

● 5.1MP DIGITAL COMPACT CAMERA

PC PRO
A LIST

Canon Digital IXUS 55

PRICE £199 (£234 inc VAT)

DELIVERY £6 (£7 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com/uk (code: 3SZKD1)

INTERNET www.canon.co.uk

VERDICT Slim, desirable and packed with features, the premium for the IXUS 55 is easy to swallow.

The IXUS 55 is the same size as its predecessor, the IXUS 50 (see issue 129, p140): 55mm high and 24mm deep, making it perfect for trouser pockets, yet still packing in a 3x optical zoom. The preview screen on the back has gained half an inch diagonally, now standing at a generous 2.5in.

Picture quality is generally excellent, with only a few minor points for concern. Foreground subjects were well detailed, but more distant objects, such as brickwork or foliage, showed the slight mottling of JPEG artefacts when the photo was examined at 100 per cent. Brightly backlit subjects revealed slight purple fringing too. On the plus side, colours were vibrant without being oversaturated, and when printed on 6 x 4in paper, we had to look closely to spot texture averaging. The macro mode is superb, and can take pictures from less than 3cm away with no difficulty.

All the expected exposure metering options are present – evaluative, centre-weighted average and spot will cater for just about any situation.

White balance is similarly comprehensive. The automatic setting captured images to our satisfaction, but there are also manual modes to choose between two fluorescent settings, tungsten and two daylight settings, as well as an evaluative option.

The bad news is the lack of a fully manual mode or shutter/aperture priority settings. There's a Long Shutter option, which will be sufficient for night-time or flash-free snaps, but anyone looking to explore more creative or demanding situations will find it a frustration.

But it's the added features that make the IXUS 55 our compact digital of choice. Select the continuous shooting mode and you'll be able to shoot at two frames per second until your memory card is full. And although there's no panorama-compiling feature on the camera, there's a stitch assist mode that saves the last fifth of an image to help with alignment, and then Canon's user-friendly PhotoStitch software does the rest when you get to a PC.



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Not only is it improbably small, the IXUS 55 takes great pictures.

The IXUS 55 is a natural A List resident. Good looks, stacks of features, excellent image quality, plus a battery life best measured in days means this is a camera that will keep both beginners and enthusiasts happy.

DAVE STEVENSON

PC PRO RATINGS

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

SPECIFICATIONS 2,592 x 1,944 maximum optical resolution; 35-105mm equivalent, f/2.8-f/4.9 lens; 2.5in TFT LCD; shutter speed 1/1,500th to 15 seconds; 50-400 ISO sensitivity; +/-2EV exposure compensation; centre-weighted, evaluative, spot metering; 640 x 480 movie mode; SD card (16MB supplied); rechargeable lithium-ion battery. Dimensions: 86 x 22 x 55mm (WDH). Weight: 154g including battery. Part code: 0319B004AA.

● 5.1MP DIGITAL COMPACT CAMERA

HP Photosmart R817

PRICE £165 (£194 inc VAT)

DELIVERY £6 (£7 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com/uk (code: 3RFFD1)

INTERNET www.hp.co.uk

VERDICT The low price and decent image quality make the R817 a reasonable choice.

It's clear from the aggressive pricing that HP is serious about taking on Canon for supremacy of the compact digital market. And, at £34 cheaper than the IXUS 55 (see above), the R817 should give serious pause for thought to those new to digital photography.

Image quality from the R817 was generally good – the 5.1-megapixel CCD and 5x optical zoom from Pentax means you can hone in on details from a distance, but we noticed significant noise at all ISO settings.

There are some fine features though, and in some cases they're better than those on the IXUS 55. The Sports mode decreases shutter times for crisper action shots, while several bracketing modes allow you to take three quick shots with the camera adjusting either exposure, colour effects or adaptive lighting.

Continuous shooting mode is a let-down, though – the frame rate is two per second, but the R817 can take only four burst shots at a time, comparing poorly to the IXUS, which is

limited only by the size of the memory card.

But not only are there shutter and aperture priority modes, there's full manual control too. There's even a manual focus of sorts: the middle of your subject is magnified, and the up and down buttons on the rear can be used to increase and decrease the focus distance.

Both the Canon and HP cameras have an equivalent focal length of about 35mm at their widest, with HP's macro feature comparable to the IXUS. We could focus well on subjects about 3cm from the end of the lens, although quality wasn't as crisp as Canon's.

Start-up time is a little long. Whereas the IXUS 55 takes about one-and-a-half seconds to be ready to shoot, the HP isn't warmed up until three-and-a-half seconds have elapsed.

Ergonomically, the R817 takes some getting used to. The zoom button is where your thumb naturally lies when framing a shot, leading to accidental zooms. It's also undeniably chunkier than the IXUS 55.



Photographers will appreciate the manual shutter and focus modes on the R817.

There's no arguing with the quality of the R817's features. But with the IXUS 55 offering superior image quality in a smaller package, it isn't difficult to justify the extra cash.

DAVE STEVENSON

PC PRO RATINGS

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

SPECIFICATIONS 2,616 x 1,960 maximum optical resolution; 36-180mm equivalent, f/2.8-f/8 lens; 2in TFT LCD; shutter speed 1/2,000th-15 seconds; 50-400 ISO sensitivity; +/-3EV exposure compensation; centre-weighted, evaluative, spot metering; 640 x 480 movie mode; 32MB internal memory; SD card slot; rechargeable lithium-ion battery. Dimensions: 130 x 54 x 98mm (WDH). Weight: 188g including battery. Part code: L2031A.