

Canon RF 70-200 F2.8 L IS USM

User impressions

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(web: www.actionimage.co.za email: simondp@actionimage.co.za)



Introduction

The 70-200mm f2.8 series of lenses are arguably one of the most popular medium telephoto zooms and used by many photographers; from amateur through enthusiast up to serious professional. That Canon would introduce one in their RF mount was just a matter of time, and when it arrived in the early part of 2019 it was a really good offering, as we've come to expect from their L series of lenses.

A quick look at the basic specifications of the lens:

Specifications

Zoom range: 70mm to 200mm

F-stop range: f2.8 to f32

Angle of view: 29° - 10°, 19.5° - 7° (horizontal, vertical)

Filter thread: 77mm

Lens construction: 17 elements in 13 groups including two glass-moulded aspherical elements, one super UD, four UD of which one is UD Aspherical

Aperture Blades: 9

Minimum focussing distance: 0.7m (0.23x magnification)

IS: 5 stops (CIPA rating)

Focus motor: USM with full manual override

Focus method: Internal, Two x Nano USM with two internal focus groups

Zoom method: Rotary type with extending lens barrel

Weight: 1070g

Accessories: front and rear lens caps, scalloped lens hood, rotating tripod collar

In the hand

This is the most compact and lightest full frame 70-200 f2.8 lens I have handled, from any manufacturer. Weighing in at just over a kilogram, it is easy to handhold this lens fitted to an EOS R5 (or any other current EOS R-type body).

As is found on all RF lenses, there are the usual zoom ring, MF ring, and Control ring. This ring can be set in the camera menu system to control a parameter of your choice; on the EOS R5 I was reviewing at the same time I selected the AF method, which meant I could quickly change the AF from centre point with surrounding AF to tracking AF or whatever I required. Very handy indeed.

The lens hood is of the bayonet fit design with a lock latch which prevents accidental removal of the hood. It locks securely into place. There is also a sliding window in the top of the lens hood which makes manipulating a polarising filter very easy. (Refer to the first photo)



Switch gear cluster - Left hand side of lens (top to bottom): Focus range limiter switch, AF / MF switch, IS On/Off switch, IS Mode switch. Also showing lens hood lock button on the left

Zoom ring left, MF ring middle, Control ring right nearest to lens mount



Right hand side of lens: Zoom lock switch

In the field performance

Auto focus is quick, quiet, and accurate. The zoom function is secure, easily controllable, and not too stiff. All the switches operate easily and clicks positively into a setting.

I had the opportunity to test this lens whilst doing my field review on the Canon EOS R5, thanks to Canon SA and Roger Machin who made the camera and lenses available to me. Unfortunately, this happened during the Covid-19 lockdown period, and therefore nothing in the way of sporting events could be used to evaluate the lens. Fortunately, the SAAF provided some action type photography when practising for a general's retirement parade, and I managed to capture some frames of the helicopters in formation coming past me. The Rooivalk CSH showed the focussing and the stabilization capabilities of the lens on the EOS R5, consistently capturing the formation of helicopters or single subjects very accurately.

I believe this lens will be ideal for fast-paced action sports such as motorsport, rugby, soccer etc. More so for those accredited photographers who can get really close to the action and who will cover a rugby match with a 400 or 500 prime for the more distant action, and then reaching for a second body with a 70-200 f2.8 mounted on it when the play moves closer to the camera.

For the outdoor photographer it can be used as a handy close-up lens, delivering a nice soft background with crisp and sharp subjects. Colours straight from the camera are good, natural looking and not over-saturated or bland. Nothing was done to the flower image in post-processing during the raw conversion in DPP, except for sharpening. I took that flower image on the next page at the closest focus distance, and I was really impressed by the results.



Sharp and accurate AF. Rooivalk CSH captured with the Canon EOS R5 and RF 70-200 f2.8 L IS USM. 200mm 1/80, f14, ISO 200



Flower close-up. Canon EOS R5 and RF 70-200 f2.8 L IS USM. 200mm, 1/2500, f2.8, ISO 160

One of the reasons these 70-200 f2.8 type lenses are so popular is the handy zoom range and fast maximum aperture, in a rather compact size, now even more so with this RF version. The zoom range makes those everyday type photos a real breeze. My neighbour's cat has taken a liking to me, regularly visiting and making herself comfortable on my balcony. Ricky remained stationary and relaxed long enough for me show the zoom range capability of the lens. Definitely a good pet-photography lens too.



