

Snap decisions

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by Dave Fearon

Ratings

- ★★★★★ **Highly recommended**
- ★★★★☆ **Great buy**
- ★★★☆☆ **Good buy**
- ★★☆☆☆ **Shop around**
- ★☆☆☆☆ **Not recommended**

The world of photography is a simple, fuss-free place when seen through the cyber eye of a digital camera. As **resolutions rocket** and prices plummet we pick the best machines on offer.

The world of digital media is accelerating fast and digital camera manufacturers are determined to keep pace. New models barely make it to market before a successor is announced: the fact that only a few models from our last group test have survived to give a repeat performance is testament to this.

But if you wait for the perfect moment to take the digital plunge, you could easily wait forever, and now is actually a good time to buy. Multi-megapixel resolutions and improved colour reproduction mean the quality available from even mid-range cameras is becoming hard to distinguish from a scanned photo. Plus, they're all packed with features and gadgets galore to keep you occupied during the winter months.

Make no mistake, traditional film cameras still give superior overall quality, but if you're involved in new media or simply can't put up with the cost and time involved in having films developed, digital photography is now a viable alternative. We've taken 22 of the current contenders, ranging from the most basic to the highest end of the market, and assessed their image quality and value for money. Read on and be illuminated.



Agfa ePhoto 1680

The ePhoto1680 is the oldest of the trio of Agfa cameras we tested this month, but it's also still the most expensive. The 1680 delivers images at a resolution of 1,600x1,200, although this is with interpolation since the CCD's resolution is only 1,343x972. You're better off taking your shots at the 1,280x960 setting to preserve space on the measly 4MB SmartMedia card supplied.

Unlike the newer ePhoto CL30 and CL50 models, the 1680 has no optical viewfinder, so all shots must be taken using the LCD screen. However, it does have a 38 to 114mm equivalent zoom. The main body of the camera

swivels independently of the lens assembly, allowing up-and-over crowd shots to be taken.

It's relatively easy to find your way around the on-screen menu via the rotary selector wheel. The feature set is fairly standard, with white balance adjustment and manual focus modes as well as a black and white high-contrast mode for document photos. An information overlay button removes indicators and icons from the screen when in record mode, allowing the camera to be used as a video recording device via the composite video output.

The TWAIN driver gives fuss-free transfer to your chosen application, but the ageing 1680 isn't blessed with a USB port, so be prepared for long waits as images download via the serial interface. Image



quality from the 1680 is high, with vibrant, correctly-balanced colours from the studio shots, although outdoor pictures in darker conditions suffered from some banding-type effects and CCD noise. Finally, for this price we'd want a carrying case and/or a lens cap, neither of which are supplied.

PCW DETAILS

Price £586 (£499 ex VAT)

Contact Agfa 0181 231 4903

www.agfa.co.uk

Good points Easy to use, swivelling lens assembly, good image quality

Bad points 4MB card supplied, no optical viewfinder, no cover or lens cap

Conclusion The 1680 is starting to show its age

Image Quality	★★★★
Features	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★

Agfa ePhoto CL30

The CL30 has pretty much conventional styling and is the cheaper of Agfa's two newer cameras.

The CL30's native CCD resolution is 1,152x876, although as with the other Agfa cameras you can choose to exceed this with an interpolated 1,440x1,080 should you so desire, but the 4MB Compact Flash card will fill up that much quicker if you do. It's most peculiar to find a camera without a Compact Flash eject lever: we actually had to resort to a pair of pliers to pull the card out.

The CL30 is unusual in having a chunky Perspex cover over two-thirds of the back of the unit, protecting both the

1.8in TFT monitor and LCD info display above it. The top LCD comes into its own when using the optical viewfinder, which is good and clear, although it lacks any framing guide marks. The f2.8 lens has a fixed focal length of 43mm equivalent, which is augmented by the 2x digital zoom feature, something you can replicate with more flexibility in your editing software simply by cropping the image and resampling up to the desired size.

Images can be downloaded to your PC in a couple of seconds, thanks to the USB interface, but there's a serial connector as well if your desktop machine lacks the necessary ports or operating system.

Image quality is good but certainly leaves something to be desired. Low contrast is the main complaint, with consequent slightly fogged results. Colour balance was reasonable, although studio shots had a faint blue cast. Detail reproduction is good, with little evidence

of compression in high- or low-resolution modes.

The CL30 has a carrying case but, unusually in this group, lacks rechargeable batteries, charger or AC adaptor.

PCW DETAILS

Price £351 (£299 ex VAT)

Contact Agfa 0181 231 4903

www.agfa.co.uk

Good points USB port, protected LCD monitor, optical viewfinder, reasonable quality for not much money

Bad points Just 4MB memory supplied, no rechargeable batteries or AC adaptor

Conclusion Good image quality allied to a low price and thoughtful design make the CL30 a decent lower-end bet

Image Quality	★★★★
Features	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★



Agfa ePhoto CL50

Considerably more expensive than the CL30, the CL50 is also rather chunkier, some might say dowdy. Like the CL30, it's a conventional compact design, but it's just over 2in deep in the middle, rendering it chic-free.

It compensates with a good feature set though, starting with a 34-102mm equivalent zoom lens, easily operated by a thumb-rocker switch at the rear. It sports both optical viewfinder and LCD monitor for frame composition, with a flip-up 'SunCatcher' window above the LCD monitor, for using sunlight instead of the backlight to illuminate the display, thus saving power. A good idea,



but in average British conditions it's not much use.

A second, relatively unusual feature is the integrated microphone that you can use to apply up to 10 seconds of audio annotation to each of your shots. The thumbwheel rotary control used by the CL30 and 1680 are replaced by conventional buttons.

The TFT LCD monitor is protected by a Perspex overlay, while the LCD info display, used when taking shots with the optical viewfinder, is top-mounted.

The CL50's native CCD resolution of 1,343x972 (increasing to 1,600x1,200 with interpolation) makes for good detail in photos, and with an 8MB SmartMedia card you can store around 24 images at 1,280x960. The CL50 appears to use the same CCD as the 1680, since image quality is almost identical, although there was less of the banding effect with low-light

outdoor shots than the 1680. In the studio, colour balance was near-perfect and image sharpness very good, but way short of the likes of the Sony F505K. Strangely, given that the cheaper CL30 features USB, the CL50 has the painfully slow serial interface for downloading images to a PC.

PCW DETAILS

Price £499 (£425 ex VAT)

Contact Agfa 0181 231 4903

www.agfa.co.uk

Good points Zoom lens, audio recording capability, good quality

Bad points Boring looks, serial interface only

Conclusion A capable camera with some novel features, but quality isn't quite in the top league

Image Quality	★★★★
Features	★★★
Value for Money	★★★
Overall Rating	★★★

Canon PowerShot A50



The A50 picks up where the old A5 left off, representing the IXUS-styled gadget camera in Canon's current digital stable. It's very similar in appearance and build to the A5, with a brushed metal case and hefty build quality, giving it a superior feel to any of the competition. The major difference between the new model and the A5 is the higher-resolution CCD: 1.3 million pixels as opposed to 810,000.

