

TOP 10 BEGINNER DIGITAL CAMERAS

	Beginner digital cameras	Megapixel rating	Maximum resolution	Optical zoom		File format	Movie/sound facilities	Storage media type	
				Digital zoom				High/low resolution capacity	
1  BEST BUY PC ADVISOR	Kodak EasyShare DX6440 0870 243 0270 www.kodak.co.uk NEW	• £299 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	4Mp	2,408x1,758	4x 3.8x	JPG, Exif 2.2	yes/yes	16MB internal & Secure Digital/Multimedia Card 17/50	
2  PC ADVISOR	Epson PhotoPC L-300 0800 220 546 www.epson.co.uk NEW	• £249 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.24Mp	2,048x1,536	3x 2x	JPG, AVI	yes/yes	16MB Secure Digital 4/62	
3  PC ADVISOR	Pentax Optio 33L 01753 792 792 www.pentax.co.uk NEW	• £280 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.2Mp	2,848x2,136	3x 4x	JPG, AVI	yes/yes	16MB CompactFlash 8/128	
4  PC ADVISOR	Canon PowerShot A70 0870 514 3723 www.canon.co.uk NEW	• £299 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.2Mp	2,048x1,536	3x 3.2x	JPG, AVI, Wave	yes/yes	16MB CompactFlash 5/167	
5  PC ADVISOR	Fujifilm FinePix S304 020 7586 1477 www.fujifilm.co.uk NEW	• £280 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.2Mp	2,048x1,536	6x 3.2x	JPG, AVI	yes/yes	16MB XD 26/122	
6  PC ADVISOR	Sony Cybershot DSC-P8 08505 111 999 www.sony.co.uk NEW	• £299 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.2Mp	2,048x1,536	3x 3.2x	JPG, Mpeg	yes/yes	16MB Memory Stick 18/243	
7  PC ADVISOR	Olympus MJU 300 0800 072 0070 www.olympus.com LAST MONTH 1	• £288 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Jul 03	3.2Mp	2,048x1,536	3x 4x	JPG	yes/yes	16MB XD 6/94	
8  PC ADVISOR	Kodak LS633 0870 243 0270 www.kodak.co.uk LAST MONTH 2	• £248 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Sep 03	3.1Mp	2,041x1,533	3x 3.3x	JPG, Exif 2.2	yes/yes	16MB internal & Secure Digital/Multimedia Card 17/50	
9  PC ADVISOR	Benq DC4500 01442 301 000 www.benq.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	• £255 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Sep 03	4.1Mp	2,848x2,136	3x 3x	JPG, TIF	yes/no	16MB CompactFlash 13/181	
10  PC ADVISOR	HP Photosmart 735 0870 547 4747 www.hp.com NEW	• £199 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.2Mp	2,140x1,560	3x 5x	JPG, AVI	yes/yes	16MB internal & Secure Digital/Multimedia Card 8/92	



↑ The Kodak EasyShare DX6440 is streets ahead of the bold-and-beautiful competition and is our unchallenged Best Buy winner

1 Kodak EasyShare DX6440



It may not be pretty or quite pocket sized, but the Kodak DX6440's specification and performance mean it streaks past the other chart contenders. On paper the EasyShare's 4Mp (megapixel) CCD and 4x zoom are matchless at this price point, with no apparent shortfall elsewhere in the spec.

Its crisp, vibrant images would make many intermediate cameras proud. The DX6440 may shoot like a camera in a higher price bracket, but it is as easy to

use as any other beginner model. Although the back panel holds a confusing gamut of controls, it's simple enough to navigate the various menus and settings. The range of options is more than adequate, from automatic, motion and macro modes to fully manual mode with aperture and shutter priority.

Crucially for a point-and-shoot camera, the DX6440's shutter reacts quickly when the button is pressed. You don't have to worry about missing all-important split-second moments as the CCD takes just a second to respond.

	Battery type	LCD size	Dimensions (wxdxh)	Software & extras included
	Recharger supplied	Lens protection	Weight	
	1 x lithium-ion	1.8in	109x55x38mm	Kodak EasyShare
	no	autoslide cover	220g	
	4 x NiMH	1.5in	105x33x60mm	Epson Photo 4.0, QuickTime 5.0, PhotoQuicker
	no	autoslide cover	185g	
	2 x NiMH	1.5in	105x63x42mm	ACDSee
	no	autoslide cover	230g	
	4 x NiMH	1.5in	101x32x64mm	ZoomBrowser EX, Image Browser, PhotoRecord
	no	autoslide cover	215g	
	4 x NiMH	1.8in	100x77x69mm	FinePix viewer, Image Maker VCD
	no	manual lens cap	295g	
	1 x rechargeable lithium-ion	1.5in	105x52x36mm	Pixela Image Mixer
	yes	autoslide cover	206g	
	1 x rechargeable lithium-ion	1.5in	99x34x56mm	Camedia Master 4.1
	yes	manual slide cover	165g	
	1 x rechargeable lithium-ion	2.2in	114x55x31mm	Kodak EasyShare
	yes	manual slide cover	210g	
	4 x nickel radmium	1.5in	109x48x81mm	Photo Impression
	yes	autoslide cover	321g	
	2 x NiMH	1.5in	104x46x71mm	HP photo imaging software
	no	autoslide cover	235g	

