

TOP 10 INTERMEDIATE DIGITAL CAMERAS

	Intermediate digital cameras	Megapixel rating	Maximum resolution	Optical zoom	Maximum aperture range	File format	Shutter speed	
				Digital zoom			ISO sensitivity equivalent	
				Optical viewfinder				
1	 Sony DSC-V1 Cybershot 0990 111 999 www.sony.co.uk NEW	• £550 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	5Mp	2,592x1,944	4x 4x yes	f2.8-f4	JPG, TIF	1/1,000 secs ISO 800
2	 Pentax Optio 450 01753 792 731 www.pentax.co.uk NEW	• £450 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	4Mp	2,288x1,712	5x 4x yes	f2.8-f4.6	JPG, TIF	1/1,000 secs ISO 400
3	 Samsung DigiMax V4 0845 922 3232 www.samsungcamera.co.uk LAST MONTH 1	• £400 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Jul 03	4Mp	2,272x1,704	3x 4x yes	f2.8-f5	JPG, TIF	1/2,000 secs ISO 400
4	 Nikon Coolpix 5400 0800 230 220 www.nikon.co.uk NEW	• £650 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	5.1Mp	2,592x1,944	4x 4x yes	f2.8-f4.6	JPG, TIF	1/4,000 secs ISO 400
5	 Fujifilm FinePix S602 Pro Zoom 020 7586 1477 www.fujifilm.co.uk NEW	• £600 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.1Mp (6Mp honeycomb CCD)	2,832x2,128	6x 2.2x electronic viewfinder	f2.8-f11	JPG, TIF	1/2,000 secs ISO 1,600 (under 1Mp only)
6	 Canon PowerShot G5 0870 514 3723 www.canon.co.uk NEW	• £680 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Oct 03	5Mp	2,592x1,944	4x 4x yes	f2-f3	JPG, RAW	1/2,000 secs ISO 400
7	 Epson Photo PC L-400 0800 220 546 www.epson.co.uk NEW	• £329 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	4Mp	2,304x1,728	3x 3x yes	f2.8-f4.9	JPG, TIF	1/2,000 secs ISO 400
8	 Kodak DX 4530 0870 243 0270 www.kodak.co.uk NEW	• £399 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	5Mp	2,580x1,932	3x 3.3x yes	f2.8-f5.1	JPG	1/2,000 secs ISO 200
9	 HP Photosmart 850 0870 747 4747 www.hp.com LAST MONTH 2	• £484 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Spr 03	4.1Mp	2,384x1,734	8x 7x yes	f2.8-f11	JPG	1/2,000 secs ISO 200
10	 Canon Digital Ixus 400 0870 514 3723 www.canon.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	• £516 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Aug 03	4Mp	2,272x1,704	3x 3.6x yes	f2.8-f4.9	JPG	1/2,000 secs ISO 400



new

↑ Need a low-cost 5Mp camera with high-end features? Look no further than our new Best Buy, Sony's DSC-V1 Cybershot

1  Sony DSC-V1 Cybershot
When it comes to high-end 5Mp (megapixel) digital cameras for keen photographers, there are really only three devices available at the time of writing: Canon's PowerShot G5, Nikon's Coolpix 5400 and Sony's DSC-V1 Cybershot. While all are undeniably brilliant models, Sony tops our chart due to its combination of high-end specifications and features tied to an all-important value-for-money price tag – the latter being something we don't normally associate with Sony products.

The DSC-V1's silver metal chassis lacks Sony's usual design pizzazz but it delivers quality images thanks to the 5Mp CCD and 4x optical zoom Carl Zeiss lens. It's responsive between shots and we found the list of features simple enough to navigate using the comprehensive menu system and four-way navipad.

Flip the jogdial to auto mode and the camera takes care of everything with impressive performance, although you'll be rewarded with better shots from the manual settings. Contrast, saturation and sharpness can be altered while the dial



↑ The Pentax Optio 450 proves that good things do come in small packages

Don't be fooled by its tiny frame – this Pentax has a feature set that serious models would be proud of. Okay, the 450 isn't as small as Canon's Ixus but its heavy-duty metal chassis feels hardy yet light and is enjoyable to use.

