



## THE EXPERT

Name: **Peter Travers**

Camera: **Canon EOS 40D**

Peter is deputy editor of *PhotoPlus* and a Canon D-SLR nut. He's passionate about portrait photography and a big advocate of using reflectors to improve his photos.



## THE READER

Name: **Derryn Vranich**

Camera: **Canon EOS 40D**

Derryn is 33 and from Somerset. He's been a keen amateur photographer for the past five years. His passion lies in travel, street and candid photography, but he wants to learn more about portraiture, and how to use light and reflectors more effectively.



We help you choose new kit

REFLECTORS  
ON TEST

## Help me buy a ... Reflector

They're invaluable bits of kit and every good photographer's got one. But which reflector is right for you? *PhotoPlus* reader Derryn Vranck tries out five options for under £100

One of the key factors in taking successful photographs is understanding light. Whether it's sunny or cloudy, you're shooting indoors or outdoors, or you're using lights or flash, being able to control and direct light onto your subjects can be the difference between a good and bad photo. But even with the most high-tech lighting set-ups or with the best sunlight in the world, sometimes the light just isn't in the right place. This is where a very basic bit of kit comes in handy: the humble reflector.

Good reflectors can direct light onto your subjects to help improve your photos. They can help to fill in shadows by bouncing light up into people's faces, highlighting features and diffusing bright sunlight. Bear in mind reflectors aren't designed to enhance your landscape photos; they're for working close up on subjects such as portraits and still lifes.

So, what should you expect in a reflector? Most modern reflectors are round with sprung frames

so you can collapse them to a fraction of their size to fit in your camera bag and, as they're flexible, they're easy to bend to bounce light back onto your subjects.

### On reflection

Basic budget reflectors come in white only, which will give you a balanced and neutral light. Mid-priced reflectors are reversible with, for example, white on one side and silver on the other, the latter producing a colder light. Top-end reflectors come as 5-in-1 and even 7-in-1, with white, silver, gold and black 'sleeves' that you can take on and off. Gold produces a warmer light, ideal for projecting onto faces indoors or on overcast days to replicate sunlight. Black reflectors can help to block out the sun completely and to improve 'edge definition' – helpful if you're shooting close-ups of brightly-coloured flowers.

Some reflectors have a 'sunfire' surface – fine strips of gold and silver that bounce lots of light and ▶



## Gear Help Me Buy a... Reflector

add warmth to your subjects. Sizes vary from 75cm in diameter to 120cmx180cm monster reflectors, which are large enough to use as backgrounds. If you want one when you're out on the move, go for the smaller option; if you need it for home studio work, you can go large.

Do you need somebody to hold the reflector all the time? That depends on your compositions. If you're cropped in tight for a head and shoulders shot, your subject can hold the reflector once you've positioned it correctly. If you're shooting a full-length shot you may need assistance. Or there are reflectors, such as Lastolite's TriGrip series, that are triangular and have a handle so you can grip and angle them in one hand and still hold and fire your camera with the other.

PhotoPlus reader Derryn Vranck is a keen amateur photographer who wants to progress his portraiture skills. He's in the market for an adaptable reflector for under £100. Derryn's in luck, as the five reflectors we have for him to test this issue are priced from £23 to £90.

For this issue's Help me buy... Derryn – with our help – has tested five reflectors from the major brands. We tested the reflectors while taking portrait photos in a studio and outdoors. Keep reading to see how he got on...

### How to use a reflector

Different coloured reflectors offer different effects. Silver provides a bright, cold light; white provides neutral reflection; sunfire offers a bright and warm reflected light.

The position of your reflector is everything. Too close with a gold reflector and your subject could look fake-tanned; too far away and you won't notice the effects. If you're zoomed on your subject's face for a tight composition, you may need to position your reflector anywhere between 4-12in away. For head and shoulder portraits, 1-2ft may be enough. Move your reflector in and out and watch the light change on your subject until you're happy, then start shooting.

