

Sigma 70-300mm f4-5.6 APO DG Macro

SRP: £155 Low cost needn't mean low quality. Sigma's 70-300mm APO DG Macro zoom is versatile, cheap and surprisingly good

A telephoto zoom is usually the first lens people buy to supplement the kit lens that came with their DSLR, and the Sigma 70-300mm f5-5.6 APO DG Macro could be the ideal choice. On a DSLR with an APS-C sized sensor, this equates to a focal range of around 110-480mm. Lenses like this can be pretty expensive, but the Sigma sells for around £155.

The aperture range is f4-5.6, although there's no image stabiliser, you'd hardly expect one at this price. There is a very good Macro mode, though, which is used with the lens set at 200mm or beyond. At 300mm it gives a reproduction ratio of 1:2, which is very impressive for a general purpose lens.

The low cost isn't reflected in the build quality, either Sigma's familiar matte black finish means that this lens feels as tough and smart as Sigma's



more expensive optics, and while there is a slight roughness in the zoom mechanism, it has just the right amount of stiffness to prevent zoom creep but not enough to make it hard to use (some Sigma lenses can be just a little too stiff). With the lens at

full extension, there's barely any play in the barrel at all, and the whole package is rounded off by a broad focusing ring with a clearly marked distance scale. At the other end is a metal lens mount, which is something you don't necessarily get with camera makers' own lenses in this price bracket.

Picture quality is pleasing. The resolution does drop at the farthest end of the focal range, but that's a common characteristic of zoom lenses in general and particularly telephoto zooms. Detail isn't quite as sharp as at shorter focal lengths, but it's not enough to make images look 'soft'.

Any softness at long focal lengths is more likely to come from camera shake and the difficulties of shooting at focal lengths equivalent to 400mm upwards. As long as the light's reasonable it's usually possible to shoot outdoors at 1/500sec or, ideally, 1/1000sec or faster, and this should limit any camera shake. The real problem is keeping your subject perfectly centred in the frame. This is where the lack of an image stabiliser does make a difference, though a monopod will be just as good. It's not a fault with the Sigma, but an issue with long telephotos in general.

There is some pincushion distortion, but nowhere near as much as you get with Nikon's 55-200mm. The levels of chromatic aberration are very low throughout most of the zoom range, and hardly objectionable even at 300mm - that's very unusual in a lens of this type, where colour fringing is often quite pronounced.

The Sigma's handling, build and performance are higher than would be expected in a lens at this price - it's hard to find anything to say against it.

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Technical data

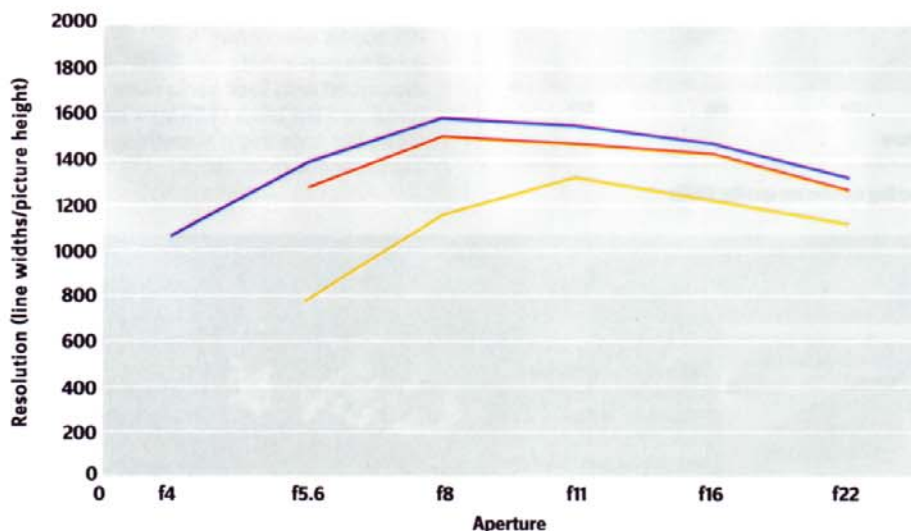
Model	70-300mm f4-5.6 APO DG Macro
Price	£155
Web	www.sigma-imaging-uk.com
Phone	01707 329999
Elements/construction	14 elements in 10 groups
Angle of view	34-8 degrees (on a full-frame camera)
Max aperture	f4
Min aperture	f22
Min focus distance	95cm
Mount	Nikon, Canon, Sigma, Pentax, Sony
Filter size	58mm
Length	122mm
Diameter	76.6mm
Weight	550g

Total

9/10

If you're looking for a low-cost telephoto zoom to supplement your kit lens, you can hardly do better than this. The Sigma delivers handling and image quality beyond what you'd expect at this price, and you'd have to pay a lot more to get significantly better performance.

Sigma 70-300mm f4-5.6 APO DG Macro ■ 70mm ■ 135mm ■ 300mm



Test results Tests carried out using a Nikon D50 body shooting maximum-quality JPEGs