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Sigma 200-500mm F2.8 APO EX DG review

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The biggest zoom lens in production. The mighty Sigma 200-500mm F2.8 APO EX DG and the only lens 500mm F2.8 lens on the market. – This thing is unquestionably huge in every aspect. Would you be surprised if I said I was honored for being given the opportunity to review this lens let alone using it, for whatever I wanted for a good 3 weeks. – If you're into big glass this is heaven!

Being used to the Sigma 300-800mm F5.6 lens weighing roughly 6 kg's I initially thought this probably wouldn't feel that much heavier. – Boy was I wrong! Let alone the huge Pelican case it came in was probably large enough to contain a grown man and weighing slightly more than the mighty lens itself, this was a hefty kit.

Opening the lid of the Pelican hardcase was a 2 man job. You unhook the 10 heavy duty locks and lift the whole lid. - I felt like I was opening a long forgotten treasure and needed only the golden light on my face and the sounds of a choir hitting the high C. And there it was. Although not covering the whole Pelican case it instantly gave the impression of a massive object. What a beast!

The Sigma 200-500mm F2.8 APO EX DG comes only in a dark green. I'm sure it's close to the same color as your average military equipment. There's shiny heavy duty bolts to keep everything in place and the hefty dark carry handle contributed to the military design. – And believe me if you're not using the included shoulder strap to carry the lens, the handle is pretty much the only other way to lift the lens. The shoulder strap and hinges are huge by any other lens in comparison.

The lens is a true joy to use. You often hear people talking about lenses build like a tank – This is certainly the case here! There's quite a lot of buttons. Probably even more than on your regular telephoto lens.

In fact the lens is even powered by its own battery – That's right you actually load this bazooka with ammunition. Let alone the battery door uses a open / close hinge and knob of a quality you won't find on other lenses. – It's a big knob and the battery is tugged down the barrel like you load a cannon. Put the plate back on and you're ready for anything. Bare in mind if there's no charge on the battery the lens will not function via auto or manual focus nor via zoom.



Center of command. Beginning basic fire procedures. – Probably not the lens you want to bring to a hostile war zone.

At the top display you'll find what mm your currently on. – Oh yes that's 1000mm F5.6. Right next this number is the distance to subject (currently 20 meter). There's an option to select between feet and meters.

Moving left and downward you find the switch for the manual or auto focus. Note the lens has been shaped to the design of the button and vice versa! The lens features constantly manual override so there's always the option to focus afterward you've focused on your subject.

Right below this switch you'll find another one matching in design. Again note the lens shaped to the button. The selector switch allows you to select focus distance. The options are : from infinity to 10 meters, infinity to 5 meters or the whole scale, which is when you're using close to 200mm focal length, infinity to 2 meters. Definitely a selector you want to take fully advantage of since you're moving quite a lot of lens elements.

And finally below this is the battery compartment.

The rubberized ring just next to the knobs and switches controls the zoom. Its smooth and so big you naturally use two hands to zoom. The zoom ring is not psychically linked to the glass inside the lens which is another reason why you'll need the battery to zoom. Needless to say the zoom ring is damped and takes a firm grip, but turn it slightly and you'll appreciate a smoothness not found a other lenses which are mechanically linked.

The focus ring behind the shares the same smoothness as the zoom ring as it isn't mechanically linked either. As with the zoom ring you won't be able to focus if there's no battery installed. The ring is almost as large as the zoom ring and fits the size of the lens.

Between both rings sits the filter holder and as with other telephoto lenses of a higher end, it uses a drop-in filter contra using a filter in the front of the lens. The drop-in filter size is a hefty 72mm!! – The usual size is 46 / 48mm. There's a ring that will allow you to rotate the filter.

Usually if you want to shot vertically you'll rotate the whole lens by loosening a knob at the tripod foot. As the Sigma 200-500mm F2.8 APO EX DG has no dedicated foot you instead loosen a small knob just behind the zoom ring and rotate the whole unit right up to where the focus switches and knobs are.



The lens draw much attention not only from your subject whether it's birds or wildlife but also from spectators, hikers, couples and whom you might meet when you're out in the field. Often people would ask me about this very lens - Understandably.

The average question is how much magnification you can get. - Some are disappointed to hear its not much more than the binoculars hanging around their necks.

The lens is delivered with a matching 2 x teleconverter of the built in the same top notch quality.

Attached to the lens the lens becomes a 400 - 1000mm F5.6 auto focus lens. Needless to say this option is the one I used the most. The display recognizes the teleconverter and writes the appropriate focal length on the display.

Autofocus precision and speed takes a hit and the viewfinder naturally becomes darker but both are nothing major.



The Sigma 200-500mm F2.8 APO EX DG does not feature optical image stabilization nor does it really need it. Although it would be a nice feature to have the weight of the lens itself work in favor of stabilizing the lens. And as gravitation draws severely on this lens a strong tripod and head is a must. I used both a Gitzo videohead and the Jobu Design BWG-Pro together with a Gitzo tripod. – Only the best for the best.

Needless to say you would never ever use this handheld. – Sure you can handheld it and look through the viewfinder for a very brief moment, but whatever you'll be pointing at will become blurred.



Lens sharpness is probably the one line most readers would be looking for.

Without the dedicated 2 x teleconverter it's great wide open from 200mm F2.8 all the way to 500mm F2.8. The contrast is a little lower than expected although easily fixable in editing software. The lens captures very fine detail easily and is overall very impressive. You'll gain a little stopping down but the big F2.8 aperture won't disappoint you here!

With the dedicated 2 x teleconverter it's not as impressive. Wide open at 1000mm F5.6 delivers okay sharpness which improves severely stopping down. In the short end 400mm F5.6 it's a bit better. I didn't expect the lens to break any new ground and defying the law of physics. A 2 x teleconverter is very seldom a usable solution when shot wide open, no matter what lens you use. There's also the fact that this is a zoom lens and therefore it's harder to achieve a sharpness image due to lens construction. I used F7.1 to F10 at 1000mm and was overall pleased. The reach is addicting and the depth of field is quite small wide open even on a 1000 meters.



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[Sample 1](#)

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Conclusion

The major reason to buy this lens would be to capture moments not achievable by using slower lenses. The Sigma 200-500mm F2.8 APO EX DG does just that.

If you planning to lug this lens anywhere remember to bring either a cart or carrier because it is simply not a option to lug it around over your shoulder for a longer period of time. It's way to heavy and cumbersome!

Now if you shooting from a stationary position perhaps from a Pickup on the open savanna on a late evening the Sigma 200-500mm F2.8 APO EX DG will get you results never before reachable.

I lugged it around using the included shoulder strap and with the tripod on the opposite side. – And that it where I came to the conclusion this is not a lens for everyone. I'm sure this will be a collectors item when time comes.

Since there's no other 500mm F2.8 lens on the market it has no competitor. It's unique and it sits alone on the top both in size and pricetag. When other manufacturer are releasing slightly updated telephoto lenses, Sigma pushes the boundaries and challenging everyone for the title as the number one lens maker.

Now I just need someone to sponsor me \$ 38,000.00

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