Canon's designs reflect the company's heritage in traditional film cameras, with features such as a

conventional rotary mode selector at the top of the body being used to select record, play and PC modes. Both optical viewfinder and LCD are present. Turning the mode selector to one of the three recording modes automatically opens the lens cover and extends the 28-70mm zoom lens.

Of the recording modes, Auto record does what it says, while Program mode allows you to record images in CCD Raw format to the 8MB Compact Flash card with no compression. The Photostitch mode assists with

panorama shots: take the first shot and the image remains on-screen, offset to one side while you line up the next frame – a great idea, but it's hard to line up the shots using the reduced-size preview. The A50 is powered by a nickel-metal hydride battery pack: both it and a charger – which doubles as an AC adaptor – are included.

Image quality from the A50 is excellent and streets ahead of the A5. Outdoor shots were

particularly impressive with good detail and natural colours, although the automatic white balance reduced the green content too much when it came to the studio shots. Overall, the only thing the A50 really lacks is a USB interface.

PCW DETAILS

Price £586 (£499 ex VAT)

Contact Canon 0121 680 8062

www.canon.co.uk

Good points Sexy design, great image quality, excellent build

Bad points Automatic white balance not the best, serial interface only

Conclusion A great alternative to consumer-level 35mm compact and APS cameras, if you can afford it

Image Quality	★★★★
Features	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★



Canon PowerShot Pro70

The winner of our last digital camera group test, the PowerShot Pro70 has for some time now been the undisputed leader in the realm of digital cameras with sub-five-figure price tags. But technology is moving apace, and being long in the tooth and expensive isn't doing the Pro70 many favours.

Canon doesn't need reminding of this and is boosting the Pro70's perceived value from mid-November by bundling either a 380EX flash gun plus 48MB Compact Flash memory card or a 170MB IBM



Microdrive, but keeping the price at the current level.

The Pro70 looks like an SLR, but in fact there's a separate viewfinder. In use it's relatively heavy at 690g, although the design makes it comfortable to hold, if a little chunky. The 1.8in TFT monitor cleverly swivels round and folds against the main body of the camera to face forward when not in use, protecting it against damage.

At the right side of the body are two Compact Flash slots, and the handgrip bulge houses a fairly large lithium-ion battery, the charger for which doubles as an AC adaptor if need be.

Being aimed at the semi-professional, the Pro70 has a Program as well as a fully automatic mode. Surprisingly, though, this is aperture priority only – there's no shutter priority, unlike Nikon's Coolpix 950.

When it comes to quality, the Pro70 still has the edge. The 1,536x1,024 resolution isn't the

highest, but the results are closer to chemical film than any other camera here. The gap is closing fast, however, and the price premium on that small difference in quality is becoming difficult to justify.

PCW DETAILS

Price £1,174 (£999 ex VAT)

Contact Canon 0121 680 8062

www.canon.co.uk

Good points *The best quality there is, massive storage from bundled Microdrive*

Bad points *Bulky, no shutter priority, only just better than the Nikons and Sony in terms of quality*

Conclusion *The Pro70 is still a superb camera, but the leaner, fitter competition is snapping at this leviathan's heels*

Image Quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★★

Casio QV-5500SX

In the past, Casio has produced models with styling akin to the Minolta Dimage EX or Agfa 1680, but the 5500SX has a more conventional design. It's sleek and comfortable to hold, with mode, power and menu control buttons falling easily to hand.

One of the features that grabs you about the Casio is the colourful and stylish GUI employed by the on-screen menu system via the 1.8in TFT. It doesn't make your pictures any better, but it's pleasing to look at. There's an optical viewfinder too, with a framing guide and offset reticle for use with the

macro mode. The camera's 1.3 megapixel CCD produces pictures at a maximum resolution of 1,280x960, with three compression levels to choose from at this setting, giving file sizes of between 500 and 200KB. These are stored on an 8MB Compact Flash card.

But if you're bored of still pictures, the 5500SX will shoot AVI movies as well, albeit at 320x240 with a maximum duration of 9.6 seconds (which gives a 2MB file). This could have its uses, but we can't think of too many, particularly with the lack of audio support.

The lens has a fixed 36mm equivalent focal length, but there's a 2x or 4x digital zoom function should you feel the need. The unit comes with both case and lens cap, but there's no AC adaptor or rechargeable batteries supplied.

Results from the camera, both indoors

and out, are good, with bright, vibrant colours and a lack of artefacts either from the CCD or from compression. The lens assembly doesn't appear top-notch, however, with rather soft focus marring fine detail. But a good showing overall from a well-designed unit.

PCW DETAILS

Price £400 (£340 ex VAT)

Contact Casio 0181 450 9131

www.casio.co.uk

Good points *Sleek design, stylish GUI, good image quality, novel movie recording feature*

Bad points *Slightly soft focus, no AC adaptor or charger supplied*

Conclusion *A fine camera with some interesting features, but others in this price bracket deliver better quality*

Image Quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★★



Epson PhotoPC 800

A couple of years back, Epson's first attempts at producing a digital camera were distinctly average and rather dull. The PhotoPC 800, however, has the looks to turn a few heads and a technical specification to match.

With its 2.1 megapixel CCD, the PhotoPC 800 will turn out images with a resolution of up to 1,984x1,488 – around 10 of these will fit onto the 8MB Compact Flash card. This resolution involves some interpolation, however, so dropping to 1,600x1,200 gives results that are just as good in practice.

Slightly larger than the Canon PowerShot A50, the PhotoPC 800 takes

just two AA batteries, although rather pleasingly four nickel-metal hydride rechargeables, plus a charger, are supplied.

The unit has an optical viewfinder and a 1.8in TFT LCD monitor. The rear of the body has a surfeit of buttons to navigate the on-screen menu system – seven to be precise – which renders it less than intuitive. Image quality, flash mode and self-timer functions are set by controls on the top panel, which also bears the LCD info display for shooting without the monitor.

There's an integrated lens cover, although unlike most designs, switching the camera on and flicking open the cover have to be done separately – hardly a major effort, but one that could mean the difference between catching and missing that magic photo moment.

Interestingly, the PhotoPC 800 features adjustable sensitivity settings, from ISO100 to 400. This is a useful feature, but remember the higher the

sensitivity, the higher the CCD gain and thus the more noise will be present on your shots.

The Epson's image quality is excellent – colours are accurate, and focus is sharp. This was slightly marred by some video interference effects, however.

PCW DETAILS

Price £539 (£459 ex VAT)

Contact Epson 0800 220546

www.epson.co.uk

Good points Design to rival Canon and Fuji, high CCD resolution, fine optics

Bad points Some CCD artefacts, confusing controls

Conclusion A highly desirable little camera

Image Quality	★★★★
Features	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★



Fujifilm MX-1500



Overall, the MX-1500 is the smallest camera in this test and definitely comes under the digital jewellery heading. It's a gorgeous little thing, and arguably more desirable than the Canon A50, although the build quality isn't as high. Like most of the models here it features an optical viewfinder and LCD monitor, but the monitor is smaller than most at 1.7in, and isn't especially clear – you're better off composing shots in the optical viewfinder. Like the Epson PhotoPC 800, the MX-1500 takes just two AA batteries – rechargeable nickel-metal hydrides and charger are supplied.

