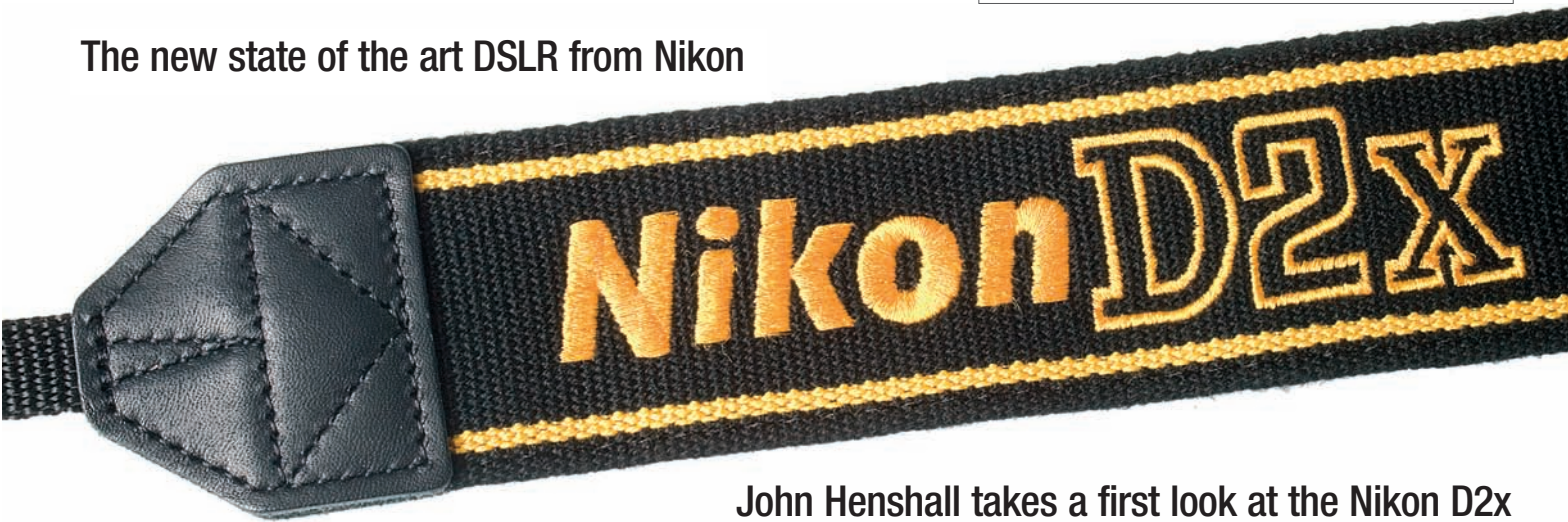


The new state of the art DSLR from Nikon



John Henshall takes a first look at the Nikon D2x

First shown at Photokina 2004, the Nikon D2x DSLR became available at the end of February 2005. I was privileged to have the first camera in the UK for a few short days at the beginning of February.

Of course, every day was dull or rainy but even typical English weather could not dampen my enthusiasm for this superb new camera.

First impressions of the D2x are extremely positive. The build quality is Nikon at its best – and that in itself is saying something. After using the Canon EOS-1Ds MkII for some time, the D2x felt comparatively light in weight.

In fact the D2x weighs 1108 grams without a lens, CF card or battery, against 1250g for the 1DsII. Add the small and lightweight (182g) 11.1V 1900mAh EN-EL4 Li-ion battery, CF card and strap and the D2x weighs a total of 1356g plus lens of choice.

Add a battery, CF card and strap to the Canon and the weight without lens is 1642g. Canon's hefty 12V NP-E3 Ni-MH battery alone weighs 339g.

The Nikon D2x uses a new APS-C sized (15.7 x 23.7mm) Sony CMOS sensor which produces 12.4 megapixel images with 2848 x 4288 pixels.

This results in an effective lens focal length multiplier of 1.5x when compared with the full 35mm-film SLR frame size of 24 x 36mm.

There's also a rather odd (until you get to know more about it) **High Speed Crop (HSC)** mode exclusive to the D2x.

HSC mode physically crops the image, using only 12 x 24mm of the sensor and producing 2136 x 3216 pixel images. This is equivalent to 6.8 megapixels and results in a 2x focal length multiplier. This means that a

200mm lens effectively becomes 400mm – without any loss in aperture.

