



DIGITAL CAMERA

PC PRO
A LIST

Canon EOS 300D

PRICE £765 (£900 inc VAT)

DELIVERY Free

INTERNET www.canon.co.uk

SUPPLIER www.jessops.com

VERDICT A dream come true for serious amateur photographers, the EOS 300D beautifully marries the advantages of an SLR with those of digital.

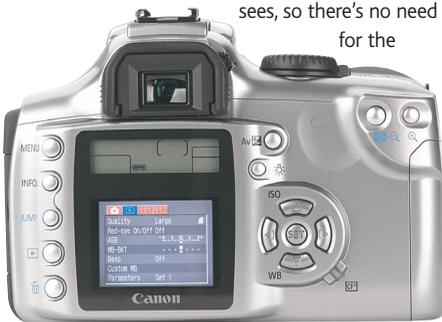
Rarely has a new camera received as much attention as the EOS 300D, released amid a flurry of excitement among photographers and a massive marketing campaign. Why the fuss? Because it's a true 6.3-megapixel digital SLR for under £1,000 including lens. It sounds expensive in the context of the cameras in this month's digital cameras Labs (see p127), but the previous generation of several models in that test were nudging a grand when they were released.

The 300D is essentially a stripped-down version of the considerably more expensive EOS 10D, the most obvious difference being the plastic rather than magnesium-alloy body. Nonetheless, the 300D is a fairly big and hefty beast, weighing in at 750g including lens and with a body width of 142mm.

The standard kit includes the first of Canon's new EF-S lenses, designed specifically for the 300D. The S stands for short, as in Short Focus Back, so-called because the small reflex mirror allows the rear element to be closer to the sensor, reducing the overall length of the lens. The body will take existing EF series lenses, but because of the APS-C size of the 300D's CMOS sensor the image is effectively cropped, leading to a 1.6x magnification factor over a standard 35mm SLR. The EF-S lens compensates for this with its 18-55mm focal length, giving a range equivalent to a standard 28-90mm model.

If you're used to missing shots because of the slow startup times, slow auto focus and infuriating shutter lag of most digital cameras, the 300D is a revelation. Powering up takes a few seconds, but once it's on, just like a standard SLR you can leave it on. All the information you need is displayed on the numeric LCD status panel, and the fact it's an SLR means the viewfinder shows you exactly what the sensor

sees, so there's no need for the



Since the Canon is an SLR camera, its viewfinder shows exactly what you're taking.



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battery-draining colour monitor to be active. Auto focus is unbelievably fast, locking in a fraction of a second in most circumstances. Once focus is locked, pressing the shutter produces that satisfying SLR clunk as the mirror flies up and the picture is taken with no discernible shutter lag.

The 300D's shooting modes, selectable in standard fashion via the top-mounted rotary mode dial, are split into two categories: Basic Zone and Creative Zone. Basic Zone encompasses the specific scene modes, with Fully Auto, Portrait, Night portrait, Landscape, Close-up and Sport modes. Creative Zone covers Program AE, aperture and shutter priority and manual modes, as well as an automatic depth-of-field mode that attempts to adjust aperture to keep the whole of the main subject in focus.

The auto focus is flexible as well as quick. The viewfinder shows seven AF points arranged in a wide-aspect cross. You can leave the camera to decide which area of the frame to focus on – the selected point lights up red in the viewfinder to indicate this – or hold down the AF select button and spin the main selector dial to choose a single point without taking your eye from the viewfinder. In fact, everything about the camera's operation is geared to taking pictures: no matter what you're doing, whether it's changing a setting in the menu system or reviewing shots, the shutter just needs to be half-pressed and the 300D instantly returns to shooting mode.

And shooting is what the 300D is all about, offering stunning image quality. Its most obvious

asset is its sheer resolving power. With its large sensor and superior optics, the amount of detail it can tease out of a shot compared to a 5-megapixel compact is amazing. What's more, image noise performance blows the competition away – there's no discernible noise at ISO 100 and 200 settings, and very little at 400. It only becomes noticeable at ISO 800, and on a qualitative level the noise even at ISO 1,600 is only about as intense as the grain of an average ISO 800 chemical film.

The 300D isn't perfect, though. The Burst mode provides a buffer for only four shots at 2.5fps, as opposed to the nine at 3fps of the EOS 10D – a potential limitation for sports and action photography. Plus, by default, the sharpening, contrast and saturation parameters are set to +1 in Basic Zone modes, giving pictures a more appealing but less accurate hyper-real quality. These can be dialled back in the manual modes, but in Sports mode you're stuck with them, which is slightly frustrating because it's the only mode that allows continuous-tracking servo auto focus for moving targets. The extra sharpening will also increase noise on high-ISO shots. A final drawback affecting digital SLRs in general is the problem of dust finding its way onto the CMOS sensor when lenses are changed. Our test 300D did have a couple of specks that showed up on some test shots, although the camera has a sensor cleaning mode that locks the mirror up to allow for careful cleaning with an aerosol blower, if you have the nerve.

But is it as good as a traditional SLR? If you're careful about your shot setup and aware of the limitations of digital, yes. In contrasty conditions at large apertures, you'll still see some of that tell-tale chromatic fringing and the odd unnaturally clipped highlight, but once you're aware of the conditions in which these occur they're easily compensated for. The huge advantage of an SLR that's effectively loaded with five usable film speeds – from ISO 100 to 1,600 – and has zero cost per shot easily outweighs the drawbacks. In an ideal world, we'd still like to see higher pixel resolution, but as it is the incredible resolving power of the APS-C sensor and EF-S lens give the impression that this camera sports more than its 6.3 megapixels.

DAVID FEARON

PC PRO RATINGS

PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★

SPECIFICATIONS 6.3-megapixel CCD; 3,072 x 2,048 maximum optical resolution; f/3.5-f/5.6 18-55mm Canon EF-S lens (28-90mm 35mm equivalent); 1.8in TFT LCD; shutter speed 1/4,000 to 30 seconds; 100-1,600 ISO sensitivity; +/-2EV exposure compensation; evaluative, partial, centre-weighted metering; lithium ion battery. Dimensions: 142 x 72 x 99mm (WDH). Weight: 560g (body only).