

Top 10 Beginner & Intermediate digital cameras

		Beginner digital cameras	Mega-pixel rating	Max resolution	Optical	Movie	File format	Storage media type	High/low resolution shots	Dimensions (wxdxh)	Software includes	
					Digital zoom	Sound		Battery/rechargeable		Weight		
PC Advisor RECOMMENDED	BEST BUY	 Kodak EasyShare DX6440 0870 243 0270 www.kodak.co.uk Last month 1	• £299 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	4Mp	2,408 x1,758	4x 3.8x	yes yes	JPG, Exif 2.2	16MB internal memory 1 x lithium/no	17/50	109x55x38mm 220g	Kodak EasyShare
		It may not be quite pocket sized, but the Kodak DX6440's spec and performance allow it to streak past the other entries. Its crisp, vibrant images would make many intermediate cameras proud and, crucially for a point-and-shoot model, the DX6440's shutter reacts quickly so you won't miss out on all-important shots.										
		 Epson PhotoPC L-300 0800 220 546 www.epson.co.uk Last month 2	• £249 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.24Mp	2,048 x1,536	3x 2x	yes yes	JPG, AVI	16MB Secure Digital 4 x NiMH/no	4/62	105x33x60mm 185g	Epson Photo CardMonitor
		The L-300 is no great looker, yet it is a solid, workman-like camera that produces decent clear and colourful shots (especially closeups) and comes at a lower-than-average price. The Epson is robust with intuitive controls so it will make a good travelling companion as well as being a pleasure to use.										
		 Pentax Optio 33L 01753 792 792 www.pentax.co.uk Last month 3	• £280 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.2Mp	2,048 x1,536	3x 2.7x	yes yes	JPG, AVI	16MB CompactFlash 2 x NiMH/no	8/128	105x63x42mm 230g	ACDSee
The Optio produces decent, attractive and colourful prints. Unfortunately, it comes without an optical viewfinder. If you're not a fan of arm's-length photography then this model isn't 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.												
 Canon PowerShot A70 0870 514 3723 www.canon.co.uk Last month 4	• £299 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.2Mp	2,048 x1,536	3x 3.2x	yes yes	JPG, AVI, Wave	16MB CompactFlash 4 x NiMH/no	5/167	101x32x64mm 215g	ZoomBrowser, ImageBrowser		
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 and it produces both colourful and sharp images. This model particularly excels at macro shots and it also has a quick shutter response time.												
 Fujifilm FinePix S304 020 7586 1477 www.fujifilm.co.uk Last month 5	• £280 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.2Mp	2,048 x1,536	6x 3.2x	yes yes	JPG, AVI	16MB xD card 4 x Alkaline/no	12/122	100x77x69mm 295g	FinePix Viewer, ImageMaker VCD		
The S304's images are sharp enough – they just don't have the dashing colour the other chart models offer. In its defence, the FinePix has great macro focusing and simple menus for navigating its modest choice of functions. The viewfinder also shows exactly what the CCD will see through the lens before each shot.												
PC Advisor RECOMMENDED	BEST BUY	 Sony DSC-V1 Cybershot 0990 111 999 www.sony.co.uk Last month 1	• £550 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	5Mp	2,592 x1,944	4x 4x	f2.8 -f4.0	JPG, TIF	32MB Memory Stick 1 x lithium/yes	12/196	99x57x65mm 291g	Image Mixer
		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 photos to A3 size.										
		 Pentax Optio 450 01753 792 731 www.pentax.co.uk Last month 2	• £450 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	4Mp	2,288 x1,712	5x 4x	f2.8 -f4.6	JPG	16MB Secure Digital 1 x lithium/yes	5/100	100x40x59mm 250g	ACDSee, Photos on CD
		Don't be fooled by its tiny frame – this Pentax has a feature set that serious models would be proud of. Okay, it isn't the smallest on offer 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 design here.										
		 Samsung DigiMax V4 0845 922 3232 www.samsungcamera.co.uk Last month 3	• £400 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Jul 03	4Mp	2,272 x1,704	3x 4x	f2.8 -f5	JPG, TIF	32MB Secure Digital 1 x lithium/no	12/675	106x38x55mm 210g	PhotoSuite 3.0 SE
The DigiMax excels in all the right places, offering great shots, ease of use, value for money and a host of features. It isn't hugely responsive and some of the colours are muted, but detail is extremely sharp. You can even tweak focusing with the best manual control option we've seen on a compact digicam.												
 Nikon Coolpix 5400 0800 230 220 www.nikon.co.uk Last month 4	• £650 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	5.1Mp	2,592 x1,944	4x 4x	f2.8 -f4.6	JPG, TIF	32MB CompactFlash 1 x lithium/yes	12/172	108x69x73mm 380g	Photoshop Elements		
Not the best value for money but the Coolpix's images are packed with detail and colours are fine, although minor blurring occurs around the edges when shots are magnified. As a bonus the Coolpix comes with Adobe Photoshop Elements – one of the best giveaway bundles for image manipulation.												
 Fujifilm FinePix S602 Pro Zoom 020 7586 1477 www.fujifilm.co.uk Last month 5	• £600 inc VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Nov 03	3.1Mp	2,832 x2,128	6x 1.4x	f2.8 -f11	JPG, TIF, RGB	512MB Microdrive 4 x NiMH/yes	19/765	121x97x82mm 500g	FinePix Viewer		
For such a good-looking model the S602 deserves better image quality. Shame because there are some brilliant features – for example, a 6x optical zoom, 512MB IBM Microdrive as well as 16MB Smart Media storage, 1.8in LCD, electronic viewfinder and the highest quality movie mode we've seen.												

Buying advice

Beginner digital cameras

- **CCD** As the chart shows, 3Mp is the standard for a Beginner camera. For decent results you'll certainly need at least that. Just remember, size isn't everything and corners can be cut to make way for a large sensor.
- **Storage** Don't accept less than 16MB. If you're going to be away from

your PC a lot then get yourself much more memory. Factor the price of additional media into the cost of your purchase. Expect to pay around £30 for 64MB and around £60 for 128MB.

- **Peripherals** Don't ignore the value of rechargeable batteries (and the necessary charger). It's also worth looking for USB connectivity so you'll be able to download pictures in super-quick time. Some companies even produce cradles for their

cameras with built-in printing and sharing capabilities.

- **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 are no substitute for a good optical zoom.