Kodak has obviously aimed to make the EasyShare DX6440 as simple to use as possible, with explanations of the several preset modes laid on for easy reference. It also includes quickly accessed sharing facilities, with automatic email and print settings so you can plug in and produce excellent printouts very quickly.

If you want a simple but effective inroad into digital photography that will render your family snaps in glorious technicolour, you could do far worse than this month's Kodak Best Buy.

2 Epson PhotoPC L-300



This Recommended buy is once again no great looker, though its hardy matte aluminium chassis will take a few knocks without any serious damage. More importantly the PhotoPC L-300 is a decent performer, taking colourful and clearly defined pictures.

The Epson skimps on preset modes, so there's no quick shortcut to action/night-time/macro capabilities. The manual settings it does offer are put at your immediate disposal, with



↑ It may not be the prettiest model in the chart, but the solid Epson PhotoPC L-300 will travel well and produces top-notch results

the menu running across the top of the screen for easy access and modification. This places the Epson very much in the more experienced end of point-and-press photography, though the unfortunate absence of shutter speed priority might discourage members of this elite band.

The L-300 is a solid, workman-like camera that produces decent shots (especially closeups) and comes at a lower-than-average price. It is well designed with capable buttons and a solid feel to it, so it will travel well and be a pleasure to use.

3 Pentax Optio 33L



With the Optio 33L, Pentax has erred towards the unconventional with a flip-up-and-swivel LCD. This means the screen is safe from scratching when it's not in use and you can capture from any angle, allowing you to frame pictures properly even when you're holding the camera high above your head.

Unfortunately, this design quirk has left no room for an optical viewfinder. If you're not a fan of arms-length photography then the Optio 33L isn't the camera for you. However if you're looking for a model that's light, fun, friendly and still gives good results, the Pentax is worth considering.

Unlike the Best Buy Kodak, there is a noticeable delay between pressing the shutter button and the frame being taken, so you have to be careful with motion shots. There is a longer pause while the camera stores the image, so if you want to take shots in quick succession you'll have to rely on the burst mode.

The Optio's menus are easy to navigate, with nice touches such as image preview when



↑ The lightweight, easy-to-navigate Pentax Optio 33L offers decent and vibrant results

you are choosing the right white balance. Again, there are only a couple of preset modes so it's up to you to take charge of the settings. Having said that, the default auto values are good enough for most situations.

The Pentax's light, not-too-flimsy plastic body makes it convenient to carry around and it produces decent, attractive and colourful prints.

4 Canon PowerShot A70



The Canon PowerShot's unusual design means it doesn't sit that easily in your hands. It is, however, a very capable camera with a wide range of settings. The images it produces are also both colourful and sharp.

Though the system of buttons on the back of the A70 is slightly unintuitive, it's easy to get to know its functions. Aside from the full quota of settings, such as night-time and motion, these include a natty panorama mode. Here, you can line up each photo with one you took before to create a collage of anything up to a 360-degree view.



Another area in which the PowerShot excels is macro shots – the camera's lens needs to be almost touching the subject before it can no longer focus. The Canon has a good shutter response time and it doesn't take too long to store the shot. The zoom/wide angle toggle is also conveniently situated around the shutter button rather than on the back of the body.

Despite its curious design, the Canon PowerShot A70 is a well deserved Recommended winner.



5 Fujifilm FinePix S304

The FinePix S304 was in our Intermediate chart bracket when it was first issued, but now we have reshuffled the price points to be VAT inclusive it gets a chance to mix with the beginner pool. Like a student kept down a year in school, the Fujifilm dwarfs its classmates in terms of spec: a huge 6x zoom puts it head and shoulders above the rest on paper. However, just like the student who didn't pass his exams, the marks its 3.2Mp (megapixel) CCD get aren't quite up to the standards of the brighter sparks in the class.

This isn't to say the S304's images aren't sharp enough – they just don't have the dashing colour the top three models offer. In its defence, the FinePix has great macro focusing and simple menus for navigating its modest choice of functions.

Best of all, the viewfinder shows exactly what the CCD will see through the lens, making framing pictures a dream. Along with the great zoom and fast shutter response, the S304 deserves its mid-table placing.