#### NO REFLECTOR



#### SILVER REFLECTOR



#### WHITE REFLECTOR



#### SUNFIRE REFLECTOR



“Sunfire reflectors bounce lots of light and add warmth to your subjects”



## Lee Reflector Pack

Price: £23 Web: [www.leefilters.com](http://www.leefilters.com)



**Peter says** "The cheapest reflector set on test comes from the respected Lee Filters – high-end camera filter experts – in the shape of basic reflective sheets. For under £25 you get eight 61cmx53cm rectangle sheets: two mirrored silver, two mirrored gold, two mottled silver and two mottled gold. The mirror reflector (especially the silver) provided a fairly harsh illumination, while the mottled reflectors produced a softer light on our model's face when angled correctly to bounce light back. It worked best taped to backing boards (£7 each from our local art shop) rather than acting limply without."



**Derryn says** "Before we could begin to use these reflectors effectively, Peter and I had to secure the sheets to a board – we put silver mirror on one side and mottled gold on the other. I found the mirrored silver a little unforgiving when lighting up the shadows on the model's face, and I had to move back so I didn't dazzle her with too much reflected light! The dappled gold produced a softer glow, but it was a little uneven across her whole face."

The sheets start to show up our fingerprints and I don't think I'd use them because they're not very practical or portable."

### PhotoPlus Verdict 45%

- ✓ Cheap, effective  
Fine for indoor use
- ✗ Need backing board, limited colours, rectangular shape, not collapsible



## Portaflash 5-in-1 80cm reflector

Price: £35 Web: [www.jessops.com](http://www.jessops.com)



**Peter says** "This Portaflash is Jessops' own brand and it's very affordable at £35 for a 5-in-1 reflector."

It comes in the customary style of a spring-loaded circular reflector that collapses into about a third of its expanded size: 80cm diameter in this case. The reflective surfaces – gold, silver, white, black – come as reversible fabric shells, which are zipped around the expanded white diffuser. The fabrics weren't a neat fit and sagged a little, but when bent to bounce the light, the white surface worked well to remove unwanted shadows from under our model's chin and the gold warmed up her cheeks."



**Derryn says** "I found the Portaflash easy to use and, with five different surfaces for £35, it's a good price. I thought the zipped outer shells would be a good idea, although I'd worry they might catch and tear the fabrics if I wasn't careful. I also noticed the Portaflash was heavy to handle for long periods and yet didn't feel as robust compared to the lighter

Lastolite. I wasn't sure why I'd want a black surface, but Peter explained that it's good for still life photos and acts as a diffuser to get rid of light and reflections."

### PhotoPlus Verdict 75%

- ✓ Affordable, 5-in-1 colours, available in all Jessops stores
- ✗ Reflective surfaces are a bit saggy, zipped sleeves make it heavy to hold



## Lastolite Bottletop 5-in-1 75cm reflector

Price: £43 Web: [www.lastolite.com](http://www.lastolite.com)



**Peter says** "Lastolite's been going for 20 years and was the first to bring us the collapsible reflector – it's a brand you'll see everywhere. It has endless reflector options, but we picked the 5-in-1 product that expands to 75cm when unleashed. It comes as a white diffuser with two reversible covers (bottletops), which are elasticated to slip over the white diffuser; there's a technique to getting them on, but we mastered it easily. The covers are gold/white and silver/sunfire – the latter was very efficient at brightening up our model's face while warming up her skin tones beautifully, too. All Lastolite reflectors come with a lifetime rim guarantee."



PhotoPlus  
READER'S  
CHOICE  
AWARD



**Derryn says** "I could tell this was a quality product from the moment it sprung into action – the inner white diffuser felt sturdy and the fabric was smooth when fully expanded. It was light to hold and easy to bend to bounce the light back into the model's face. The gold brought a nice glow to her hair, although the sunfire surface was new to me. I didn't know you could get a mixture of both gold and silver – what a

great idea to combine the warmth of gold with the cool light of silver. All this quality and usability for a little over £40, too. I even found the Lastolite the easiest and smallest to collapse!"