The MX-1500's PC interface is the

slow serial variety, and both the serial connector, video out and AC adaptor sockets are unprotected against dust, so don't take it to the beach.

The Fuji carries a 1.5 megapixel CCD, giving 1,280x1,024 maximum image resolution. Memory comes in the form of a 4MB SmartMedia card, which is only barely acceptable these days. The lens focal length is fixed at 38mm equivalent.

The MX-1500 isn't kitted out with quite so many whizzy features as some of its counterparts: there are just automatic and manual record modes (allowing you to set white balance, exposure and flash mode), bolstered by a two-level digital zoom if you like chunky photos.

Image quality is certainly high, although it's beaten by the more expensive competition. Indoor shots suffered from incorrect white balance, and high contrast areas displayed just discernible compression artefacts, even at the highest quality setting. Outdoor shots suffered similar

artefacts, and strayed towards under-exposure.

For the price, the MX-1500 is definitely a good buy. If the best image quality is important you'll need to spend more, but this camera represents excellent value.

PCW DETAILS

Price £299 (£255 ex VAT)

Contact Fujifilm 0171 465 5745

www.fujifilm.co.uk

Good points Low price, natty design, reasonable image quality

Bad points Relatively sparse feature set, the more expensive alternatives give better quality

Conclusion A great price for a camera that looks far more expensive than it is. Definitely the one to go for if your budget is limited

Image Quality	★★
Features	★★
Value for Money	★★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★



Kodak DC215 Zoom

The first of two Kodak models in this test, the DC215 is the cheaper of the pair. This is another model that's gone for the small and sexy feel, with a brushed metal finish bearing a champagne blush. Build quality is among the best, with a solid, hefty feel.

The 215's on-screen user interface is colourful and features clever scrolling effects when reviewing the contents of the memory card. When taking shots, however, there's no information overlaid onto the preview image, and setting parameters such as exposure compensation means switching away

from the preview, which is clumsy and time-consuming. Similarly, setting image quality can't be done via a dedicated button, as with most others: you need to switch to the Preferences mode and use the on-screen menu.

This all eats up valuable battery time. When the batteries do die, they are replaced by completely removing a long battery tray, inserting the batteries and sliding the whole thing back in again: a strange design feature which is more long-winded than the standard battery door arrangement.

The DC215 has a zoom lens with an equivalent focal length range of 29-58mm. It takes standard Compact Flash memory, but loses marks for the inclusion of a card with a capacity of only 4MB. The PC interface is the yawn-inducing serial variety.

Image quality is disappointing: at the maximum 1,152x864 resolution, exposure and colour balance were fine,



but indoor shots suffered from obvious compression artefacts, while images of foliage in outdoor scenes were affected to an even greater extent, being rendered as a fuzzy mass of green. If you must have a Kodak camera, you're better off saving your money and going for the DC280.

PCW DETAILS

Price £350 (£298 ex VAT)

Contact Kodak 0870 243 0270

www.kodak.co.uk

Good points Excellent build quality, colourful menus, low price, zoom lens

Bad points Frustrating user interface, disappointing image quality

Conclusion The DC215 falls foul of the competition in most areas

Image Quality	★★★
Features	★★★
Value for Money	★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★

Kodak DC280 Zoom

The second of the Kodak entrants sports similar styling, but with a more utilitarian feel. It's about half an inch wider than the DC215, but has the same solid build quality. The two-tone grey colour scheme looks a little dull compared to the brushed silver affairs.

The DC280 has improved features over its smaller cousin: for starters, the supplied Compact Flash Card's capacity is up to a very healthy 20MB, while CCD resolution is up to 2.3 megapixels, giving output resolution of a maximum 1,760x1,168. The bizarre battery tray is not present, but has been replaced

by standard drop-in battery loading.

The DC280's on-screen menu has the same look and feel as the DC215's, but it's improved in some areas: you can change image quality without switching away from capture mode, but there's still no dedicated button to achieve the same effect. Overall, the system is a tad clunky and not best adapted for slick operation. The 280, like the Epson PhotoPC 800, has adjustable CCD sensitivity, although this can't be explicitly set - when activated, sensitivity increases automatically in low-light situations.

The DC215 was bereft of AC adaptor or rechargeable batteries, but the 280 comes with four nickel-metal hydrides, charger and travel adaptor. Instead of a blissfully fast USB connector, there's still a serial interface to contend with.

The DC280 delivered very high image quality, way ahead of the DC215: both indoor and outdoor

shots were rendered with bags of detail, and there were almost no discernible CCD or compression artefacts at the highest quality settings. The automatic exposure tended to slightly over-expose, but this can easily be corrected. The 280 may not be an ergonomic miracle, but it's got it where it counts.

PCW DETAILS

Price £600 (£511 ex VAT)

Contact Kodak 0870 243 0270

www.kodak.co.uk

Good points Superb image quality, good build, plenty of features

Bad points Not especially intuitive, quite large and chunky

Conclusion Stands out by virtue of its image quality, but ease of use isn't brilliant

Image Quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★



Konica Q-M200

Konica has managed to break the mould a little with the exterior design of the Q-M200, and the lens cover is something of a party piece: switch on the power and it glides down into the body under motor power. The rest of the camera's features are, however, very similar to most of the pack. There's an optical viewfinder as well as a 1.8in TFT LCD monitor, backed up by a top-mounted LCD numerical info display. Mode selection happens via a rotary selector, and there's a sextet of buttons at the back for controlling the on-screen menu system. Recording

quality, flash mode and self-timer can all be directly set via buttons beneath the top LCD.

Lurking behind a flap on the right-hand side of the body is an 8MB Compact Flash card. With the image quality set to the maximum 1,600x1,200 resolution and minimum compression, you'll get 11 images on the card, which increases to 40 if you choose 1,152x872 with moderate compression.

The Q-M200 is powered by three AA batteries, or there's the option of a custom lithium ion battery pack. The feature set is fairly austere overall, with the highlights limited to four photo modes. These are Sports, which sets the shutter as fast as possible; Infinity, which locks the focus for shooting landscapes; Macro for close-ups and Text, which records in monochrome.



Given the relative lack of any spectacular features, the Q-M200 needs to make up the deficit with superior image quality. And it's certainly very impressive: the uniform white background of the studio shots was rendered with no CCD noise or other artefacts, and the outdoor shots showed no confusion around areas of dense foliage.

PCW DETAILS

Price £550 (£468 ex VAT)

Contact Konica 0181 751 6121

www.konica.co.uk

Good points Groovy lens cover, great quality

Bad points A bit samey and uninspiring features-wise

Conclusion It's good, but other models outshine the Q-M200

Image Quality	★★★★
Features	★★★
Value for Money	★★
Overall Rating	★★★

Minolta Dimage EX Zoom 1500

The Dimage EX is one of the more challenging cameras in this test, and features the less conventional separated body and swivelling lens form factor. The main impression one gets when first switching on is confusion: there are 17 controls and buttons, and working out how to adjust even the basic settings is less than intuitive.