6 Sony CyberShot DSC-P8

By far the smartest and smallest camera in the Beginners chart this month, the CyberShot unfortunately doesn't do the business as well as its competitors. The colour of its images are substantially dimmer than those of its peers. And while the DSC-P8 has an impressively efficient autofocus, it's a bit sluggish taking pictures once you've pressed the button and takes time to prime itself for the next shot.

Having said that, the CyberShot DSC-P8 is fairly easy to use, as long as your digits are dainty enough for the buttons, and its varied settings will cater for most shooting conditions.

7 Olympus MJU 300

This former Gold award and Best Buy winner is a tough but stylish beginner model that provides impressively fine shots for its size and price point. Developed from one of Olympus' most successful 35mm cameras, the good-looking MJU 300 has a weatherproof body that should keep your snaps safe.

The bundled 16MB CompactFlash card is a little on the small side (it only stores six high-resolution images). However, the photos you do manage to take will be nicely coloured, especially outdoor shots.



The Olympus is ideal for the novice user. This simplicity comes in part from a lack of detailed shot options, though there are a handful of settings to cope with most lighting conditions. The MJU 300 may lack punch and subtlety, but it gives decent results and won't scare technophobes.



8 Kodak LS633

The Kodak LS633's standout feature is its 2.2in backlit OLED screen. Due to cutting-edge technology, this is visible even in the brightest sunlight. Its 3.2Mp CCD is no disappointment either, taking fine shots in most conditions. There aren't a huge number of settings on this Kodak model – it's aimed at the happy-snappy market and does its job very well. The colours and edges in the prints are strong and vivid, sometimes seeming unnatural, but this is far better than having washed-out images.

The LS633 is very much a forerunner of the Best Buy DX6440, so if you want something that produces quality similar to this month's winner but with fewer bells and whistles then this is for you.

9 Benq DC4500

For a beginner camera the Benq DC4500 packs one heck of a punch. Like the Kodak in first place, the DC4500 has an



Buying advice

- **CCD** As the chart shows, 3Mp (megapixels) is the standard for a Beginner camera. If you want anything like decent results you'll certainly need at least that. At this low price point, though, you won't be able to afford 5Mp or 6Mp models. Just remember, size isn't everything and corners can be cut to make way for a large sensor.
- **Storage** All the cameras we viewed came with 16MB of storage and you shouldn't accept less than that. However, if you're going to be away from your PC for a while, you'll want to get yourself much more memory. Either that or you'll have to be ruthlessly selective about the prints you take home. Factor the price of additional media into the cost of your purchase. Expect to pay around £30 for 64MB of RAM and around £60 for 128MB.
- **Peripherals** Don't ignore the value of rechargeable batteries (and the necessary charger). Power adds to the total cost of ownership of your camera, so it could be worth going for a pricier model with a lithium-ion battery and charger to avoid frequent supermarket trips for more AA cells. It's also worth looking for USB connectivity so you'll be able to download pictures in super-quick time. Some companies – Kodak and HP especially – produce cradles for their cameras with built-in printing and sharing capabilities. These bump up the cost of the purchase but can make a difference to how you use your camera and particularly to how PC-centric you want to be.
- **Zoom** A zoom of at least 3x is standard in the Beginner chart these days, with some models stretching to 4x or 6x. Be sure when evaluating this you concentrate on the optical zoom. Most cameras will bolster the zoom lens with some software interpolation, but these often render grainy images and don't add as much value or functionality as the optical zoom.

above-average sized 4Mp (megapixel) CCD that can capture good-quality shots. What's more, with Benq's HIT interpolation technology it can take this rating up to 6Mp with a lot less image granulation than you'd expect. But this powerhouse capability takes some hefty casing – the result is a bulky model that you might not enjoy lugging around.

The DC4500 also depends on two nickel cadmium AA batteries for power, which it rips through at a frightening pace. There aren't a great deal of manual settings to be had here, but a handful of basic options ensure you'll be okay in most shooting conditions.

10 HP Photosmart 735

The curiously cuboid Photosmart 735 scraped into the Beginner chart mainly because of its low price tag. While the HP does have some good features, images have none of the exuberance that many of the rival cameras produce.

All the same, the Photosmart is a intuitively laid-out camera and has the advantage of a liquid crystal information



screen as well as the LCD. This means the back viewer isn't cluttered up with setting information. The settings in question offer a good choice of profiles, although the lack of shutter priority and the tokenistic aperture settings mean you won't be stretching the boundaries of photography.

Along with the simple menus and well-organised function buttons, this a good model for absolute beginners. ■



Unsure of a technical term?
Find out exactly what it means in our searchable Glossary which is on the cover disc