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[AF DC Nikkor 135mm f/2D – Lens Review](#)

Posted on 19 June 2009 by Irwin_Wong

Should you get this lens? Definitely, if you are me. But you're not. Read on for more ambiguities...



The Skinny:

Name:	AF DC Nikkor 135mm f/2D
Construction:	7 elements in 6 groups
Field of View:	18 degrees on FX, 12 degrees on DX
Number of Blades:	9 (rounded)
Closest Focusing Distance:	1.1 metres
Weight	815 grams
Other Stuff:	Comes with built-in lens hood. Takes 72mm filters. Made in Japan.

BEST. PORTRAIT. LENS. EVER???

There's a lot of scuttlebutt about this 135mm f2 being the **BEST PORTRAIT LENS EVER**. So before I start, let me just say that there are no official guidelines that separate a lens from a 'portrait' lens. No one came out of the Vatican one day with a stone tablet that decreed that a lens had to have certain characteristics to be a 'portrait' lens. In fact, **you can take a portrait with any lens, even a fisheye. It all depends on what effect you want.**

And while I'm on the subject, there isn't a set canon (excuse the wordplay) on what constitutes a portrait either. A head shot can be a portrait. So can a full-body shot. So can a wide angle shot of someone running at full speed taking a shit into a sackful of anchovies. It doesn't matter. **What matters is being able to convey something about your subject to your audience.** That's what a portrait means to me. That's why I believe that any lens can be a portrait lens.

Having said that however, I admit that this lens does it better than most others.

So is this lens good or not?

The short answer: f**k yes.

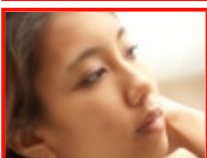
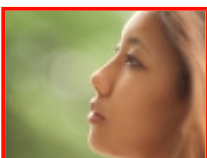
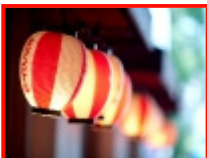
Let's start with the focal length. 135mm on FX is slightly on the long end which makes it a versatile telephoto suitable for weddings, ceremonies, street photography, and yes – portraits. **This thing excels at isolating your target with crystal-clear clarity and surrounding it with the most dreamy bokeh you will ever see**, even in an acid-induced haze. Also, the best part is that you can control the quality of the bokeh using the Defocus Control ring on the lens – more on this in a moment.

At f2 this lens is bloody fast without sacrificing size or weight. It also makes for a very shallow depth of field at close to medium ranges, which for you bokeh junkies is pretty appealing. Even stopped down to the slowest aperture at f16, you only get about a 2 metre field of sharpness.

As for sharpness – well, I haven't done any optical testing or anything fancy, I just went out and shot it like I would in real situations: one wedding, a portrait shoot and on the street. **It's super sharp.** Check out the results for yourself – you'll see it's plenty sharp enough for doing what you need.

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On FX bodies, there's only slight **vignetting** in the corners at f2 (probably less than 1 stop but I'm just guessing here), which doesn't bother me too much. There's a large central area that isn't affected and since I'm likely to use this lens to isolate my subjects from the background, I think it adds rather than detracts to the image.

On another note, at f2 there seems to be some chromatic fringing on the edges of blown-out highlights or high contrast areas. It's nothing to get your knickers in a twist over however, just make sure your subject isn't a checkerboard and more importantly, watch your highlights.



Handling-wise, there isn't much to say due to the inherent simplicity of prime lenses. It has a great big focus ring that slides around nice and smooth, and the switch for manual/auto focus is one of those stiff click-and-twist type rings. You can switch easily to manual focus by using the switch on the lens – you don't have to turn off the autofocus on the camera as well, which is handy. The aperture ring is the

standard Nikon one: it can only be set at 1-stop intervals, which is only really unfortunate if you're using a really old camera. Otherwise you'll be using the command dials on the camera body. There are half-hearted depth of field markings for f16 only.

Autofocus is fast, relatively hunt-free, but pretty damn noisy. **This lens uses the old screw-drive autofocus**, which makes it obsolete on the D40, 40X, 60 and 5000. Otherwise, no complaints. Owners of these cameras may not be happy though.

The only other handling/performance topic that I have left to talk about is the Defocus Control ring. Strap yourselves in boys and girls, because this is the reason why this lens is more alluring than Scarlett Johanssen's thighs...

What's this new-fangled DC thingamabob...jig?

Every Nikkor is followed by its own menagerie of letters indicating the features that it possesses. The name of this particular lens is the AF DC Nikkor 135mm f/2D. **The DC part stands for Defocus Control**, and as far as I'm aware, no other company makes a lens with this sort of capability.

What does it do? In technical terms it allows you to control the degree of spherical aberration in the background or foreground with a twist of the wrist. **In other words, this lens allows you to finetune the quality of the Bokeh until you are happy with it.**

Sounds too good to be true? It *almost* is. **At its extreme settings, the Defocus Control also acts like a soft-focus lens.** This can be cool – if that's the effect you are after. But it also means that the feature isn't perfect. If you're like me though, you'll appreciate the fact that you have two potential features on your lens; soft-focus and bokeh-control. Neither of them are perfect though, but on neutral settings the lens performs absolutely great, so I'm not overly concerned.

All images shot at f2.



This lens is mine. There are many like it, but this one is mine.

The question is, Nikon-users: should you get it? The answer is a bit more complicated than you might think.

Viable AF lenses in the same focal-length neighbourhood are the 85mm f1.4 and 1.8, the 105mm f2 DC. **Of these lenses the 135mm is the most expensive**, and none of the other lenses are losing out in the price/performance stakes. Whether you decide to buy this lens depends on whether this particular focal length is the best for you.

Personally I find it ideal for events where I'm in with the mix but don't want to get too close for comfort – weddings being the prime example. It's also great in intimate portrait sessions because of its versatility and gorgeous bokeh. **It all depends on how you shoot.** I carry this and the 24-70mm in my bag all the time now because I know that I can get almost everything I need with those focal lengths on my FX body.

The bottom line is that this is an excellent lens that produces excellent results - if you need a telephoto prime this is certainly one of the ones to consider. Don't let the added bells and whistles of Defocus Control distract you though -if you're more comfortable with a shorter lens for everyday use, get an 85mm. It's a fun feature, but like everything else, if used badly, it can harm your images more than add to them.

Wanna get one? As far as I know you can pick one up 2nd hand at the used-Nikon store in Ginza for around 70,000yen. They had about 3 at last check. New, these things are pretty cheap on Amazon.jp. If you find a store with a cheaper price, let us know and we'll put it up!