposure compensation, and the flash power was reduced by one stop as well, using flash exposure compensation. This

meant the ambient-to-flash light ratio was still equally balanced and avoided blowing out (overexposing) any highlights on the bride's dress.



## Optimal zoom settings

The aim of a softbox is to diffuse the light from a flash unit, softening the shadows falling on the subject.

For the best results, you should adjust the flash zoom setting on your Speedlite to suit. By setting your flash zoom setting to its widest, the light reaching the front diffusion panel of the Ezybox will already be slightly softened, making the job of the Ezybox easier and your lighting even softer.

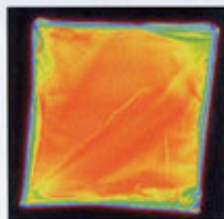
As you can see in the series of false-colour images below, the various flash zoom settings make quite a difference to the diffusion of

### The best flash zoom setting is 24mm - the default

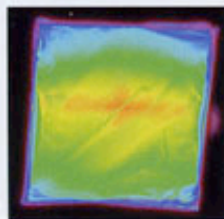
the light from the front of the softbox. The 14mm wide-panel diffuser on the 580EX spreads the light out and provides the maximum internal diffusion

for the softest results without any flash hot-spots. Gradually, as the flash zoom length is increased, you can see a hotspot developing in the centre of the diffusion panel where the light from the flash is hitting it very directly.

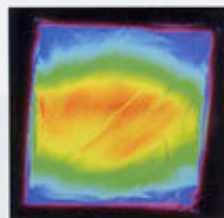
We feel that the best compromise setting is 24mm, as this is the default on the EOS Speedlites when set to slave mode. It's therefore one less thing to think about. Although the lighting is not quite as smooth as the 14mm setting, the differences are not noticeable in the final images.



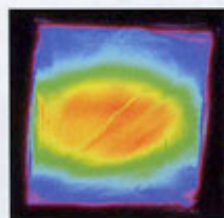
14mm wide diffuser



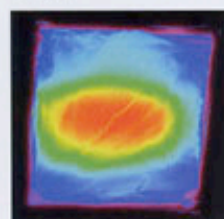
24mm



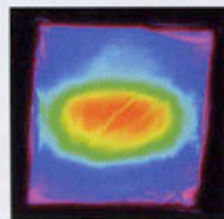
35mm



50mm



80mm



105mm

## Extended handle



Use the Extended handle that fits to the mounting

Having a portable softbox is great, but handling it in the field can be tricky. To make the Ezybox hotshoe easier to handle, Lastolite has produced an Extended handle (above) which fits to the mounting bracket so you can hold the flash and softbox with one hand while shooting with the camera in the other. This makes it easy to manoeuvre

the lighting to quickly adapt to changing situations, although it may require some practice and a strong left arm to hold it all at once. (See EOS Collection catalogue with this issue.)

Alternatively, you can support the softbox with a stand. Any standard lighting stand with a 3/8 inch fitting can be attached to the base of the flashgun mounting bracket.

## E-TTL metering

The Canon flash system uses an evaluative through-the-lens (E-TTL) metering algorithm to calculate the flash power. When you depress the shutter button to take a picture, the flash fires a pre-flash at the subject. The light reflected back through the lens is measured by the flash metering cells located in the viewfinder (on digital EOS cameras) or in the viewfinder and in the base of the camera (on EOS film cameras) and the flash output required is then calculated. All this happens between you pressing the shutter button and the picture being taken.

### The flash output is calculated by the EOS camera

The sensors used for the flash metering are spread over the metering area to read the light from several different sections of the image, which is why it is called evaluative flash metering. On a half press of the shutter button the camera takes an ambient light exposure reading. The second pressure causes the pre-flash which is read in conjunction with the ambient light. The camera subtracts the ambient light reading from the combined flash and ambient light reading and from that calculates the flash exposure required.

Once this has been done, the shutter opens and the flash fires again for the main exposure.