Ricky the cat. Top at 70mm, bottom at 200mm, no change in position. Canon EOS R5 and RF 70-200 f2.8 L IS USM. 1/1600, f2.8, ISO 100

The fast f2.8 aperture makes this lens ideal for the portrait / wedding photographer working in lower light conditions, more so when linked to an EOS R5 (or R6) with its very good high ISO and effective IS performance. The image on the left below was taken indoors. My niece / goddaughter / live-in cook and bottle washer played model for this test, as she has done so many times before when I have to do equipment reviews. In this case I relied on the very good IS to allow for f8 and slower shutter speed with a sharp portrait and sufficient overall depth of field. On outdoor portraits (below right) that pleasing soft background is achieved by the f2.8 aperture, making your model stand out quite nicely.

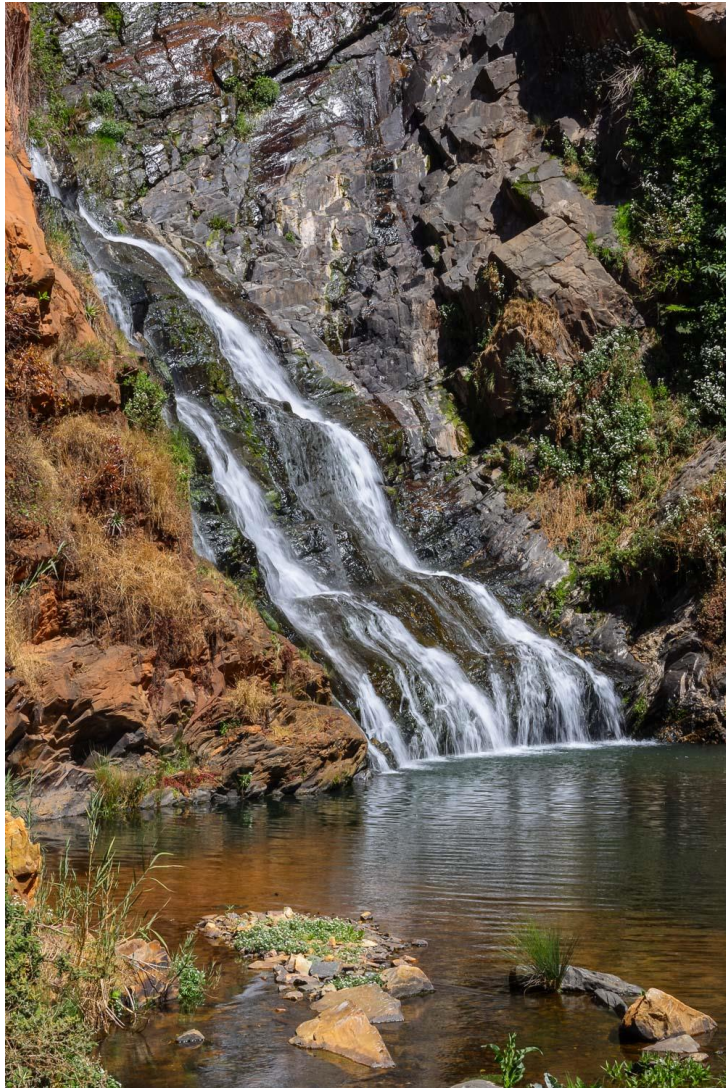


Canon EOS R5 with RF 70-200 f2.8 L IS USM

Left: 108mm, 1/60, f8, ISO 6400.

Right: 200mm, 1/1000, f2.8, ISO 200

The versatility of the lens was demonstrated even more when doing some impromptu landscaping whilst working on the filed review for the EOS R5. The very well-known Witpoortjie falls in the Walter Sisulu Botanical Garden provided an opportunity to use the RF 70-200 in a mid-tele role, isolating the lower section of the waterfall in the frame. A slower shutter speed was chosen and again the very good IS capabilities when fitted to the EOS R5 helped in keeping the scene sharp with a pleasing flow in the waterfall. Sometimes the scene does not allow for wide-angle lenses, a high quality medium-tele zoom will get the job done.



Conclusion

The Canon RF 70-200mm f2.8 L IS USM is a real top performer, and definitely one of the best in this zoom range. It's a very versatile lens capable of performing in a wide range of applications – it will get the job done. Yes, it is an expensive lens, as are most of the fast RF mount lenses. But if your budget stretches that far, you will not be disappointed.

Many thanks to Canon SA for arranging and making available the test lens.