

Canon EOS 350D

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A LIST

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WINNER



PRICE £486 (£571 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.purelygadgets.co.uk

VERDICT The benchmark against which every other entry-level digital SLR is gauged.

Since our original review six months ago, the EOS 350D has held onto its A-List status without problem. It's the smallest and lightest of the group, yet battery life is excellent. We were able to shoot hundreds of frames with flash use and image reviewing between charges. Build quality is on a par with the solid Nikon D50, although ergonomically the latter is superior thanks to a bigger handgrip.

We like the fact that the LCD is above the main 1.8in TFT (which is a touch small). It's backlit and means you don't need to look on top of the camera as with the D50 and *ist DL to check settings. Menu navigation buttons double as main functions when shooting, providing instant access to ISO, white balance, exposure compensation, metering and focus modes. It's a shame you have to use the TFT (instead of the LCD) to change some of these, and it's also annoying that there's no spot-metering mode.



Startup is instant and the EOS 350D will shoot at 3fps for 14 frames in JPEG mode or four in RAW—this is a major advantage over slower cameras like the FinePix S9500.

Of course, with a Canon EF lens mount, you can use a huge range of lenses—a limitation with others like Olympus and Pentax. The bundled kit lens offers an 18-55mm zoom and can focus down to 28cm. The highlight, however, is the 8-megapixel CMOS sensor, which distinguishes it from all but the Olympus and Fujifilm here.

You really can see the difference in resolution when viewing images at 100 per cent, but this is only useful if you want to crop a centre portion. For printing at anything up to A4, it will be hard to notice the difference between this and the 6-megapixel cameras on test.

Overall, the 350D produces well-exposed images under any circumstances. The kit lens isn't as sharp as the Nikon's, but you'd only tell by comparing photos side-by-side. In low light, images were usable up to ISO 800; noise was

kept to a minimum, and much less noticeable than with the Olympus. The built-in flash provides great results, never leaving images with a washed-out look and eliminating red eye.

Our only real problem was white-balance accuracy. Compared to the Nikon, which kept every image neutral, we saw slight colour casts in almost every situation. Of course, you can shoot in RAW mode and set the balance afterwards using the supplied software.

It's virtually impossible to choose between the 350D and D50, as they're both excellent, albeit in subtly different ways. The Canon's extra price reflects the included RAW editing software, and with a higher resolution and features like a backlit LCD it wins by the smallest margin.

PC PRO RATINGS

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| IMAGE QUALITY | ★★★★★ |
| FEATURES & DESIGN | ★★★★★ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★★★ |
| OVERALL | ★★★★★ |

Fujifilm FinePix S9500 Zoom

PRICE £383 (£450 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com (code: 96197)

VERDICT Image quality isn't as good as it should be from the 9-megapixel S9500 and it doesn't handle as well as an SLR. If you want to shoot video, use a separate camera.

As the S9500 isn't an SLR, some may feel it shouldn't be in this test. However, the price puts it in direct competition with models like the Nikon D50, and Fujifilm is clearly aiming it at the same audience.

With a sensor resolution of 3,488 x 2,616 and a versatile lens, which, in 35mm terms, equates to 28-300mm, the S9500 beats everything else on test. The non-removable lens means dust will never get on the sensor, and you can still use filters.

The S9500 also lets you frame shots with the (admittedly small) 1.8in LCD. It flips out, allowing you to frame from high or low angles—a tricky prospect with an SLR. A quick look at the specifications shows that not much is given away to others: you can shoot in RAW mode, there's ISO selection from 80-1,600 and full manual control.

Weighing in at 766g, the S9500 is light enough and comfortable to hold and use. It's well built, and most buttons you'd



want are present, with other functions easily reachable via menus. Menus are relatively intuitive, although the setup options are buried too deep for our liking.

Power comes from four AA batteries, which is a blessing and a curse. Alkaline replacements are always available, but don't last long because of the LCD and EVF (electronic viewfinder) constantly draining them. No rechargeables are included.

Image quality is respectable, but it doesn't match the others here. The small sensor is partly to blame: while you can select up to ISO 1,600, noise is still more noticeable than with other cameras at equivalent settings. Resolution isn't as good as the 9-megapixel rating would suggest either, although this is partly the fault of the optics: images have soft focus.

This was true with our indoor shot too; looking close up, detail is much fuzzier than the



6-megapixel Nikon. We were fairly impressed with the auto white balance, though, and flash performance was also fine. Outdoors, the Fuji produces good exposures with natural colours. Macro performance will beat all others, as it can focus down to just 17mm.

Another bonus is the ability to shoot unlimited-length VGA video clips. But if you want to be creative with stills, the minimum aperture of f/11 is too big. We don't like the focus-by-wire approach, and prefer an optical viewfinder too. Add the relatively slow operation when shooting and reviewing images and we can't recommend the Fujifilm.

PC PRO RATINGS

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| IMAGE QUALITY | ★★★★★ |
| FEATURES & DESIGN | ★★★★★ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★★★ |
| OVERALL | ★★★★★ |