

Sigma 35mm f/1.4 DG HSM Lens Review

For those that follow the world of prime lenses, you have probably read many great things about the brand new Sigma 35mm f/1.4 lens. This is the first lens to come to market using Sigma's new individually Quality Controlled lens manufacturing process and significantly upgraded production techniques on professional grade lenses. All of the reviews so far have been excellent with this lens easily outperforming 35mm lenses that cost 2-3 times as much. This includes all 35mm DSLR lenses from the major manufacturers and the lens even outguns the Zeiss 35mm lens on independent tests. I decided that I had to see for myself so I pitted a brand new Sigma 35mm f/1.4 against a brand new Nikkor 35mm f/1.4G and a completely rebuilt and overhauled to better than new Nikkor 24-70 f/2.8G to see what the hype is all about. All those other reviews were right!.

The Sigma blows away the Nikon lenses when shot wide open in every category except vignetting where it has about 1/2 stop more vignetting than either of the Nikon contenders. It is sharper in both the



corners and the center wide open. It has significantly less chromatic aberration and dramatically less pincushion/barrel distortion. The Nikon 35mm f/1.4G has a lot of barrel distortion regardless of aperture. The Nikon 24-70 also has a lot of linear distortion at the widest end of this zoom but it is well controlled by the time you zoom to 35mm. By f/2.8 the Nikon 35mm f/1.4 catches up to the Sigma for center resolution and then stays approximately equal throughout the aperture range but it never catches the Sigma for corner resolution or Chromatic aberration. Vignetting affects the Sigma more than the others until you get to f/5.6. By f/8 the Sigma actually vignettes less than the Nikon lenses. One of the biggest issues with the Nikon 35mm f/1.4 is focus shift. This is a phenomenon where the lens focuses in a different place depending on aperture. Since we focus with the lens wide open on a phase detect autofocus DSLR, a small amount of focus error is induced when stopping down. The Sigma has very little focus shift from wide open to other apertures while the Nikon prime does exhibit this

phenomenon. The 24-70 also has very little focus shift which was to be expected since focus shift is generally an issue only for the very fastest prime lenses. Horizontal Red/Green Chromatic aberration is significantly higher on both Nikon lenses but is essentially eliminated using the lens profiles supplied by the latest version of ACR and LR. ACR 7.4 and LR4.4 already include lens profiles for the new Sigma lens which eliminates the vignetting. Build quality on all three lenses is first rate. The Sigma is not



one of those lightweight plastic feeling lenses that we often find in third party lenses. This is a bulky, strong lens with first rate lens finish like it's Nikon counterpart. It has a decidedly more modern and very high quality look. Autofocus on this

lens is significantly faster than the Nikkor 35mm f/1.4G, which is one of Nikon's slowest focusing AF-S lenses. It is on par in focusing speed with the 24-70mm f/2.8G lens.

Below, find a table of the results ranking the lenses from first to third for each category tested. As you can see, the Sigma lives up to it's claims and easily dethrones the Nikon 35mm f/1.4G lens which is by all accounts an excellent lens although wide open leaves a bit to be desired. All tests with a D800E using contrast detect AF to eliminate shot-to-shot variability:

35mm shootout			
	Nkon 24-70 f/2.8	Nikon 35mm f/1.4	Sigma 35mm f/1.4
f/1.4			
Center Resolution	N/A	2	1
Corner Resolution	N/A	2	1
Chromatic Aberration	N/A	2	1
Linear Distortion	N/A	2	1
Vignetting	N/A	1	2
f/2.8			
Center Resolution	3	1	1
Corner Resolution	3	2	1
Chromatic Aberration	3	2	1
Linear Distortion	2	3	1
Vignetting	2	1	3
f/5.6			
Center Resolution	3	1	1
Corner Resolution	3	2	1
Chromatic Aberration	3	2	1
Linear Distortion	2	3	1
Vignetting	1	2	2
f/8			
Center Resolution	3	1	1
Corner Resolution	3	2	1
Chromatic Aberration	3	2	1
Linear Distortion	2	3	1
Vignetting	2	2	1