**PhotoPlus Verdict 88%**

- ✓ Reputable reflector brand, well made, easy to use, light, adaptable, good price
- ✗ Elasticated covers can be a little fiddly when you're learning how to use them



## Bowens Oval Reflector and Telescopic holder

Price: £38 and £41 Web: [www.bowens.co.uk](http://www.bowens.co.uk)



**Peter says** "This is one of only a few reflectors that the highly regarded lighting company Bowens produce and it's a quality bit of kit. We picked Bowens' largest reflector (£42), which expands from 40cm diameter when folded to a rectangular oval of 122cmx92cm. It comes with a telescopic arm (£38), which holds the reflector in place via two heavy-duty clips – but you'll need a lighting stand for this (an extra £25 approx). Once in place, it's like having an assistant to hold it for you, leaving you to take nicely lit portraits."



**Derryn says** "I've obviously heard of Bowens and was interested to see what its reflectors would be like. When expanded, this was larger than the previous products, but still felt strong and rigid. When hand-held I could bend it easily to bounce light into specific areas on the model, but it was nice to attach it onto the stand, position it then forget about it and concentrate on taking nearly full-length portrait photos. The gold and silver

reflectors worked well, as expected, although with such a large surface it meant the model's head, shoulders and hair would be fully lit – even if I only wanted to light her face."

**PhotoPlus Verdict 78%**

- ✓ Quality brand, big reflective surface, can be attached to stand
- ✗ You need a stand for the holder (which isn't portable on outdoor shoots), only two colours, rectangular oval shape



## Karlu 7-in-1 Collapsible Reflector

Price: £90 Web: [www.karlu.com](http://www.karlu.com)

**Peter says** "We haven't used any Karlu photography kit before, so we were interested to see what their reflectors would be like. We chose the massive 120cmx180cm 7-in-1 number, which has a spring-framed white translucent diffuser as its base. Zipped to this are reversible covers in white, silver, gold and sunfire, as well as 'chromakey' green and blue backgrounds for video work. It's designed for full-length portraits and worked admirably at reflecting light on our model when standing. It's a big reflector that needs to be propped up rather than hold. Karlu's products are fully protected by a two-year warranty and although £90 is a lot, this is a lot of reflector."



## How to collapse a reflector

Ever tried and failed to fold up an expanded reflector? It's harder than it looks, but easier than you think. Grip the rim of the reflector firmly with both hands about a foot apart. Now, bring them together as if you're closing a book, but turn your left hand under the right to form a figure of eight. The bottom half should want to bend upwards to form a circle. Grip it all together to make a circle and pack it into its carry case!



**Derryn says** "This is one huge reflector – it was as tall as me! We all had to stand back for this monster to spring into action when it was unpacked. Once expanded it was the perfect size to highlight the model for some full-length, top-to-toe portraits. I liked the fact that there were four reflective surfaces plus two backgrounds – although the blue and green backgrounds were scrunched up and didn't smooth out when at full stretch."

Peter explained that the backgrounds were more for video recording. He also had to show me how to manhandle it to collapse it back down, but once back in its case it's only 64cm in diameter."

### PhotoPlus Verdict 65

- ✓ Its sheer size, good for full-length portraits, good value considering its size
- ✗ Its size can also be a hindrance, heavy to hold and manhandle

**NEED OUR HELP?**  
Want one-to-one advice on choosing a piece of kit? Email the details of what you're looking for along with your address to [photoplus@futurenet.co.uk](mailto:photoplus@futurenet.co.uk) putting 'Help Me Buy' in the subject line.

## DERRYN'S VERDICT



**Derryn says**  
I had a great day with PhotoPlus using the reflectors to improve my portraits. Each of the reflectors offered something different. The Lee Filters worked surprisingly well, but I don't really want a DIY reflector made from sheets of paper. The Jessops' Portaflash was effective but too cheap and cheerful for me, whereas the Bowens and Karlu options were both a little too cumbersome for my requirements – the former needing a stand and the latter not being very portable.

The reflector I'd go for is the 5-in-1 Lastolite. It's light and easy to use – once I'd got the hang of the elastic bottletop covers – and it reflected light well off all of its surfaces, especially the gold and sunfire. Plus, the Lastolite feels very well made, it's easy to pack away and is well-priced at just over £40. ■



