

Product Information:

Model-MVC FD71

Manufactured by: Sony Computer Products

MSRP: \$699

System Requirements

System 7.5 or later

Macintosh PC Exchange

A program to view JPEGs

Surprises in life are fun. Unexpected, very pleasant surprises are rare enough to be a real treat. The Sony Mavica FD-71 has been such a pleasant surprise, and so much fun, that I can no longer imagine not having one. My wife has spent some time as a professional photographer; so when the time came to buy a digital camera for her, I knew not just any one would do. After months of investigation, talking to owners and reading a myriad of reviews, I discovered two things.

First, I became very weary of computer product reviewers who touted the camera they reviewed as “the next great thing” in the beginning of a review, only to list so many problems with the product in the latter part of the review that I couldn’t imagine buying one!

Second, I learned that no matter how good a digital camera is, a decent quality 35mm film camera will outperform it, hands down. Much like the argument that CDs can never sound as good as a decent LP, due to the inherent digital sampling of an analog product, digital images are nothing more than “sampled” pixels of a real image. I decided to center my search on two criteria: Ease of use and battery life. So many of the Mega-pixel cameras seemed to have downloading difficulties and short battery life expectancy that I kept coming back to the Digital Mavica format. When I finally got a chance to use a friend’s older FD-7, I was hooked.

Here’s what you get with the Sony FD-71:

- A comfortable, easily held digital still camera with 330,000 pixel 640x480 resolution.
- 2.5" TFT LCD View Screen with Backlight and On-Screen Controls for all functions

- 10x Optical Zoom - Selectable Auto/Manual Focus - Range .5" - infinity
- Rechargeable "InfoLithium" Ion Battery (Up to 2 hours use with standard battery NP-F330 - Optional NPF-550 offers up to 4 hours use - approx. \$50)
- Auto Flash - Selectable Forced Flash/Auto/No Flash
- Storage on 3.5" Floppy Discs - DOS Formatted - 15-40 images per disc depending on mode, flash use, etc. - 2X write-to-disk floppy drive
- Six Exposure Modes - Portrait, Sports, Beach & Ski, Sunset & Moon, Landscape and Panfocus
- Five Effects Modes - Normal, Black & White, Sepia, Negative and Solarize
- The FD-71 comes with a battery charger, shoulder strap and lens cap.

Downtown Warren, Vermont (Is that a "small dog" on the porch?)

The FD-71 has "standard" and "fine" image settings, with "fine" increasing image quality by reducing JPEG compression. The 10x zoom allows for photos from a macro at a half inch out to infinity! It has three recording modes: Normal—for regular photos, E-mail—which adds a

320x240 image for each photo to reduce file size for e-mailing, and Bitmap—a non-compression format for actual pixel photos with a subsequently larger file size. Only one Bitmap image will fit on a floppy.

The Mavica uses regular 3.5" floppies as “film.” They are formatted as DOS disks; and can be read by any PC, or Mac System 7.5 or later with PC exchange. Images are stored as JPEGs; any program that can view JPEGs will work to view your photos. I found the Shareware program Graphic Converter <<http://www.lemkesoft.de>> absolutely indispensable.

Using the FD-71 is a snap. Take a floppy full of photos (15-40 depending on flash, mode, exposure, etc.), copy them to your hard drive, and view them in the GraphicConverter “Browser” mode. The FD-71’s on-screen controls take a little getting used to; the small buttons invite an occasional “Oops” if you push the wrong one. Once you are familiar with it, you can use the FD-71 as a simple point-and-shoot camera; or you can adjust the settings for whatever your project demands.

The 2.5" LCD Screen is the viewfinder, where you frame your shots or view photos after they are taken. If you don’t like a particular shot, you can simply erase it from within the screen, and try another. You can erase a photo immediately after it is taken, or later if you want to conserve space. You can also format a disk while it is in the camera, in case you only have Mac-formatted floppies available. There is a “copy” function which makes a duplicate of any floppy that is in the camera. We have found this handy on vacation; if we wish we can give our subjects a copy to take home with them! The on-screen display also informs you of disk space available, battery time remaining, exposure mode, picture effects, and image quality.

There are six different exposure modes:

Soft Portrait - For soft background portraits and accurate skin tones.

Sports Lesson - Faster shutter speed for fast-moving subjects.

Beach & Ski - Proper exposure in strong light, such as the beach or ski slope.

Sunset & Moon - For dark environments like sunsets, fireworks, neon signs, etc.

Landscape Mode - For distant objects or shooting through a window or screen.

Panfocus Mode - Proper exposure for quick shots or flash use in the dark.

There are also five different picture effects modes:

Normal - For regular use.

Negative Art - The color and brightness of the photo is reversed.

Sepia - The picture will be in Sepia tone (all warm browns and tans, like old Tin Type pictures).

Black and White - The picture will be monochrome (Black and White).

Solarize - Colors are rendered as blocks and posterized.

The Mighty Guard Dog Hammerli

The FD-71 is infinitely adjustable allowing you to tailor your photos to your needs. You can also use the FD-71 for Web image recording; the JPEGs can be uploaded or e-mailed with ease. Its cross-platform support, ease of use and quality of image makes the FD-71 a perfect choice for those who want to purchase a digital camera that won't be obsolete next week. I was delighted with the image quality, color accuracy, and overall "enjoyability" of the Mavica.

I have two criticisms of the Mavica. I find the LCD screen-as-a-viewfinder takes some getting used to. Unlike using a 35mm camera, you must hold the camera away from you to frame your photo, and you sometimes get a larger image than you framed. If this camera had a through-the-lens viewfinder it would be an absolute winner. Second, it is very difficult to get enough light at night to auto-focus the camera; the Panfocus mode is suggested for these situations.

Macro Photo of Modem Circuit Board

As this review went to press, I noticed that the FD-71 is being discounted (as low as \$550!) by a number of On-Line merchants. This usually indicates that a model is being discontinued, which would be a real shame. There are two new Sony models out— the FD-81 and FD-91—possibly indicating an end to the FD-71. If you can get a deal on an FD-71, by all means, grab one. You will not be disappointed, nor will you find a camera that does so much for so relatively little. It gets my highest recommendation.

If you are planning on purchasing a Mavica, or already own one, you should visit a couple of interesting Web sites I've discovered in the process of writing this review. There is an excellent Mavica owner's e-zine called "Mav!" available at <http://webhome.idirect.com/~mavmag/>.

Also, there is a Shareware program called "Mavicadabra! v1.1" that can help you download, catalogue, convert, and name your Mavica photos. It's available at <http://www.kagi.com/griffin/mavica.html>.

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