Canon LiDE 500F

PRICE £100 (£117 inc VAT) **SUPPLIER** www.misco.co.uk (code: 101180)

VERDICT Great performance, quality and looks. It misses out on the Labs Winner award because of the high price compared to the Epson.

We weren't expecting any design triumphs from these budget scanners, but Canon has clearly put a lot of thought into the aesthetics of the LiDE 500F. Built around the cheaper but more compact CIS/LED image capture system, it takes up virtually no space. This is because it's only 35mm thick and can be mounted on its edge.

Dropping single photos or sheets of paper onto the platen works surprisingly well, and the lid is held shut by a pair of gentle magnets. The 500F is usefully powered by its USB 2 connection, thus cutting down on cable clutter.

Beauty is only skin deep, so it's fortunate that the 500F's looks are backed up by equally good image quality. In fact, the 150ppi skin-tone test generated colours very close to the original print and appeared in Photoshop after just nine seconds. The 600ppi colour test was excellent too. Subtle differences in shades were faithfully picked up and noise was almost absent. It was scanned in 20 seconds, placing it in the top three in the group.

The mono photo scan wasn't quite as impressive, though. The dynamic range was just slightly lower than that of the HP 4070, resulting in less detail in very dark and very light areas of the image.

Those wanting to convert documents into editable text will appreciate the inclusion of ScanSoft OmniPage 2 SE. While it isn't as good as TextBridge Pro 9 (supplied with the Xerox), it does the job well. But at 150ppi, characters had jagged edges. This doesn't affect OCR, but means the copy button on the LiDE is less useful.

Unlike scanners with integrated transparency adaptors, Canon includes an external lightbox and a holder for strips of negatives. The drawbacks to this system are that you can only scan one frame at a time, while the cheaper HP and Epson can scan multiple negatives at a time. It's also a fiddly process to get a strip correctly positioned. The bonus is that the LiDE 500F features Canon's FARE (Film Automatic Retouching and Enhancement) Level 3. While not a professional solution, the negative scan was the best of the bunch and FARE made a very good job of restoring our red-tinged photo. Our heavily scratched black-and-white print was also well restored.

Although the Canon offers superb negative scanning and useful restoration technology, it's the most expensive flatbed here by far. If you like the looks and features, the 500F is a good choice, but Epson's Perfection 2580 Photo is faster, easier to use and offers virtually the same quality for £31 less.

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