

CAMERA LENS RRP: \$3499

Canon 70-200mm f/2.8 L IS II USM

One of Canon's best professional lenses recently got a little better. Words and images by **Ewen Bell**.

FOR OVER A DECADE, CANON'S top of the line image stabilised telephoto zoom has been pushed by advances in the EOS autofocus systems – but now it's also image quality that drives lens development. As digital sensors push past the resolution limits of traditional film, the need to update the 70-200mm lens has become more evident.

The modest telephoto range of the 70-200mm makes it a handy lens for those times when you can't get as close to your subject as you'd like, but also don't want to sacrifice your image quality. The ability to shoot down to f/2.8 and still retain

excellent optics is the key strength of this lens, now enhanced with a 4-stop image stabiliser system for those moments when slow shutters are unavoidable.

For professional image quality, the new 70-200mm is the next best thing to a prime lens.

Professionally focused

The new model looks very similar to the last, and feels similar too. The changes are mostly internal with a little more weight and a modified lens hood. It still retains the 77mm filter thread, a detachable tripod mount and professional-grade weather sealing at the mount. Canon have incorporated five "ultralow dispersion" elements in the new design made from Fluorite. Canon have updated the Image Stabiliser to bring it into line with their Third Generation stabilisation, but you can still choose between panning mode or regular stability on the 70-200mm. The autofocus guide selector now reveals the closer focal distance of 1.2m, which brings the new lens into useful range for close-up photography. It's not a macro lens, but you can chase down little creatures like butterflies and employ that super fast autofocus powered by ultrasonic motors.

With the old 70-200mm I would have needed an extension-tube to get in close enough to chase butterflies, and paid a penalty in focus speed. While the new lens doesn't get you as close as a macro, or an extension-tube, for many applications it gets you close enough. Particularly if you're willing to ditch some pixels to crop in closer.

The second generation of this lens is intended to appeal not only to professionals shooting on a Canon 1D, but anyone utilising the cropping factor on a Canon 7D. On the Canon 60D or 7D camera bodies this lens is effectively a 110-320mm telephoto zoom. Smaller sensors effectively magnify flaws in any lens, and while it's a shame to throw away half of that bright

LOOK FAMILIAR?
The new Canon 70-200mm f/2.8 model looks very similar to its predecessor, and feels similar too – for the most part, the differences are internal.

COSMETIC CHANGES
Although it's a little heavier, the new 70-200mm retains its 77mm filter thread, as well as a detachable tripod mount and professional-grade weather sealing at the mount.



Editor's choice
"Given the choice of this 70-200mm with a 2x converter, or a Canon 100-400mm – I'd pick the 70-200mm every time."



CONVERTED
The new MkIII version of Canon's 1.4x Converter works so well with the MkII version of the 70-200mm f/2.8 lens that you'll be happy to extend your shooting range without worrying about image degradation. There is also a MkIII version of Canon's 2X converter, but we only had access to the older MkII version for this review.

"The ability to shoot down to f/2.8 and still retain excellent optics is the key strength of this lens"

■ Herald Island Polar Bear
Shot with a Canon 1D MkIV;
70-200mm f/2.8 L IS II USM;
1/1000sec; f/11; ISO 1600;
focal length 320mm

» DETAILS

Manufacturer: Canon

RRP: \$3499

Focal length: 70-200mm on full frame sensors, 112-320 on APS-C sized sensors

FOV: 34 - 12 degrees

Dimensions: 197mm long x 86.2 diameter

Weight: 1.57kg

Website: canon.com.au

» VERDICT

Upgrading one of your lenses is always difficult to justify, especially when the previous version of Canon's 70-200mm f/2.8 L IS is such a reliable work horse. The new version fully meets the demands of digital technology, improves on a few specifications, and will be one of Canon's best lenses for a long time to come.

» RATING **9/10**



BUILT TO LAST

Keeping the lens movements fully internalised makes this a highly resilient lens built to last a decade of rough and tumble.

“A converter pushes optical qualities to their limit. This is where the new lens excels”

and sharp image the high speed burst mode and extended reach of the 7D turns the 70-200mm f/2.8 into a useful wildlife rig.

Extending Performance

Typically the 70-200mm lenses are employed for work at weddings and newspapers, but they are also valuable for sports and wildlife provided you can get close enough. If you're almost close enough, then adding a converter to the lens can get you over the line, but in the process you're pushing the optical qualities of the elements to their limit. This is precisely where the new version of the lens excels.

Canon's third generation 1.4x converter is a great bit of equipment and works well with any of the L-series telephoto lenses, but the 2x converter is still something of a last resort. Adding the Canon 2x converter to any telephoto lens can halve your performance at the very least. If your

lens isn't up to the job you can lose the autofocus entirely, plus drop several stops of light. It's an excellent stress test for any telephoto lens.

I had the new 70-200mm lens on a field shoot in Arctic Russia in the hopes of chasing down polar bears and puffins, along with 1.4x and 2x converters packed to push my telephoto reach a little further. Arctic wildlife is hard to get close to, partly due to predation by native tribes and partly because a polar bear can kill you. The 70-200mm lens spent very little time without the 2x converter slotted in place.