The EX is a tad pricey, but you do get a bundle of extras for your money. The best of these is the SanDisk external Compact Flash reader. This is a parallel port device which acts as a solid state drive when a

Compact Flash card is inserted, allowing you to transfer your pictures to the host PC in a couple of seconds rather than the several minutes it would take via the serial port. Ideally we'd prefer the USB connection on the more modern cameras, but it's a great time-saver nonetheless. As well as the CF reader, there's an extra 8MB card (for a total of 16MB), four rechargeable batteries plus charger, an AC adaptor and Adobe Photoshop 4.0 LE.

Increasing the frustration of the tricky controls is the fact that the manual is supplied on CD-ROM – not much good when you're out in the field. Rather bizarrely, to download your pictures via the serial interface you need to remove the detachable lens module – the point of which escapes us.



The EX's 1.5 megapixel CCD produces images at a maximum of 1,344x1,008, and the resulting quality was reasonably high, but with some reservations. Colour balance was somewhat awry, with over-enthusiastic reds. Detail was excellent, however, with very little CCD noise.

PCW DETAILS

Price £600 (£511 ex VAT)

Contact Minolta 01908 200 400

www.minoltaeurope.com

Good points High image quality with good detail, fine bundle of extras

Bad points Hard to use, manuals on CD-ROM, poor colour rendition

Conclusion One to consider if you're prepared to learn how to work it

Image Quality	★★★★
Features	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★

Mustek VDC-300

The VDC-300 is the first incarnation of a camera that also goes by the name of the Trust Photocam LCD: they're the same model rebadged. With its budget origins, it's no surprise that the build quality of the Mustek feels a little less than first-class. But although it's plasticky, it doesn't feel as if it'll fall apart any time soon.

It scores over some more expensive models in ease of use: there's just the one automatic picture mode, although you can adjust exposure up or down by a couple of stops, and there are white balance settings for artificial

light and sunlight. Memory is an internal, non-removable 2MB, which can be augmented via the Compact Flash slot in the side of the unit.

Image quality options are limited to Economy, Standard and Fine, which give the same 640x480 resolution but with allegedly different compression levels. To be honest, the settings are difficult to tell apart, being uniformly awful. The background of the studio shots was speckled with CCD noise, contrast was low and focus was fuzzy.

Outdoors there was a slight perceived increase in quality, but the low resolution still made it impossible to pick out any detail. The VDC-300 has fixed, rather than automatic focus, which goes some way to explaining the excessively poor studio results.

Still, the Mustek

does have one saving grace, apart from the price: the USB connection. This is something that most of the more expensive cameras can't boast, and means your images will download via the TWAIN driver in the blink of an eye. If you live for USB, buy the VDC-300. If you live for quality, don't.

PCW DETAILS

Price £187 (£159 ex VAT)

Contact Evesham Micros
0800 038 0800

www.mustek-europe.com

Good points USB connection, price, simplicity

Bad points Very poor image quality, tacky build

Conclusion There's no way we can recommend the VDC-300

Image Quality	★
Features	★★
Value for Money	★★★
Overall Rating	★★



Nikon Coolpix 700



Nikon has a formidable reputation among the traditional film camera fraternity for producing some of the best SLRs available. In the digital realm, too, Nikon is a name to be reckoned with, but it's not the undisputed leader.

The Coolpix 700 is the cheaper of two Nikons this month, with more conventional and compact styling than its larger brother. The matt black finish gives it a traditional look, and it's extremely comfortable to hold by virtue of the protruding grip that also serves to house its four AA batteries.

Being aimed at the semi-

professional, the 700 is replete with the expected manual mode and features such as matrix, centre-weighted or spot metering plus adjustable CCD sensitivity, but it also has a couple of other tricks up its sleeve. One of the most unusual features is the BSS (best shot selection) mode. This is designed for use in macro or low-light situations where camera shake may be a problem: the camera shoots up to 10 photos, then attempts to analyse them and selects the one with the most detail. In practise it works surprisingly well.

The on-screen menu system is well-designed and allows control of the camera with one hand.

There are just four buttons on the rear of the unit, with the shutter acting as a selector button when navigating menus.

Results from the 700 via its 2.1 megapixel CCD are truly impressive. The studio shots produced wonderfully clean, natural-looking images at 1,600x1,200 with great

detail: the only gripe was a little blooming around high-contrast edges. Outdoor results were similarly competent, with the automatic exposure right on the money and amazing detail to boot. This is a great camera that exudes quality and competent design.

PCW DETAILS

Price £499 (£425 ex VAT)

Contact Nikon 0800 230 220

www.nikon.co.uk

Good points Packed with advanced features yet easy to use, superlative image quality, great price

Bad points No zoom, but that's about it

Conclusion If you're looking for quality in a compact case, the Coolpix 700 is it

Image Quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★★



Nikon Coolpix 950

After the brilliant performance of the Coolpix 700, we wanted to see how its larger, more expensive stable mate fared. The Coolpix 950 bears a CCD with the same technical performance: 2.1 megapixels giving 1,600x1,200 maximum resolution images.

The primary difference is the 38-115mm equivalent zoom lens and separated body/swivelling lens design. In addition there are programmed aperture and shutter-priority modes for controlling depth of field and shooting fast-moving objects: these will be familiar to owners of conventional 35mm SLR cameras.

The LCD monitor is slightly larger than the



Coolpix 700's at 2in, although the difference in quality isn't especially marked: they're both very clear with a fast refresh rate. The menu system is virtually identical and again can be operated quite easily with one hand. One control the 950 has that the 700 lacks is a rotary dial under the index finger, used for scrolling through options such as manual focus range.

Like the Coolpix 700, the 950 will record in 640x480, 1,024x768 or 1,600x1,200 resolutions using three selectable levels of jpeg compression. There's also the option, when in Manual mode, to select 1,600x1,200 with lossless TIFF compression, although you'll only get one image on the 8MB Compact Flash card supplied.

Image quality results were, unsurprisingly, almost identical to those from the Coolpix 700: in other words absolutely fabulous, with auto-exposure completely unruffled by a landscape scene with a bright sky, bringing out ground detail with amazing finesse where other cameras

rendered the foreground in silhouette.

Being £300 dearer than the Coolpix 700, you'll have to ask yourself if you really need that zoom lens. But should you find you do, you won't regret buying the Coolpix 950.