Our only bone of contention is the lazy menu layout – Pentax gets no awards for presentation here. Fortunately you're never left waiting between shots because the Optio 450 is a speedy operator – and not just from shot to shot. There's also no delay when navigating the menu options.

The 4Mp (megapixel) CCD offers a maximum resolution of 2,288x1,712 and the 5x optical zoom is particularly impressive for a small camera. The Optio is bundled with a chunky lithium-ion battery that offers long-lasting power and this can be charged using the provided adapter. However, we'd highly recommend upgrading the measly 16MB Secure Digital card.

There's an autoshooting mode for point-and-click novices and the dial offers preset options for different photographic conditions and full exposure control. The Pentax can't compete with the bigger 5Mp boys when it comes to shot detail but colours look good and it even offers control over image saturation.

The Optio 450 also has the unusual bonus of a 3D effect setting – simply use the bundled image viewer glasses to create 3D shots. A word of warning, though: you must print the images out in order to see the effect.

3 Samsung DigiMax V4



This ex-Best Buy stays in the upper echelons of the chart as it's good in all the right places and offers a unique feature that the other manufacturers could do to adopt. It's compatible with nine power sources so you should never find yourself caught short for juice. Great shots, easy to use, value for money and surprisingly full of features, the Samsung DigiMax is one of those rare models that will satisfy all types of users.

Storage media type High/low resolution capacity	Battery type Recharger supplied	LCD size Lens protection	Dimensions (wxhxdh) Weight		Software & extras
32MB Memory Stick 12/196	1 x rechargeable lithium-ion yes	1.5in autoslide cover	99x57x65mm	291g	Image Mixer
16MB Secure Digital 5/100	1 x rechargeable lithium-ion yes	1.5in autoslide cover	100x40x59mm	250g	ACDSee, photo CD
32MB Secure Digital 12/675	1 x lithium-ion no	1.5in autoslide cover	106x38x55mm	210g	MGI PhotoSuite 3.0 SE
32MB CompactFlash Type II 12/172	1 x rechargeable lithium-ion yes	1.5in plastic cap	108x69x73mm	380g	Adobe Photoshop Elements, Nikon View
512MB IBM Microdrive & 16MB Smart Media 29/1,641	4 x AA alkaline/ 4 x AA NiMH yes	1.8in plastic cap	121x97x82mm	500g	FinePix viewer, Video Impression, Adobe Photo Deluxe
32MB CompactFlash Type II 11/337	1 x rechargeable lithium-ion yes	1.8in plastic cap	121x70x74mm	410g	Canon utilities, ArcSoft
16MB Secure Digital 8/127	4 x AA Alkaline no	1.5in autoslide cover	105x33x85mm	185g	Epson Photo & Print, PhotoQuicker, PIF designer
32MB internal memory 21/78	1 x lithium-ion no	1.8in autoslide cover	107x36x68mm	249g	EasyShare 3.0.1
16MB Secure Digital 5/71	4 x AA titanium no	2in autoslide cover	120x120x85mm	388g	HP Photo Imaging
32MB CompactFlash Type II 14/338	1 x rechargeable lithium-ion yes	1.5in autoslide cover	87x57x27mm	227g	Canon utilities

offers an array of exposure settings, from full manual to aperture and shutter priority.

For shooting at night the DSC-V1 is unbeatable. A hardware switch on top of the camera turns on the nightframing mode and the *Matrix*-effect laser that comes out is in fact an infrared hologram autofocus. This can determine the layout of the subject in complete darkness and shots can be framed in natural colours when the flash goes off.

Of all the high-end models the DSC-V1 contains the best tonal colour

range with the sharpest detail. We did find slight oversaturation when shooting deep reds but this was easy enough to rectify with the onboard controls. There's also little image degradation when blowing up shots to A3 size.

2 Pentax Optio 450

Most pocketable cameras look good but lack features.

The Optio 450 breaks from the norm making it one of the best small mid-range digital cameras around.