The cropped area is indicated by crop lines in the viewfinder.

In HSC mode, the D2x can capture 35 JPEGs at 8 frames per second, compared to 16 JPEGs at 5 fps in full-sensor mode. This makes HSC mode very useful for sports and other action photography, where the doubling of effective focal length can also be useful.

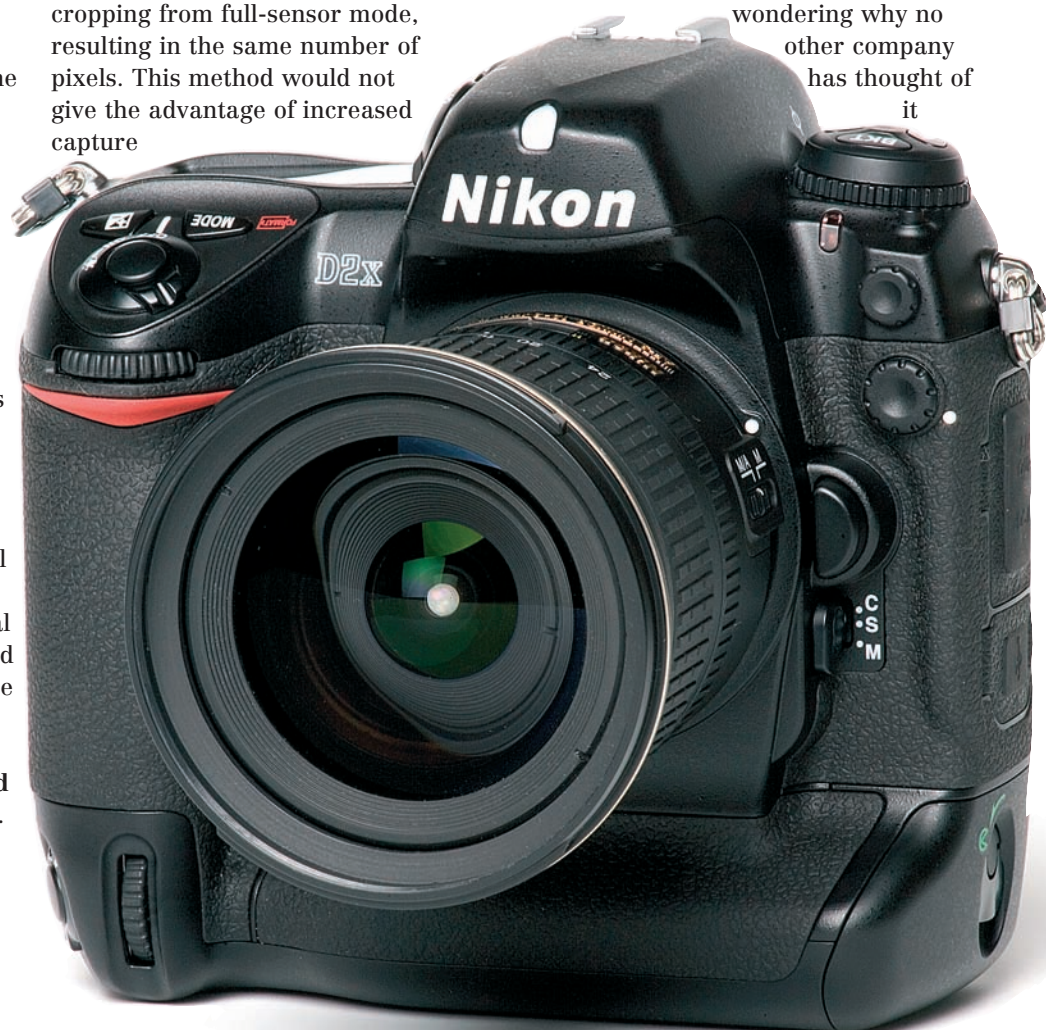
Of course you could achieve the effective doubling of focal length by cropping from full-sensor mode, resulting in the same number of pixels. This method would not give the advantage of increased capture

speed, though – 8fps instead of 5fps.

On the rear of the camera, the huge 2.5-inch high resolution colour LCD screen is quite simply the best I have ever seen. Big and bright, not only does it make for impressive reviewing of images but also easy reading and navigation of the colour-coded menus.