While driving along a pebbled beach we startled a mother polar bear with her two cubs. The cubs were approaching adult status and our vehicle was approaching too fast. In the space of a few seconds the driver slowed the vehicle to a stop, during which time the bears had crossed the beach and dived into the water.

Despite the bump and tumble of a vehicle hauling on the brakes, our cameras never stopped shooting. The sun was dipping low at the time and backlit the entire scene, but we had no problems grabbing focus and freezing the moment. It was a pretty decent test for the autofocus abilities of the lens when using the 2x converter.

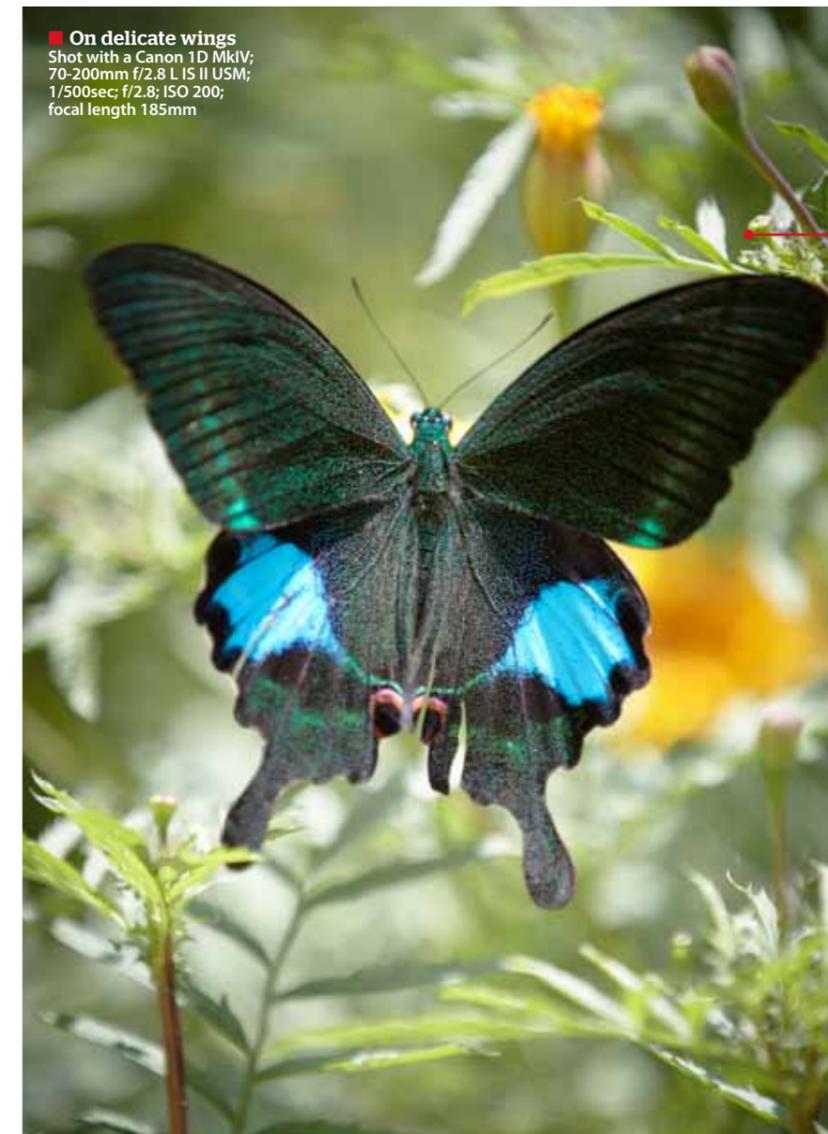
Once the vehicle had stopped we all looked at each other in disbelief, still trying to process what a remarkable experience we'd just shared. There were many moments on that journey when I was glad to have the upgraded 70-200mm f/2.8, but none quite so dramatic.

Speed and light

Trying to catch fast-moving puffins (left) with the 70-200mm hobbled by a 2x converter was a whole lot less appealing. Sitting in a small zodiac as it rocks up and down with the waves while small birds zip past at high speed, and at close range, makes it hard to grab focus. Misty and clouded light doesn't help either and we were shooting at 6400 ISO or higher to maintain fast shutter speeds. Manual focus is simply out of the question with such unpredictable flight paths, so you're relying heavily on the autofocus system to do the hard work.

There's just no replacing a serious prime telephoto lens with a 70-200mm zoom; it's designed for closer and larger subjects. This is a great lens for penguins down south, as they aren't so shy, but puffins in the northern polar regions are another matter altogether.

Our last excursion for the voyage was a zodiac cruise along some ragged cliffs with about 100,000 birds filling the skies and covering the rocks. Even in dull light the combination of Canon's 1D MkIV autofocus and the second generation 70-200mm was flawless. In the space



■ On delicate wings
Shot with a Canon 1D MkIV;
70-200mm f/2.8 L IS II USM;
1/500sec; f/2.8; ISO 200;
focal length 185mm

CLOSE WORK

The new 70-200mm is certainly not a macro lens, but you can chase down little creatures like butterflies and employ that super fast autofocus powered by ultrasonic motors.

