

<p>AFS 70- 200 mm f/2.8 G ED- IF VR</p>	<p>5 (DX:D1X, D2H, D2X)</p> <p>4 (FX: D3, see text)</p>	<p>A huge improvement over the AFS 80-200/2.8 and the AF 80-400/4.5-5.6 VR lens, this newcomer is a landmark achievement, and is clearly slated to be a legendary Nikkor (despite its "G" design, which I don't adore).</p> <p>Compared to the others, it is surprisingly small and neat in its outward appearance. It shows excellent workmanship and handles impeccably, thanks to a nice balance with a D1-series camera, and controls which are well laid-out. The VR function works splendidly, and AF speed is up among the very best. Even the tripod collar is sufficient, and the scalloped, flower-shaped lens hood has a nice locking button. These are small but significant details, which indicate Nikon has listened to user feed-back re the earlier medium-range zoom lenses.</p> <p>Images are rendered with the enhanced colour saturation and high contrast typical for ED optics. On a D1-series camera there is virtually no light fall-off across the frame even at f/2.8 (probably would show up on a F5), and sharpness wide-open is very good, improving further at f/4-f/11. Bokeh is superb, the out-of-focus areas being rendered with that exquisite creaminess so often missing from lesser lenses.</p> <p>Chromatic aberrations (CA) were scarcely detectable at any aperture setting; a remarkable achievement for this complex optical design. At the short end there is some barrel geometric distortion, which predictably changes to pincushion when the lens is zoomed towards 200 mm. At around 105 mm distortion is virtually absent. Flare is a potential problem with all those elements inside the lens barrel and ghosting can be quite nasty as well.</p> <p>Vibration Reduction (VR) functions very well, being highly responsive, and allows me to take adequately sharp images (at 200 mm) at speeds as low as 1/10 sec hand-held (I'm notorious for my shaking hands). When switched to "Active" mode, VR constantly tracks lens movements, and the viewfinder image may jitter quite visibly, thus easily causing some nausea if you are susceptible to sea-sickness (like me). The lens handles panning with ease and there is no setting to this end. (VR feasibility on a tripod is covered in the pending full review).</p> <p>The 70-200 VR excels in producing some of the most pleasing and beautiful bokeh I've ever seen with a Nikkor lens. Thus, the out-of-focus areas are depicted as 'silky smooth', and without any trace of harshness. Test shooting indicates that the VR setting may influence bokeh so to achieve the very best results, be sure to turn VR off.</p> <p>A full review is found here. Note this applies to DX cameras only.</p> <p>On the D3, however, issues occur with this lens. A certain amount of vignetting when the lens is set wide open is both to be expected and indeed readily visible. But stopping down one or two clicks resolves that issue nicely. The centre sharpness is excellent even on the D3, but the tendency for the corners lacking critical sharpness when the lens is focused towards infinity at its longer end is unexpected and troublesome. For landscapes at 200 mm, you need to stop down way too far to get the corners just barely acceptable, even to f/22 in some cases. I think the covering power of this slim design simply is not adequate for a good performance across the entire FX frame, at least towards the 200 mm setting. For PJ-style work or for studio and portraiture, this flaw is tolerable, but not for landscapes. Nikon really needs to come up with a Mk.II model of this general-purpose zoom lens.</p>
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