



Article

Markins M10 Ballhead Review

by Aaron LEUNG  
 Category: Camera

I can't believe that I've been using my Markins M10 ballhead for almost a year now. Here I would like to share with you my experience of using it. Before doing so, I would also like to mention why I switched from using the (in)famous Arca Swiss B1 to this Markins M10.

Like most nature photographers, I'd been dreaming of having an Arca Swiss ballhead since I'd seen others using it. I eventually acquired one in January 2003. To my disappointment, it failed in my expectations. In addition to Arca Swiss's notorious seizure/lockup problem, my B1 was very stiff, even when the friction knob was completely loosened. It was so stiff that making minute and precise movements with my macro set-up was very difficult, if not impossible. The problem was less severe when the ballhead was used in an upright position with the camera mounted on top of it but that is seldom the case for my particular macro work.



Markins M10 ballhead



Arca Swiss B1 ballhead

Several months after my 'dream' purchase I was told that a number of other photographers shared the same problem, which reputedly could be resolved by hitting the ballhead hard from the top when in the "loosened up" mode. This violent solution did solve the problem temporarily only for it to reappear when it went through another tighten/loosen cycle. This would mean I would have to carry a hammer on my macro trips and astound everyone by beating up my gear at regular intervals; definitely not a practical solution.

After months of cursing the B1 in the field, I came across the Markins ballhead on the web and read some positive reviews about it. With luck, I was even able to view and feel the actual Markins M10 from a kind user before making the decision. In fact, the decision was made as soon as I saw it.

My first impression of the Markins M10 ballhead was that it's a smaller version of the Arca Swiss B1. It has the identical controls as the B1 with exactly the same layout but just smaller in size and with a spherical ball instead of the elliptical one. The Markins is built just as strong as the B1 and the finishing is even better. All the sharp edges found on the quick shoe of the Arca Swiss B1 are smooth and round on the M10. An additional feature is a simple and effective screw known as a plate stopper that stops the plate (with your camera and lens of course) from sliding through the clamp when vertically orientated. However this is not found on their new quick shoes.



Markins M10 ballhead nomenclature

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My maximum macro setup on the M10



A closer look at the M10 with loads

Function-wise the Markins M10 works as expected and designed: the [quick-release clamp knob](#), the [progressive friction control knob](#) and the [panning knob](#) are smooth to turn. When the [progressive friction control knob](#) is loosened, the ballhead moves smoothly in the socket; while tightened, the ballhead is rock steady with the load that I generally employ (4kg max). Similarly, the [panning knob](#) fastens and loosens the panning base easily. (The panning base of my Arca Swiss B1 could still be moved even if I tightened the panning knob until by fingers started feeling pain.)

Although the ballhead and the panning base of my Markins M10 do move very smoothly when loosened, they do not give the kind of "floating"

feeling as the Arca Swiss B1 does. However that difference to me isn't that important. What's important is that the M10 has never jammed or misbehaved as the B1 does, and its panning base can be tightened much easier than the B1.

The consistent performance of the M10 is utterly important when shooting in the field. I have lost many precious moments due to the 'misbehavior' of my Arca Swiss B1 in the heat of action. The M10 has never failed me so far. When it is meant to be loosened, it is loosened; when it is meant to be moveable but hold the gear when I let go, it does exactly that; when it is supposed to be tightened, it is solidly tightened. I have full control and the confidence that goes with that.

Cleaning maybe a concern with this type of ballhead because it's quite impossible for the users to clean whatever gets between the ball and the socket. The M10 is such a high precision instrument, engineered and manufactured to very low tolerances, that dust and sand don't seem to be able to find a way in. This is evident after the stress test of all my photographic equipment during the safari trip in Sri Lanka in Sept 2003 where all my gear was repeatedly covered with a coat of fine dust/sand. The M10 worked just like when it was first unboxed. All I needed to do was to remove the dust on the ballhead with a damp cloth once in a while.



This damselfly was taken with my Markins M10

Together with the M10 I bought the camera body plate P33U from Markins that is designed to fit my Canon EOS 10D body. Although I must admit that it's a very expensive piece of metal for the size, it is just so beautifully designed, engineered and finished that it became an integral part of my camera at once; not to mention that it works just as designed such that no pivoting between the camera body and the plate has been experienced.



Markins P33U body plate snug fits my Canon EOS 10D body



One more thing that I like about Markins is that it has a rather comprehensive [website](#) that lists all its products and it provides a way to contact them. More importantly, they do respond! What does Arca Swiss

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provide in this regard?

In conclusion, Markins M10 is a real performer in every respect for my use. It's a high precision instrument that is beautifully designed, engineered and finished. To my experience it beats the Arca Swiss B1 hands-down because despite being smaller and lighter it carries similar loads but most importantly it is absolutely

reliable.

The only difficulty I experienced in the past with Markins was the tedious ordering process, which involved banks transfers and custom clearances. This is most likely resolved now that Markins is available in Singapore.

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