This compact 4Mp (megapixel) camera offers a maximum resolution of 2,272x1,704 and a 3x optical zoom that can be bumped up to 12x with the 4x digital zoom. The lithium-ion battery isn't rechargeable but, as mentioned earlier, the Samsung is compatible with nine types of power sources.

For a camera that's aimed at the point-and-shoot market there are a lot of hardware buttons surrounding the quality 1.5in LCD. However the DigiMax is easy to navigate and, with a bit of patience, you'll soon appreciate the various shooting options available. Different presets such as white balance are provided but choose the manual option and you have control over ISO settings, exposure and aperture as well as shutter priority.

The Samsung isn't hugely responsive and some of the colours are a little muted. But shot detail is extremely sharp and you can tweak focusing to perfection with the best manual focus option we've seen on a compact digicam.



4 Nikon Coolpix 5400



Our fourth Recommended award goes to Nikon's 5.1Mp (megapixel) Coolpix 5400. It might not offer the best value for money but this Nikon model will satisfy users looking to get the most from high-end digital photography.

With its soft large rubber grip, the 5400 is the most comfortable model to use. On top of feeling sturdy, we also

appreciated Nikon's decision to include a quality tilt-and-swivel LCD screen. Composing shots from any angle is therefore a simple procedure.

While the menu system is messy, there are vast amounts of shooting options to choose from. Novices will certainly find it daunting to use. Apart from offering the best macro mode, one standout feature on the 5400 is its best-shot selector. The camera captures five images at different exposure values and records only the best shot to the memory card. This means you don't have to tweak each picture before achieving the best results.

Images were packed with detail and colours were fine, although we noticed minor blurring around the edges when shots were magnified. As a bonus the Coolpix comes with Adobe Photoshop Elements – one of the best giveaway bundles for image manipulation.



5 Fujifilm FinePix S602 Pro Zoom

The FinePix S602 Pro had the Reviews department split down the middle. On the one hand the camera is a beautifully designed piece of kit that feels great to hold. On the other, Fujifilm is relying too heavily on its third-generation Super CCD technology to double the megapixel count from 3.1Mp to 6Mp. At the moment the S602 Pro Zoom's asking price is too high. It could, however, be worth waiting for a price drop.

There are brilliant features on the FinePix – for example, a 6x optical zoom, 512MB IBM Microdrive, 1.8in LCD, electronic viewfinder and the highest quality movie mode we've seen. We would have preferred a rechargeable lithium-ion battery, though.

Shots were full of colour but lacked the sharpness offered by the 5Mp devices. Indeed, for such a good-looking model the

S602 deserves better image quality. Shame because there are some features, such as the focus-check magnification, that make this a brilliant camera.



6 Canon PowerShot G5

The PowerShot G5 is a brilliant camera that's simply too expensive to achieve a higher chart position. But if money's no object this remains a good buy for anyone who's after top-quality shots and full control. The G5 has the largest maximum aperture we've seen on a 5Mp (megapixel) model. We were surprised to see the top right corner of the lens through the optical viewfinder but it doesn't impede shooting too much. Still, it's a strange design choice.

Canon has opted for the excellent 1.8in twist-and-swivel LCD on the G5 so composing shots from any angle is a breeze. We were equally impressed to see Canon's chunky rechargeable lithium-ion battery powering the camera.

While the G5 can be fully automated, people will be buying it for the array of manual configurations. It has 12 shooting modes to cover every photographic condition and the results speak for themselves. We took test shots in automatic mode and they demonstrated a great dark-to-light dynamic range with sharp detail and natural colours.

7 Epson Photo PC L-400

The cheapest model in our chart, the Photo PC L-400 shouldn't really qualify as an Intermediate model – it's more a good-quality camera for beginners. While Epson can't compete with the majority of our chart entries, there's something satisfying about using this model.

The well-built metallic casing holds quality hardware buttons that work perfectly. And despite a lack of options



you get controls over white balance presets, exposure compensation and ISO sensitivity. It's just a shame about the battery compartment's cheap and flimsy plastic lid as this spoils the L-400's look.

The Epson only comes with four alkaline batteries but, in its favour, the bundled adapter means the device can be used for shooting indoors or tethered to the PC without wearing the batteries out.