PCW DETAILS

Price £799 (£680 ex VAT)

Contact Nikon 0800 230 220

www.nikon.co.uk

Good points Image quality, zoom lens, aperture and shutter priority modes

Bad points The same image quality as the Coolpix 700, but far more expensive

Conclusion Superb quality, but unless you really need the zoom the 700 is better value

Image Quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★★

Olympus Camedia C-2000 Zoom

In contrast to its ultra-modern partner, Olympus' higher-end camera has a real retro look about it. The C-2000 sports a 2.1 megapixel CCD, giving image resolutions of 1,600x1,200 to the 920's 1,280x960. The zoom lens has a generous 35-105mm equivalent range, which equates to 3x magnification, from wide to telephoto. An interesting inclusion is a tiny infra red remote control, which not only lets you release the shutter automatically, but allows you to alter the zoom as well.

In keeping with its semi-professional image, the C-2000 has both aperture and shutter priority shooting modes as well as the standard auto mode. When using aperture or shutter priority, the currently selected aperture/shutter speed setting is displayed in the 1.8in LCD monitor, and can be nudged up and down via the four-way rocker switch which falls conveniently beneath the thumb. CCD sensitivity can also be altered between 100 and 400 ISO, but the standard warnings about increased noise levels at higher sensitivity settings apply here as much as anywhere else.

Out in the field, the C-2000 feels very similar to the Nikon Coolpix 700, and controlling it with one hand is just as easy as all the controls are in the right places.

Olympus digital cameras all use SmartMedia for image storage, and the C-2000 comes with 8MB as standard.

The test shots we took with the C-2000 had a superbly clean, balanced look to them that was reminiscent of the Nikons. CCD

noise was virtually non-existent, but the C-2000's focus was slightly soft, with a consequent loss of detail. This is all relative of course: the 2000 is among the top dogs here. But overall it's not quite the winner in the quality stakes.

PCW DETAILS

Price £600 (£511 ex VAT)

Contact Olympus 0800 072 0070

www.olympus-europa.com

Good points Ergonomic design, cool retro looks, superbly balanced picture quality

Bad points Not quite as good as the Nikons, soft focus, design may not appeal to everyone

Conclusion A capable high-end performer, but take a look at Nikon, Canon and Sony too

Image Quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★★



Olympus C-920 Zoom

The second in the Olympus pair is the C-920 Zoom, which in contrast to the esoteric C-2000 is more consumer-oriented. The unit's styling is very much in the vein of Olympus' conventional 35mm compact and APS cameras. Sliding back the lens cover automatically switches the unit on and extends the 35-105mm zoom lens.

There are nine small buttons on the back panel of the 920 to the right of the 1.8in TFT LCD monitor, and it's by no means immediately obvious which does what: we much prefer the simpler, more menu-driven system of the C-2000. Despite all the buttons, it's not

possible to set the capture quality without resorting to the on-screen menus. Once you do work the system out, however, you'll find that the C-920 incorporates many of the functions of the C-2000, including CCD sensitivity adjustment and spot metering, but excluding the aperture and shutter priority modes. Like the C-2000, the 920's highest resolution can be recorded with lossless TIFF compression, which can be useful if you need shots at the highest possible quality: the generous 16MB SmartMedia card lets you store a few frames. The unit has a panoramic assist mode, but simply provides an on-screen guide to indicate recommended overlap, rather than displaying the edge of the last frame as with the Canon's Photostitch feature.

Neither the C-920 nor C-2000 include an AC adaptor, which is rather annoying, and neither has a TWAIN driver: the standalone Camedia application has to be

used for image download via the serial interface.

The image quality resulting from the C-920 is good, but less refined than the C-2000, with crisp focus marred by a slight vertical banding effect. Overall a good performer, but a little quirky for our tastes.

PCW DETAILS

Price £450 (£383 ex VAT)

Contact Olympus 0800 072 0070

www.olympus-europa.com

Good points Consumer styling, plenty of features

Bad points Quirky operation, CCD artefacts

Conclusion The highest quality of the consumer-oriented cameras, but not the most appealing in features or design respects

Image Quality	★★★★
Features	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★



Ricoh RDC-5000

Originally, Ricoh's cameras stood out from the crowd with their unusual, flat 110-style appearance, but the company now seems to have decided to conform more closely to conventional standards. The RDC-5000 isn't entirely run-of-the-mill in its design, however.

It does sport the now *de rigueur* combination of optical viewfinder and 1.8in TFT LCD monitor, but the monitor is cleverly protected by an opaque plastic shield that's drawn back when the camera's power switch is flipped across. The unit also supports both internal and external memory, with 8MB of storage lurking in the

bowels of the unit that can be bolstered by a SmartMedia card.

The RDC-5000 has a 2.3 megapixel CCD, producing images at 1,792x1,200, 896x600 or 640x480 resolutions in any of three compression levels.

The rear of the camera is refreshingly uncluttered, and the on-screen menu system is driven by just two buttons in conjunction with the rocker switch used to control the 38-86mm equivalent zoom lens. The top of the unit simply houses the rotary mode selector and dedicated buttons for image quality, self timer, flash mode and internal/external memory selector.

The LCD monitor itself was by far the easiest to see in bright sunlight, and the menu system is straightforward and easy to use.

When it came to image quality, the RDC-5000 put in an excellent performance, focus was up there with the sharpest in the studio tests, but there was no

lossless compression mode, and artefacts were noticeable close-up. External shots were over-exposed, but as with other cameras this is correctable.

With a lossless compression mode, the 5000 could have been a contender for the image quality honours.

PCW DETAILS

Price £764 (£650 ex VAT)

Contact Ricoh 01782 753322

www.ricoh-cameras.co.uk

Good points Fine image quality, internal and external memory support, uncluttered layout, protected LCD monitor

Bad points Compression artefacts, auto exposure not great

Conclusion A distinctive camera from Ricoh shows the company hasn't gone all conformist on us

Image Quality	★★★★
Features	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★





Sony Cybershot DSC-F505K

If there's one camera in this test that makes everyone salivate, this is it. With the 505 Sony has gone out on a limb, and the gamble has paid off. The design isn't simply a gimmick, however: it works superbly when the camera is used in anger.

The 505 is one of only two models in this test not to include an optical viewfinder, so you're relying on the 2in TFT for all picture composition. As such, battery life is an important factor, and the Infolithium 'intelligent' lithium-ion battery gives a



constant readout of remaining battery life in minutes. The 505 has a Carl Zeiss 38-190mm equivalent zoom lens: Zeiss is legendary for its optics, so this is a

pretty good start. When you first pick up the camera, it's difficult to use until you get used to the idea of holding the lens rather than the body: after that it's perfectly natural, and all the controls fall easily to hand.

The 505 uses Sony's Memory Stick media rather than Compact Flash or SmartMedia. It's a shame that only 4MB is supplied, especially given its special trick: it'll record MPEG video with sound. Like the Casio's similar feature, this is something of a gimmick, although the higher space efficiency of MPEG allows several minute-long 160 x 120 or 15-second 320x240 bursts of video to fit onto the Memory Stick. It's not exactly high quality however.

The 505's 2.1 megapixel CCD gives a maximum 1,600x1,200 resolution output. With the USB interface, images are downloaded in a second or two. Image

quality is up there with the best, and the Zeiss lens gives the sharpest results of all. The Nikons are superior when it comes to colour reproduction, but the Sony shares their supremely capable auto-exposure ability.

