

DC-Nikkor 135mm f/2.0 AF

810g, 79mm x 120/128mm, 7 lenses/6 groups, 72mm filter

Defocus Control is one of Nikon's most unique innovations. Nikon manufactures only two lenses with this feature, a 105mm lens and a 135mm lens, both with f/2.0 apertures. DC lenses utilize a special floating element that allows you to selectively blur the front or rear out-of-focus highlights by means of spherical aberration for special depth-of-field effects. The effect is otherwise only seen with very long telephoto lenses (>300mm) with large apertures. The DC lenses feature a defocus ring, 9-bladed diaphragm (for round, pleasant highlights), a manual/auto switch, built-in hood, and the snazzy silver highlight found only on older manual lenses. The front element does not rotate because the lens sports a rear focusing element. Thus, the lens doesn't extend when focusing and focal length stays constant like in IF lenses.

Blur is controlled by a special defocus ring with specific marks for each aperture, one for foreground defocus, and an opposite one for rear defocus. At the F setting, ring-shaped highlights will appear behind the plane of best focus and the foreground will blur more. At the R setting, the background will blur very nicely instead. The effect is very, very slight, and is almost entirely undetectable in the viewfinder since focusing screens correct for spherical aberration somewhat. By cranking the defocus ring far past the aperture, one can achieve a soft-focus effect. The pictures below demonstrate what can be done with the DC feature. (These pictures appear in the manual and are available on the Nikon Japan website.)



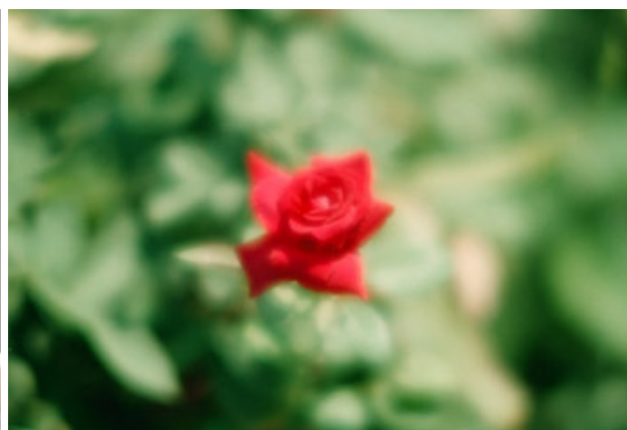
Defocus ring set to F



Neutral defocus



Defocus ring set to R



Soft focus (DC ring past R/5.6 at f/2)

This lens is most useful in portrait photography but also serves as a super-fast medium telephoto. I have heard that the defocus effect is not quite as pronounced in the 105mm model, so that's why I opted for 135mm. The ability to soft focus is nice since you don't need a filter, but I'm not a big fan of soft focus so it's not particularly valuable to me. It is inherently a soft-focus lens, so images are not quite as sharp as primes of comparable focal length, but it's plenty sharp compared to other third party lenses. The most impressive thing is the contrast, which is striking, providing vivid portraits. The lens feels substantial and is well-built like other pro Nikkor lenses. If you can shell out the 1100USD for this lens or find it at a very cheap price on the used market, go for it. Otherwise, try the Micro-Nikkor 105.