

The Long March Towards Revolution: AFS 70-200 mm f/2.8 G ED IF VR Nikkor Reviewed

4. Vibration Reduction

by Bjørn Rørslett

4. Vibration Reduction (VR)

A sound scientific approach is saying something doesn't work, and then go on to try to get evidence of the opposite. So, my basic attitude was to pretend VR had no influence at all. It took me less than one minute to shatter that hypothesis so I now accept VR really works. See the test images on display below. Isn't science a great thing. The lower the speed the greater the risk of getting unsharp images, but I consistently got acceptably sharp pictures at 1/20 sec (200 mm), even down to 1/5 sec in some cases.

I have no urgent need to understand the principles behind vibration reduction technology provided VR does its job reliably and unnoticed. Nikon literature gives a lot of details for those feeling compelled to be updated on its technological achievement. For me, VR is just another technological 'black-box'. And it surely works.

Vibration Reduction (VR) indeed works its magic



Hand-held



VR mode Normal

Normally, I wouldn't dream of shooting hand-held at shutter speeds as low as 1/5 sec with a 200 mm lens. However, with VR working its magic even such unprecedented actions can be contemplated.

The tiny crop above (no sharpening applied in or out of camera) represents just 1.5% of the D1X image area and clearly shows that even at 1/5 sec, adequate image sharpness may be present in hand-held shots. I like to stress 'may' because not every shot will turn out to satisfaction, but you are ensured of a quite healthy ratio of keepers.

VR mode Normal is recommended for the normal shooting situation, and in this mode the VR circuits will detect that the lens is being panned and not attempt to reduce or correct for that movement. Thus, there is no switch to set for this operation. Panning isn't my favourite way of shooting, but I tried it out and the systems works exactly as described by Nikon.

The more aggressive Active mode will detect and correct motion in any direction so cannot be employed in conjunction with panning shots. This mode is targeted towards unpredictable and unstable shooting conditions, for instance on deck of a boat. Once again, I'll likely get sea-

sick under that contingency so taking pictures would be my last concern. However the VR system is there for you if you want it. With the lens in Active VR mode, the viewfinder image gets a bit jittery on its own, more than enough to introduce nausea for me. You are warned.

When you focus using the AF-ON button (found on rear of newer Nikons), Nikon warns in their pamphlet that VR is not set into motion. To commence VR operation, the shutter-release button must be pressed half-way down. Depending on the amount of corrective work to be done when VR kicks in, there sometimes may be a lag between the final push on the release and the taking of the picture. With VR set to normal mode, I had very few incidents of this kind. However, with the Active mode selected, in conjunction with the camera being set to single-frame shooting or focus priority, you may lose the occasional shot simply because the camera refuses to fire at the decisive moment. The risk of encountered this issue must be balanced against the increased chance of getting a sharp image.

While operating, the VR circuitry might emit a low-pitched humming sound, interspersed with sharper clicking. The sounds are quite low and may pass unnoticed in many cases. More and louder clicking sounds are heard when the VR mode is set to Active. At least you are assured that the VR feature has sprung into action.

All the VR in the world won't halt your subject in its own motion, so slow shutter speeds always bring with them a chance for unsharpness, VR or not VR.

Nikon is ambiguous as to the need for switching VR off when this lens is mounted on a tripod. Their pamphlet can be interpreted to indicate a shaky tripod or head might benefit from having VR switched on in Normal mode. The first VR offering, AF 80-400 mm f/4.5-5.6 Nikkor did not like tripods at all either with or without VR (largely due to its horribly designed tripod mount). The new VR lens behaves differently.

I shot a comprehensive test series to clarify whether VR impacted performance on a tripod. The results indicate that VR should **not** be put into operation when you deploy the lens on high-quality tripods such as the Sachtler range. A small, but detectable loss of detail resulted with VR in Normal mode, and the degradation of detail increased with the Active VR setting. On the other hand, for less critical use or when more modest tripods are pressed into service, little harm is done if you forget to switch VR off.

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Last update 19 February, 2003