PCW DETAILS

Price £700 (£596 ex VAT)

Contact Sony 0990 111 999

www.sel.sony.com

Good points Completely desirable, image quality almost equal with the Nikons, huge zoom range

Bad points Lack of optical viewfinder may be a hindrance in some circumstances, lacks the advanced program modes of some others

Conclusion A consumer's dream, and worthy of the professional too

Image Quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★★
Overall Rating	★★★★★

Trust Photocam Plus

It's rather ironic that the Photocam Plus comes directly after the Sony 505, since they're the proverbial chalk and cheese. This is the cheapest and, dare we say it, the nastiest camera on test. Looking on the bright side, it does have a kind of special charm. It's very small and extremely light, and comes with its own carrying case and an AC adaptor. When not plugged into the mains it's powered by a lithium (that's lithium, not lithium-ion) CR123A camera battery.

Memory comes in the form of a strange little memory stick that contains 2MB: enough for

26 pictures in the Standard quality mode or eight when recording in the heady heights of Fine quality. It's the only camera here to have an optical viewfinder and no LCD monitor. The lens is fixed focus, and consequently very wide-angle.

The Photocam plus has four controls: power, shutter release, erase, and a switch to select between Standard or Fine quality (320x240 or 640x480). A press of the shutter is accompanied by a satisfying mechanical 'clunk'.

Image quality is absolutely hideous.

This is real first-generation stuff, with low contrast, low detail and lots of compression artefacts. The optical viewfinder is somewhat wide of the mark close-up, leading to interestingly offset results with the studio-based tests.

Predictably enough, the Photocam Plus has a serial interface. The

TWAIN driver works well enough,

and incorporates a live video feature, whereby the camera chucks its real-time video output down the serial connection and lets you record (very) low quality AVIs.

The Photocam Plus is kind of sweet in an unpretentious toy-like way. It may make a good gift for a child, or possibly a teenager starting up a website, but that's about it.

PCW DETAILS

Price £120 (£102 ex VAT)

Contact Trust 0800 328 0261

www.trust.com

Good points Small, light, cheap

Bad points Not that cheap, abysmal image quality, low resolution

Conclusion One for the children. Possibly

Image Quality	★
Features	★
Value for Money	★
Overall Rating	★



Trust Photocam LCD

Hot on the heels of the Photocam Plus comes the slightly more upmarket Photocam LCD. It is in fact the same camera as the Mustek VDC-300 with a very slightly redesigned front.

Compared to the Photocam Plus it's very advanced, with optical viewfinder and LCD monitor, complete with a moderately comprehensive on-screen menu system allowing adjustment of flash mode, quality mode, white balance, exposure compensation and even such minutiae as LCD brightness and video output format (PAL or NTSC). There's a self-timer too, complete

with adjustable delay. The only mechanical exposure control is a manual front-mounted slider that switches the aperture between f8 and f2.8. The lens is fixed focus, in other words sufficiently wide-angle not to need focusing. Top-mounted controls are limited to power, shutter release and mode switch, the latter switching between record and playback modes: the top-mounted LED changes colour to indicate which you're currently in.

At the side of the camera behind a rubber flap are DC in, composite video out, serial interface and the USB port for swift, fuss-free transfer of your images. The TWAIN driver works perfectly well with the USB port, and images are sent across in just a few seconds.

Being identical to the Mustek, you might assume the results from the two cameras would be the same. But you'd be wrong, because identical performance requires

calibration, and calibration costs money. As it is, the colour balance from the Photocam LCD shows excessive green bias, whereas the Mustek showed excessive reds. Both are similar in that the results are awful, with low contrast and very little detail resolution. In summary, the Photocam LCD just isn't worth bothering with.



PCW DETAILS

Price £200 (£170 ex VAT)

Contact Trust 0800 328 0261

www.trust.com

Good points USB interface, price

Bad points Poor image quality, poor build

Conclusion Spend your money on something else

Image Quality	★
Features	★★
Value for Money	★★★
Overall Rating	★★

Trust Photocam LCD Pro

Presumably the 'Pro' in Trust's last entrant is supposed to indicate that professionals use it, but we'd be awfully surprised if the professionals in question were professional photographers.

The LCD Pro follows the Trust tradition of relatively cheap and cheerful products. The upright design, with the camera taller than it is wide is pretty comfortable in the hand, although you need to be careful not to obscure the flash with your middle finger. The LCD Pro has the full feature complement of optical viewfinder, LCD TFT monitor and top-mounted LCD info display. Seven buttons arranged around the monitor screen control record and playback functions.

Like the other two Trust offerings, the LCD Pro has a wide-angle, fixed-focus lens that considerably reduces complexity and cost. A manual

slider switches between normal and macro modes, with macro mode fixing the focus at 25cm.

The LCD Pro comes with 4MB of internal RAM as standard, expandable via the unit's Compact Flash slot. The CCD has a claimed 810,000 pixel resolution, enough for images of 1,024x768 in high-quality mode.

The LCD Pro's quality isn't exactly anything to write home about, but to be fair it is good enough for reasonably undemanding applications. The colour balance in the studio shots was somewhat wide of the mark, and focus tails off considerably towards the edges of the frame.

There's no contest in comparison with the likes of Nikon, Canon and Sony, but it delivers sufficiently good results for estate agents to use, especially since the outdoor shots actually showed fair auto exposure, and

webmasters may find it acceptable too. But when you consider that for the same price you can get hold of Fujifilm's infinitely superior MX-1500, the LCD Pro's meagre attractions pale into the background.



PCW DETAILS

Price £300 (£255 ex VAT)

Contact Trust 0800 328 0261

www.trust.com

Good points Acceptable image quality for undemanding applications, low cost

Bad points Fixed-focus lens, relatively low resolution, very poor colour rendition

Conclusion Not worth considering when you can get Fujifilm's MX-1500 for the same price

Image Quality	★★
Features	★★
Value for Money	★★
Overall Rating	★★

How we tested

The major advantage of digital photography is its convenience and speed, not to mention the lower running costs. But it goes without saying that a vitally important aspect of any camera is the quality of the images it can produce. To properly assess their image-making ability we used two distinct sets of tests.

First, we set up a controlled studio environment with a still life scene. This was lit using special daylight simulation bulbs to match everyday lighting conditions more closely. The lighting was deliberately fairly low intensity: this tends to show up electrical noise in

CCDs and electronics as they increase the gain to compensate. Each camera was mounted on a tripod and a shot taken in the highest resolution and lowest compression mode available, with integrated flash units forced off. Although white balance, focus and exposure are manually adjustable on many of the cameras, we kept them all set to automatic, partly to maintain a level playing field, but mainly because this is the setting that the vast majority of owners will use them on.

Then we took the cameras out in the field and tested them in anger, to

highlight any ergonomic problems. We took a shot with each from the same location, all within half an hour to try and keep lighting conditions as constant as possible. We made sure we took outdoor photos in situations that would be tricky for automatic exposure, and also ensured that there were leaves and foliage in shot to highlight poor compression schemes. Then we looked at the results and assessed each camera for overall detail, colour reproduction, lack of distortion from CCD and/or compression, and picked the top performers.

