

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

1. Introduction

by Bjørn Rørslett

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At last, about a year after its initial announcement, the long-awaited addition to Nikon's limited arsenal of vibration reduction (VR) technology arrived. This lens is the natural successor and replacement to the current AFS 80-200 mm f/2.8 Nikkor, and likely will find its place in many a professional shooter's bag. Aspiring or amateur photographers will enjoy this new Nikkor as well, despite its possible steep price tag.



So, here it is - take a look

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The 70-200 VR heralds a new line of lens development from Nikon. Silent wave focusing motors and vibration reduction technology unite to create a new and exciting level of technological achievement for Nikon users. However, this new pinnacle of technology brings along with it repercussions which are impossible to overlook. No longer is backwards compatibility, once the ultimate goal for Nikon designers, considered an overriding major concern for their lenses. Nikon has played up to this for a while by crippling more and more features on their new cameras so as not to allow using MF lenses in practice, although such lenses still mount. Thus I'm not in the least surprised by this poignant blow to Nikon traditions, more in a sad mode as it were.

This VR lens is made for the new generation of Nikon shooters which may have grown up neither seeing nor using manual-focusing lenses from the legendary Nikkor past, so they don't know what they miss. The generally held view that Nikon's classic "F"-mount, the basic design of which dates back to the end of the 1950's, could not cater for future evolution such as combinations of AFS, VR etc., has been proven false. All AFS lenses I've seen have 10 electronic contacts although the current cameras only have 8, so it's fairly safe to say the "F" bayonet could have future tricks up its venerable mount.

The lack of an aperture collar on the lens ("G" type) in practice means you cannot use the VR lens on earlier pro cameras such as Nikon F, F2, and F3, and its operation on F4 although possible is severely restricted (you have to shoot in P or S mode and VR won't work). The 70-200 VR however springs to life on an F100, F5 and all of the new digital SLRs. Presumably it will work on lower-end new Nikons as well (Nikon literature will provide the details).

I think the AFS and G features quickly will prevail the Nikkor line, with VR capability thrown in for middle- and high-end optics. What we witness now might well be a planned obsolescence of the MF Nikkors. Such a pity because many of the old champions never were dethroned by superior designs, just by newer lenses or more features.

Personally I'm not too keen on having a standard zoom lens with this focal range, for a good deal of reasons. However, I realise I'm an exception to the generally held view here, so I just go on reviewing the lens for the benefit of other people. What one wouldn't do for an appreciative audience.

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