

Bitesized Review

By
John Hallett Photography



Bitesized Review: SRB-Griturn Graduated Neutral Density Filters

For some time I have been thinking of obtaining some graduated neutral density filters to tone down the sky in my landscapes in order to obtain a more balanced exposure in-camera, rather than relying on post-processing to correct it. Because I don't want the horizon in the same place in every shot it discounted circular screw-in filters and so the square, modular type seemed to fit the bill.

Trouble is, there are many different manufacturers across a wide price range and each seems to have their good points and bad points. The expensive ones tend to be made of glass and are therefore heavier and more fragile. Cheaper, resin ones are often reported to create a colour-cast.

Eventually I came across a company called SRB-Griturn (www.srb-griturn.com) whose filters seemed to get positive reviews. In fact, they were listed in the top-10 landscape accessories in Amateur Photographer magazine and a maximum 5 stars in a Digital Camera Magazine's ND group test in September 2011.

Initially I was just going to buy one 2-stop 'soft' and one 2-stop 'hard' graduated ND filter together with the filter holder and the 3 adapter rings required to fit my various lenses. Bizarrely though, when I totted up the prices it was more cost-effective to buy a set of three 'soft' filters than just buy an individual one.

Note: I plumbed for the wide-angle filter holder and the 'P' sized filters because of my 10-20mm wide-angle zoom lens. The wide-angle filter holder can only hold one filter at a time (so no filter stacking) but creates less vignetting at wider focal lengths. The 'P' size filters can be used on lenses up to 82mm filter thread size and are comparable with the Cokin 'P' size filters.

The goods arrived promptly in a Jiffy bag. Each filter was separately packaged, as were the adapter rings. The filter wallet and adapter ring bag seem good quality.

I unpacked the filters and put them in the wallet. The adapter rings and the filter holder fitted into the little blue bag - which seals with Velcro as well as the draw-strings.



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Each filter is marked at one corner to identify it.

Note: A 1-stop filter is also known as a 0.3. Why, because historically a logarithmic scale to the base of 10 has been used to calculate exposure.

Each adapter ring is similarly marked.



How to use a graduated neutral density filter:

First we can look at the 'proper' way to evaluate the correct ND filter to use. Then we can look at the easy way. *I am assuming here that we are taking a landscape shot and want to balance a bright sky with a darker foreground.*

The proper way:

Put your camera into 'spot' metering or 'centre-weighted' metering mode and then meter off the sky. Remember the result. Now meter off the foreground. Work out the difference. i.e. if the shutter speed for the sky is 1/60s and for the foreground is 1/15s then this indicates a two-stop difference. To tone down the brightness of the sky and balance it exactly with the foreground therefore needs a two-stop (or 0.6) graduated neutral density filter. Remember to change your metering mode back afterwards.

The easy way:

Take a filter, any filter, and place it on your lens. Take the shot. Look at the image on your LCD screen and the histogram and decide if the image is balanced. Change filter as appropriate to a darker or lighter one. *(After a while you will instinctively know which strength filter is likely to work best. I suggest that a 2-stop or 0.6 will work 80% of the time).*

Soft or hard?

Hard-edged graduated neutral density filters are mainly used when there is a very flat horizon (such as a seascape, for example). However, if you are taking a shot where the horizon undulates (mountains, for example) then a soft-edge filter would be preferable since it will more easily hide the transition from light to dark.



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To see where the transition falls first stop down your lens to a small aperture, f/16 or f/22 for example. Then activate your depth-of-field preview and, whilst activated, move the filter up-and-down monitoring where the transition line falls through the viewfinder or with live-view. Don't forget to reset your aperture when you have finalised the filter position.

Top Tip!

If a soft filter still leaves an unacceptable transition line hold the filter in front of the lens with your fingers rather than a filter holder and gently move it up-and-down during the exposure to 'feather' the edge.

The entire set worked extremely well in the field. I previously used to have a Cokin filter kit and so I am used to the modular-type sets and how it works:- first screw in the appropriate adapter onto the front of your lens, then add the filter holder - and finally slide in the filter of your choice.

Pro's

- Cheaper than some manufacturers of glass filters.
- Compatible with the Cokin filter system.
- Light and easy to carry - especially with the wallet and bag.
- No noticeable colour-cast.

Con's

- Not as tall as some filter systems.
- Strange pricing structure - check the options before you buy.

Similar products from other manufacturers are also available.

If you found this review useful please let me know by leaving a comment on my Facebook page (or just 'Like' it) at <https://www.facebook.com/johnhallettphotographs/> . Thanks