The future of storage

A major disadvantage from which most digital cameras currently suffer is a lack of memory. Whereas a film camera can store 36 huge-resolution, full-quality pictures, most digital models manage less than 10 at their highest quality settings, and often just one or two when a lossless compression scheme is available.

Solutions are arriving, though, from two different sources. First and most exciting is IBM with its Microdrive technology, and second is Iomega with its Clik drive.

IBM's Microdrives are a marvel of miniaturisation of which any Sony engineer would be proud. They are

housed in a standard ATA-compatible Compact Flash II package, yet contain a real hard disk drive, currently in capacities of either 170MB or 340MB. By

the time you read this, Canon will be providing the 170MB

variant as standard with its PowerShot Pro70, and they should be available to buy separately very soon.

Pricing is yet to be announced, but they should certainly set you back considerably less than a standard

Compact Flash RAM card of similar capacity. It's unclear at the moment exactly how compatible the drives will be with existing devices, but there should be few problems.

▲ THE MICRODRIVE WILL LET DIGITAL CAMERAS STORE AS MANY PICTURES AS A CELLULOID FILM



Iomega's

Clik drive has been some years in preparation: the company announced the product well over a year ago. We've yet to see a camera with an integrated drive, but the separate external version is already available: so we may see a camera with an integrated drive before the year is out.

Clik drives use proprietary, metal-shelled 40MB disks, just 25mm by 25mm across and 1mm thick. Although the combination of a single disk and drive is more bulky overall with lower capacity than the Microdrive, a pack of 10 disks only costs around £80.

So both technologies have their advantages. If you want to be able to store an excessive amount of images on one card, IBM's Microdrive is perfect. But if you want to be able to carry multiple storage cards like traditional film, Iomega's Clik will suit.

◀ CLIK DRIVES ARE A CONVENIENT SOURCE OF REMOVABLE STORAGE BUT, ABOVE ALL, THEY'RE CHEAP



Focus on still life

Each of these shots was taken in a controlled studio environment. The cameras were set to the highest-quality settings. Also, the lowest possible compression ratio was used when saving each file, with raw CCD data selected for the cameras that would allow this. Each camera was judged for image quality both on the indoor and outdoor sample shots.

The images on these pages only give an indication of the quality of each camera. Due to the way magazines are printed, each image is put through many different processes before it appears on the page. Also, because of the varying resolutions of each camera, differing amounts of magnification have been used with each image to produce these samples.

AGFA ePHOTO 1680



AGFA ePHOTO CL30



AGFA ePHOTO CL50



CANON POWERSHOT A50



CANON POWERSHOT PRO 70



CASIO QV-5500SX



EPSON PHOTOPC 800



FUJIFILM MX-1500



KODAK DC215 ZOOM



KODAK DC280 ZOOM



KONICA Q-M200



MINOLTA DIMAGE EX ZOOM 1500



MUSTEK VDC-300



NIKON COOLPIX700



NIKON COOLPIX950



OLYMPUS C-2000 ZOOM



OLYMPUS C-920 ZOOM



RICOH RDC-5000



SONY CYBERSHOT DSC-F505K



TRUST PHOTOCAM PLUS



TRUST PHOTOCAM LCD



TRUST PHOTOCAM LCD PRO



Table of features



MANUFACTURER	AGFA	AGFA	AGFA	CANON	CANON
MODEL NAME	EPHOTO 1680	EPHOTO CL30	EPHOTO CL50	POWERSHOT A50	POWERSHOT PRO70
Price inc VAT	£586	£351	£499	£586	£1,174
Phone	0181 231 4903	0181 231 4903	0181 231 4903	0121 680 8062	0121 680 8062
URL	www.agfa.co.uk	www.agfa.co.uk	www.agfa.co.uk	www.canon.co.uk	www.canon.co.uk
Lens focal length (35mm eq)	38-114mm	43mm	38-114mm	28-70mm	28-70mm
Max lens aperture	f2.8 to f3.5	f2.8	f2.8 to f4.7	f2.6 to f4	f2.0 to f2.4
Macro mode	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Max optical resolution	1,343x972	1,158x876	1,343x972	1,280x960	1,536x1,024
Max interpolated resolution	1,600x1,200	1,440x1,080	1,600x1,200	N/A	N/A
Other resolutions	1,280x960, 640x480	1,152x864, 640x480	1,280x960, 640x480	640x480	768x512
Int/ext memory	4MB ext	4MB ext	8MB ext	8MB ext	48MB or 170MB ext
External memory type	SmartMedia	Compact Flash	SmartMedia	Compact Flash	Compact Flash or Microdrive
AC adaptor included	X	X	X	✓	✓
Video out	✓	✓	✓+audio	✓	✓
Image-editing software	PhotoWise v1.6	PhotoWise 1.7	PhotoWise 1.8	MGI PhotoSuite SE	Ulead PhotoImpact 4
Lens cover	X	X	X	✓	✓
Optical viewfinder	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrying case	X	✓	✓	X	X
LCD monitor size	2in	1.8in	2in	1.8in	1.8in
Data transfer method	serial	USB, serial	serial	serial	serial
Rechargeable batts+charger	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Flash	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Dimensions (wxdxh)	157x92x52	128x37x80	131x56x72	103x37x68	145x132x85
Weight excluding battery	380g	265g	300g	260g	690g



MANUFACTURER	MINOLTA	MUSTEK	NIKON	NIKON	OLYMPUS
MODEL NAME	DIMAGE EX ZOOM 1500	VDC-300	COOLPIX700	COOLPIX950	C-2000 ZOOM
Price inc VAT	£600	£187	£499	£799	£600
Phone	01908 200 400	Evesham 0800 038 0800	0800 230 220	0800 230 220	0800 072 0070
URL	www.minoltaeurope.com	www.mustek-europe.com	www.nikon.co.uk	www.nikon.co.uk	www.olympus-europa.com
Lens focal length (35mm eq)	38-115mm	approx 28mm	35mm	38-115mm	35-105mm
Max lens aperture	f3.5 to f5.6	f2.8	f2.6	f2.6 to f4	f2 to f2.8
Macro mode	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Max optical resolution	1,344x1,008	640x480	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200
Max interpolated resolution	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other resolutions	640x480	N/A	640x480	640x480	1,024x768, 640x480
Int/ext memory	16MB ext	2MB int	8MB ext	8MB ext	8MB ext
External memory type	Compact Flash	Compact Flash (not inc)	Compact Flash	Compact Flash	SmartMedia
AC adaptor included	✓	✓	X	X	X
Video out	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Image-editing software	Adobe Photoshop 4.0 LE	None	None	None	None
Lens cover?	X	X	X	X	✓
Optical viewfinder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrying case	✓	X	✓	✓	X
LCD monitor size	2in	1.8in	1.8in	2in	1.8in
Data transfer method	serial/CF reader	USB, serial	serial	serial	serial
Rechargeable batts+charger	✓	X	X	X	X
Flash	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dimensions (wxdxh)	128x59x68	145x54x73	114x39x67	143x37x77	108x66x74
Weight excluding battery	310g	240g	270g	350g	305g

