

CHECKING EXPOSURE – Highlights.

With technology getting ever cleverer, there is a temptation to leave it all to “Auto”, that God of the camera. Even if He gets it wrong a correction is still possible at FotoFirst or in PhotoShop, isn't it? Wrong! Nothing beats a correct exposure. You owe it to yourself to get as close to perfect exposure as possible.

Slide workers accept and welcome this discipline. However, whether you use print film or a digital camera, you will get much better results if your initial exposure is good.

Take a good close look at the highlight areas in your images. What do you look for?

Specular highlights (glitter, reflection of the sun from chrome, glass or water) will be absolutely white. No problem with that.

Look at the brightest highlights that are not specular. These are often in the clouds, white walls, breaking waves, snow etc. Are the brightest portions also totally blank white with no detail? If so the image is probably over exposed. If these zones are small relative to the rest of the highlight area, or perhaps rim lighting, they can be ignored or even very effective. But you need to think about whether the effect is supporting or detracting from your photograph.

Generally highlights should contain a tiny amount of tone in the brightest areas, with specular highlights being the only parts of the image allowed to burn out.

Most photographs derive sparkle and impact from an exposure that is just enough to produce a few tiny zones of absolute white. This is generally true whether the picture is taken in bright sunlight or in subdued overcast conditions. Try bracketing a few exposures and see the effect of small changes in exposure on important highlight detail.