

# KIT REVIEW: **The Red Eye** **wide-angle adaptor**

Tested by Zerb Editor Karl Lear, Johnny Saunderson and David Hands



## **Karl Lear**

Canada-based Rene Collins is one of the GTC's most respected and well-known members. His work as a cameraman takes him far afield, recently to Brazil shooting HD, and to Gambia training local TV staff. His contribution to television is not limited just to filming though. Rene has designed his own wide-angle lens, the Red Eye, a non-zoom through lens adaptor, designed to meet the demands of the modern cameraman. For proof of how popular the Red Eye is, one only needs to visit Rene's website [www.collinscraft.com](http://www.collinscraft.com) and read the many postings from users.

At Pangaea we have used the Red

Eye on three shoots so far: Michael Jackson's visit to Exeter for real close to subject shots following the celebrity on walkabouts; on a recent shoot for National Geographic; and during the filming of a rock video for MTV. The Red Eye is the perfect tool for small confined spaces - situations with little space between lens and subject, and also when you want that ultra-wide feel. I've even used it where it was not strictly necessary, to create that slightly odd distorted-around-the-edges shot that fits well into music promos and the like.

Fitting the Red Eye to your lens takes less than 20 seconds, and where that sort of time scale is

impractical, you'll be unlikely to be worrying about a wide angle anyway. Basically, if a cameraman doesn't use the Red Eye it will be because it's not appropriate for the shot - not because there isn't time. On the downside, the Red Eye cannot allow 'zoom-through' operation as zooming alters the focal length and hence the focus. However, wide is wide - I can do my zooming when the filter is off!

At around \$490 Canadian dollars (£204) for a 82mm, and \$360 (£150) for a 77mm Red Eye, if it gets you out of a jam once, it has earned its worth. I have been delighted with the results so far and I've already had several 'How did you get that

shot?' and 'I didn't realise our lens could shoot that wide' comments from colleagues. I have shown them the Red Eye and I am sure that one, if not all, of them will be purchasing their own soon.

Johnny Saunderson in Ireland and David Hands in Lebanon have also been trying out the Red Eye. Visit David's [tvcameramen.com](http://tvcameramen.com) website for their full unabridged stories.

## **Johnny Saunderson**

I was immediately attracted to the Red Eye by the packaging: a gorgeous soft leather pouch, designed to sit on the belt, containing a filter made to fit directly onto my camera lens. It

doesn't clamp or slide on, it screws on - and that's how I like my filters. Screwing it on means it stays on.

I shoot news 95% of the time and in practice I tend to use the wider end of my lens. I have dabbled with the idea of forking out for a wide-angle lens, but I'd still want to carry around a longer lens. Even wide-angle adaptors are pretty pricey and what a crazy amount of money to pay for that occasional wide shot. On the other hand 'that occasional wide shot', used sparingly and in the right place, really does add a lot to a news package.

My first chance to try the Red Eye came the day after it arrived. I didn't want to go out of my way to use it, I would only use it if it was justified. However, I soon had the choice of how to set up visually a story which was to be seen through the eyes of a political candidate. I found myself inside a battered old Ford Escort, squeezing into the back seat to position myself behind the subject. I would not even have attempted the shot without the Red Eye: the maximum reach between the front element on the lens and the main subject was approximately three inches (7.5 cm). As it turned out, I got a fabulous opening sequence with his right ear and side of face filling the left of frame and the

scene through the windscreen of the moving vehicle forming the remainder.

Later, I used the Red Eye to wonderful effect in a low light environment. Wide angle means massive depth of field and there's a distinct lack of noticeable shake when hand-held. Everything in the shot, from centre to edge, was crisp and I could even argue that the contrast was enhanced, but not at the expense of shadow or highlight detail. I was also surprised by the relative lack of distortion with the Red Eye. Depending on the perspective when shooting a scene, you can lessen or increase the perceived distortion to your preference. I found I could shoot consistently with the Red Eye in such a way that it was difficult to detect any distortion.

I rarely produce a news piece now without a Red Eye shot or two, and it always raises favourable comments from the news desk.

### David Hands

I decided to test the Red Eye while on assignment at the El Khiam prison in Lebanon. It's important to choose the right situation for using the Red Eye as it does have its restrictions. Once it is fitted, focus can only be achieved by using the

macro or by changing the back focus. Messing around with the back focus is not a great idea on location but changing the macro is fine as there is a preset you can go back to. I decided not to use the Red Eye for the main body of the shoot which was in a confined space and I didn't want to be limited in focal range.

However, after we had finished, I went back through the prison for additional shots. This is where the Red Eye came in very handy indeed. The whole perspective of the image changed. The tiny prison cells could now fit into my viewfinder and the Red Eye's curved image managed to show the whole cell, the curved distortion emphasising how tiny they were. With the macro I was able to focus either on foreground or background. Removing the Red Eye to get tighter shots is easy and the only adjustment to be made is setting the macro back to normal.

Indoors the adapter worked well without any additional considerations. The low light levels assured a large aperture and the short depth of field meant no visible spots on the lens and no lens shade visible at the edges. Outside though, at the mercy of the strong Middle East sun and with much smaller apertures, every little spot of dirt became visible. If

I was not careful, the lens shade would intrude in the corners of the frame and so I found I had to cut down the light with ND filters ensuring the minimum depth of field. Focus of the lens had to be set on maximum.

However, using a short depth of field is not a problem with any wide-angle as it provides a good range of focus. All the shots were sharp. Tall buildings looked taller, streets looked longer. This is not a lens that you have on your camera all the time - but it is a lens you carry with you to get you out of that tight situation and as an added tool in your creative arsenal.

For more on the Red Eye see [www.collinscraft.com](http://www.collinscraft.com). Rene offers an enormously generous 40% discount on his products to GTC members. For full reviews by David Hands and Johnny Saunderson and many other interesting items see [tvcameramen.com](http://tvcameramen.com)

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