					
CASIO	EPSON	FUJIFILM	KODAK	KODAK	KONICA
QV-5500SX	PHOTOPC 800	MX-1500	DC215 ZOOM	DC280 ZOOM	Q-M200
£400	£539	£299	£350	£600	£550
0181 450 9131	0800 220 546	0171 465 5745	0870 243 0270	0870 243 0270	0181 751 6121
www.casio.co.uk	www.epson.co.uk	www.fujifilm.co.uk	www.kodak.co.uk	www.kodak.co.uk	www.konica.co.uk
36mm	38mm	38mm	29-58mm	30-60mm	38mm
f2.8	f2.4	f2.6	f4 to f4.8	f3 to f3.8	f3.2
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1,280x960	1,600x1,200	1,280x1,024	1,152x864	1,760x1,168	1,600x1,200
N/A	1,984x1,488	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
640x480, 320x240AVI, 160x120AVI	640x480	640x480	640x480	896x592	1,152x872, 640x480
8MB ext	8MB ext	4MB ext	4MB ext	20MB ext	8MB ext
Compact Flash	Compact Flash	SmartMedia	Compact Flash	Compact Flash	Compact Flash
X	X	X	X	X	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
None	Presto! Mr Photo	Adobe PhotoDeluxe 3	Adobe PhotoDeluxe 2	Adobe PhotoDeluxe 1	Konica Image Processing plug-in
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	X	X	X	✓
1.8in	1.8in	1.7in	1.8in	1.8in	1.8in
serial	serial	serial	serial	serial	serial
X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
131x43x69	113x36x68	104x31x70	115x43x68	133x52x76	122x42x727
250g	235g	250g	303g	342g	270g
					
OLYMPUS	RICOH	SONY CYBERSHOT	TRUST	TRUST	TRUST
C-920 ZOOM	RDC-5000	DSC-F505K	PHOTOCAM PLUS	PHOTOCAM LCD	PHOTOCAM LCD PRO
£450	£764	£700	£120	£200	£300
0800 072 0070	01782 753 322	0990 111 999	0800 328 0261	0800 328 0261	0800 328 0261
www.olympus-europa.com	www.ricoh-cameras.co.uk	www.sel.sony.com	www.trust.com	www.trust.com	www.trust.com
35-105mm	38-86mm	38-190mm	approx 28mm	approx 28mm	approx 28mm
f2.8 to f4.4	f2.8 to f3.2	f2.8 to f3.3	f4 to f11	f2.8	f3.5
✓	✓	✓	X	X	yes
1,280x960	1,792x1,200	1,600x1,200	640x480	640x480	1,024x768
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
640x480	896x600, 640x480	1,024x768, 640x480, 320x240	320x240	N/A	640x480
16MB ext	8MB int	4MB ext	2MB ext	2MB int	4MB internal
SmartMedia	SmartMedia (not inc)	Sony Memory Stick	Proprietary memory stick	Compact Flash (not inc)	Compact Flash (not inc)
X	X	✓	✓	✓	yes
✓	✓	✓	yes, via serial interface	✓	yes
None	Arcsoft Camera Suite	PictureGear 3.2Lite	None	None	MGI PhotoSuite
✓	X	✓	X	X	no
✓	✓	X	✓	✓	yes
X	✓	X	✓	X	yes
1.8in	1.8in	2in	N/A	1.8in	1.8in
serial	serial	USB, serial	serial	USB, serial	USB, serial
X	X	✓	X	X	no
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	yes
127x53x67	131x45x69	107x136x62	123x34x60mm	145x54x73	85x107x45
270g	315g	435g	approx 200g	240g	250g

Editor's Choice

If there's one thing that seeing the latest batch of digital cameras has shown us, it's that the manufacturers aren't bringing out new models for the sake of it.

Quality and features are improving, while prices are dropping. At the outset of this test, we were worried that manufacturers were concentrating too much on the CCD numbers game, giving ever higher resolution figures while ignoring other factors which are at least as important as raw pixel count. Our fears have proved groundless, however, as not only pixel resolution but also overall image quality is coming along in leaps and bounds.

▶ **NIKON'S HIGH QUALITY AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE PROVES TO BE UNBEATABLE**



The Coolpix 700 really shows its heritage: it's a photographer's rather than a computer freak's camera, eschewing the

image results, but the Carl Zeiss optics of the F505K give Nikon's lenses a run for their money, earning Sony a **Highly Commended** award.

↪ **The middle ground** was hotly contested, but in the end a **Highly Commended** award goes to **Canon's** second entrant, the **PowerShot A50**, for image quality significantly ahead of main rivals Agfa, Epson and Casio, all packed into that desirable silver

casing. With its IXUS APS camera range, Canon is the undisputed



▶ **AT THE LOWER END OF THE MARKET, FUJIFILM SCOOPS AN AWARD WITHOUT SKIMPING ON IMAGE QUALITY**

king of consumer film cameras, and the same design ethic has been applied to the

A50. The images produced by the camera owe a lot to PowerShot Pro70, with a similarly crisp rendering of details showing few quality flaws.

↪ **As such, it's been a tough test** for the older models in this group,

glitzy gadget styling for a tremendously solid body that's reminiscent of 1960s and 1970s 35mm compact designs. Both physical controls and the on-screen menu system are well laid out, so the powerful feature set is a boon rather than a barrier between you and the shots you want.

It was a tough choice quality-wise between the Nikons and Sony's gadget-tastic DSC-F505K, but in the end we preferred the Coolpix's natural-looking images.

↪ **Sony most definitely deserves** recognition for the **DSC-F505K's** ground-breaking features. Hailing from the opposite end of the design spectrum to the

Coolpix 700, the F505K's overtly technologically-influenced design hasn't meant compromises in the all-important quality stakes. Not so long ago, Sony's cameras were derided by many for their poor



▼ **THE STYLISH POWERSHOT A50 IS LEAGUES AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION IN THE MID-RANGE**

↪ **And finally**, at the lower range of the price scale, **Fujifilm's** diminutive **MX-1500** wins our last **Highly Commended** award for

being the cheapest camera to retain decent image quality, while still managing to exude that cool technochic the other lower-end models completely fail to replicate. □



▲ **SONY'S BELLS AND WHISTLES EFFORT IS STILL A DESERVING AND WELL-CRAFTED MACHINE**

particularly the reigning

quality champion, Canon's PowerShot Pro70. As, the most expensive camera here, it still just manages to hang on to the top image quality crown, but as far as the Editor's Choice goes, it's been dethroned. Why? Because for less than half the price of the PowerShot you can get quality that comes within a hair's breadth of the more expensive model, in a package that's small and superbly put together. That package goes by the name of the **Nikon Coolpix 700**, and it therefore garners the **Editor's Choice** award this time around.