NOT JUST RUMOUR

Canon are planning to release a 200-400mm f/4 zoom lens with a twist. They recognise how much professionals rely on the 1.4x converters to extend their telephoto, so have included that inside this new lens with a flick switch to engage or disable the feature. With an aperture of f/4 through the zoom range, this lens is already ahead of the existing 100-400mm, plus the advantage of quick access to a little more reach when conditions demand it.

Conclusion

When Canon first released the original 70-200mm f/2.8 design they were ahead of the pack, and the combination of useful zoom, excellent autofocus and very fast optics made it perfect for press photography. Over the last decade, everybody else has caught up, with an excellent version from the Nikon camp and some affordable models by Sigma and Tamron.

There's something about the basic equation of the 70-200mm range that plays nicely with engineers who want to push for wide apertures at f/2.8. Canon had to reinvent the wheel this time around, and have succeeded in making it a little more rounded. Even if you don't shoot that much with a telephoto lens, this is the one you want in your kit when a truly special moment arises.

of a single hour I shot 48 gigs worth of wildlife, most with the 2x or 1.4x converter, and barely a handful of frames lacked for accuracy.

I didn't nail the composition I wanted in every shot, but I can't blame the gear for that.

Most buyers for this lens will try to avoid the converters, but it's good to know they have an option. At crowded cultural performances the focusing ability of the lens, unimpeded by converters, was evident. Under cloudy skies or bright sunlight the movement of dancers was easily tamed with this lens, with just the right zoom length to get in close when needed or pull back to include some context.

Pulling out your choice of subject from a crowded scene is one the great advantages when shooting at f/2.8 on a modest telephoto. You can achieve background blur at f/10, but it just looks a lot better at f/2.8 – provided your subject is sharp. The second generation 70-200mm L IS USM from Canon is as sharp as they get.

Long enough for ya?

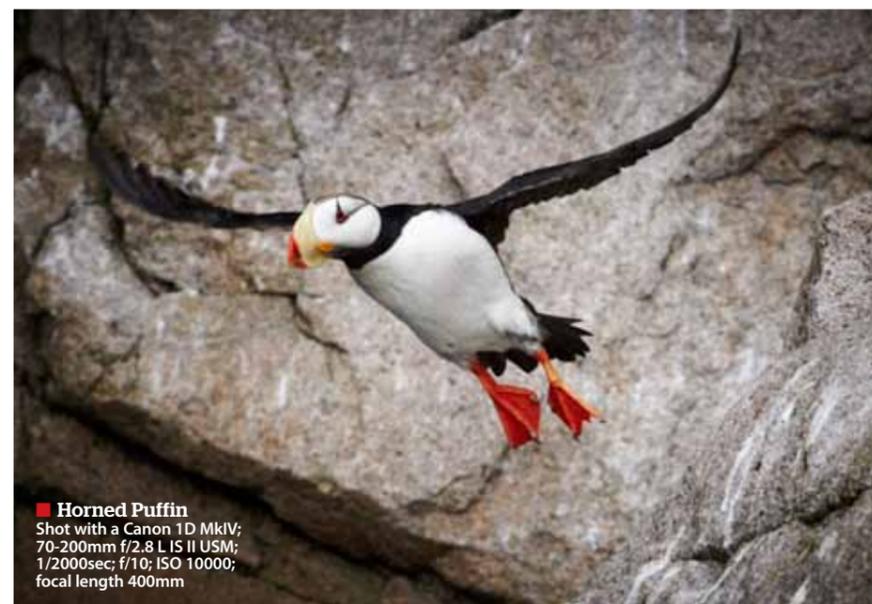
A common choice for buyers of telephoto equipment is whether to get a 70-200mm or a 100-400mm. Wildlife can test your patience,

and having a very long lens is often desirable. Unless you're packing a 7kg monster prime lens, the quality of image you can reasonably expect from a 400mm focal range is very limited. The basic rule of "get closer" is in fact still the best way to improve your photography, certainly in preference to just buying a bigger lens.

If you can get the shot you want with a 200mm telephoto, then the new 70-200mm from Canon will give you a quantum leap in image quality over the old 100-400mm pump action zoom.

Keeping the lens movements fully internalised is one of the ways the 70-200mm f/2.8 design delivers resilience to weather exposure. This is a lens built to last a decade of rough and tumble against dust and salt. Given the choice of the 70-200mm with a 2x converter, or a Canon 100-400mm L series f/4.5-5.6 – I'd pick the 70-200mm every time.

The image resolution at 400mm with either of these two rigs is equivalent, but the 70-200mm can step back to normal operation and deliver some of the best quality images you'll see on a DSLR system.



■ Horned Puffin
Shot with a Canon 1D MkIV;
70-200mm f/2.8 L IS II USM;
1/2000sec; f/10; ISO 10000;
focal length 400mm