

Arca Swiss D4

Written by Administrator

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The Arca Swiss D4 is a small and flexible geared head that also is quite solid.

These are my initial impressions:

Geared motion

Two axes are geared, tilt and camera rotation. Panning is unfortunately not geared. I can live with that.

There is a lock level for each geared axis. If the level is unlocked the camera can swing around that axis freely, if the lock level is tightened the gears engage and all movement around that axis is done by gears. The gears don't creep and there is no obvious play.

Tracking a subject

If both pan and tilt are released the head works essentially as a 2D head the bottom part of the tripod can be used as a leveling base. With this combo it is easier to track a moving subject than with a normal ball head because the camera is kept level assuming that the top plate is leveled correctly.

Using as a panorama head

The top plate can be used as a panorama head, replacing my RRS PCL1.

Why do I need a geared head?

I frequently shoot with long telephoto lenses. There is always some flex in the tripod assembly, like legs, head camera/lens mount. On a ball head the camera is held essentially in the hand and locked down. After locking the ball the hand releases the camera. The flexing of tripod changes the composition significantly. This occurs even with very rigid tripods and some of the flexing is actually in the camera itself.

With gears the tripod head is moved and the camera platform is not supported by hand during adjustment. So vertical adjustment is easy. I would prefer to have gears for panning also, but panning action is little affected by weight of the system, so I can live without.

Dual pan

Panning is on both bottom and top. The top panning plate can easily be leveled using the bubble levels and geared motion and can serve as a pan head. **What is not to my**

liking

- There are angle markings on the lower part of the top pan plate but no registration marks on the top plate. Having registration marks at each 90 degree position like on the Really Right Stuff PC1 clamp would be handy. Ok, I finally found a registration mark but there should be multiple instances. You cannot walk around the tripod so you can see the single marking
- I'm obviously missing geared pan, even if I can live without it.
- I'm not really enthusiastic about the "fliplock". I much prefer the heft and simplicity of the RRS (Really Right Stuff) lever type quick release. That said the "fliplock" works.

Summing up

The Arca Swiss D4 head is a lightweight and flexible solution for photographers needing a

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geared head. It is compact, flexible and well engineered. It's not perfect, but very good.