8 Kodak DX 4530

On a pound-per-megapixel ratio, nothing touches the value for money offered by this Kodak model – 5Mp for only £399 is undoubtedly good. Kodak has simply taken its cheapest-to-manufacture model and added a 5Mp CCD but this doesn't automatically make it a good camera.

Kodak touts family-friendly credentials



so we were surprised to see a cheap, plastic body – the DX 4530 will come off worse when faced with an over-enthusiastic

child on holiday. The lithium-ion battery is nonrechargeable and, due to the awkward position of the navipad, the 4530 is only good for lefthanded users. In its defence, shot quality is good. There'll always be an audience for this type of camera but it's unlikely anyone would stick with it for long.

9 HP Photosmart 850

This was the first HP camera to make a good impact on the Reviews team but it couldn't keep up with the influx of this month's new entries.

The Photosmart is a fairly squat, sturdy camera with pleasing deep curved lines and a reassuringly solid feel. It weighs just 388g, but the addition of four AA batteries adds to the bulk. Sturdiness is a good thing, though – a heavier object is easier to hold steady than a lighter one.

The 16MB memory card is stingy these days,



Buying advice

- **Megapixels** Plenty of megapixels doesn't necessarily result in an excellent digital camera but it certainly helps. And manufacturers are getting ever more generous, meaning you get more megapixels for your money. We've seen an influx of 5Mp cameras in this month's chart, but in most cases you have to pay around £600 for the privilege. While you can pick up Kodak's 5Mp model for £400, you might be disappointed with the rest of the camera's features. However, spend over £350 and you're likely to get a decent 4Mp device. The quality at this resolution is fine for photo-sized snaps and even blowing up to A4 size. The very minimum you should expect is a 3.2Mp model.
- **Storage** This comes in all shapes and sizes – some models even have internal memory. But regardless of the card used make sure you're getting at least 16MB. To be honest, even 32MB is miserly and manufacturers often expect consumers to pay out for higher storage cards. Put it this way, a 5Mp camera is only capable of storing about 11 images on a 32MB card – pretty limiting, don't you think? Some manufacturers, such as Fuji and Olympus, are bundling brilliant 512MB Microdrives on certain cameras.
- **Peripherals** Manufacturers cut costs on cheaper cameras by not bundling all the necessary sundries. Expect the cupboard to be bare when a model's asking price is low. It's possible to get by without some extras, such as a case or an adapter, but some of them – such as decent batteries – are essential. Alkaline cells run out before you can say 'cheese' and nickel batteries just don't have the power of lithium-ion ones. At this price point you should be getting rechargeable lithium-ion cells in your bundle. Remember that there are some lithium-ion batteries you can't recharge so avoid these where possible.
- **Zoom** The quality of digital zooms is negligible unless you're using at least a 5Mp camera. An optical zoom will provide the clearest results for telephoto shooting and this month's chart provides a decent selection. If a good zoom takes priority over all else then HP's Photosmart 850 comes with an 8x optical zoom. On average, you should expect to get 4x and accept no less than 3x.

especially on a camera with a 4.1Mp (megapixel) CCD. But the few shots the Photosmart can hold offer naturalistic colours and good detail. Zoom enthusiasts might be tempted by the generous 8x optical zoom.

This mid-range digital camera takes decent still and movie footage. It has a good balance of intelligent automatic controls and user-override features. HP hasn't tried to be too flash with the functions it provides or the number of controls to get to grips with, ensuring the Photosmart 850 has broad appeal.

10 Canon Digital Ixus 400

The Digital Ixus 400 is exactly what we would expect from Canon's quality range: a sleek, efficient and easy-to-use pocket snapper that takes sharp, colourful shots.

You're paying over the odds for styling and the Ixus lacks plenty of manual tweaks. But it remains one of the smallest



cameras around. The 4Mp shooter has a maximum resolution of 2,272x1,704 and a 3x optical zoom – specs on a par with low-end intermediate cameras. While we liked the inclusion of a 32MB memory card, we were surprised Canon chose CompactFlash rather than something smaller.

Anyone after photographic versatility should look elsewhere, but for compact, point-and-click simplicity the Canon is worth considering.



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