A **Recent Settings** menu screen allows the user to return quickly to any one of the last eight recently used settings. This is such a simple but useful feature that I can't help

wondering why no other company has thought of it



before.

The D2x has two JPEG compression modes. Not to be confused with usual options for the selection of different strengths of compression, the two modes allow the user to set either the same file size – **Size Priority** – or to select **Optimal Quality**. This setting allows the size of the compressed file to vary, to maximise the image quality.

Other new features include two methods of multiple exposure – **Image Overlay** and **Multiple Exposure**.

I did not test these features, feeling that I could do everything in Adobe Photoshop anyway. But perhaps a combination of one exposure for the shadows and another for highlights could give the effect of increased dynamic range?

Using the D2x on location in dull weather ensured that I had plenty of opportunity to use the camera close to its limits.

Inside Oxford's Covered Market (facing page) I needed to set the sensitivity to ISO800, even with the 12–24mm zoom at its widest aperture and an exposure time of 1/30 sec.

Even so, the superb colour, low noise and ability to cope with mixed lighting are very impressive.

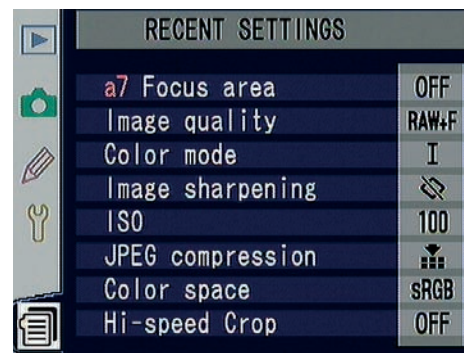
The AF system is similar to that of the D2H, with 11 autofocus sensors arranged in a 3–5–3 configuration.

The centre nine of these AF sensors are cross type which sense focus in both horizontal and vertical planes of the image. This makes the AF faster and more reliable, especially in low light. The outer two sensors are not used in HSC mode as they are outside the image area.

ISO800 is the top sensitivity unless HI-1 (ISO1600) or HI-2 (ISO3200) are set. The good news is that, at ISO800, noise is very tight and perfectly acceptable. For higher speeds a new High Noise feature may be beneficial but I did not have the latest version of Nikon Capture (v4.2) to process the resultant images.

To get the best from the D2x you must use high-quality lenses. Nikon supplied two zoom lenses with the D2x: AF-S DX 18–70mm (equivalent to 27–105mm) f/3.5–4.5G and AF-S DX 12–24mm (equivalent to 18–36mm) f/4G, both of which are the latest lightweight lenses design especially for the smaller digital sensors (DX series) using ED (Extra low Dispersion) glass with SWM (Silent Wave Motor).

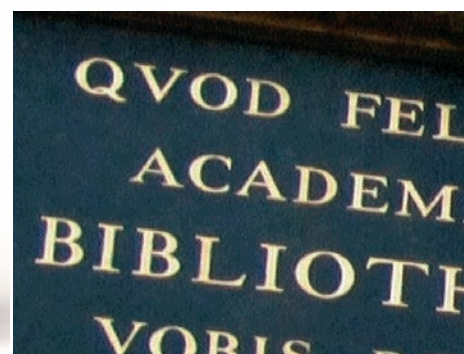
These lenses are noticeably higher



ABOVE: Menus are big bright and very easy to navigate.



ABOVE: Histograms may either be displayed as Luminance only or Luminance together with RGB. BELOW: Magnify mode is somewhat different from other DSLRs. A red/blue box is first superimposed on the image to show the area to be magnified (bottom).



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Oxford Covered Market. Auto white balance in a mixture of day, tungsten and fluorescent light. AF-S DX Zoom Nikkor 12-24mm f/4G IF-ED lens. Wide open at the widest angle, 1/30 sec hand-held at ISO800.

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quality than my older Nikkor zoom lenses. The DX range includes a 180 degree picture angle Fisheye 10.5mm f/2.8G, equivalent to a 16mm Fisheye on 35mm film format.

The 12–24mm zoom has a list price of a penny short of £900, so make sure your budget also includes a tidy sum for good lenses.

Nikon seems to be firmly committed to the smaller sensor. The only way to get full-frame sensors in a body with Nikon-F mount would be to go for the Kodak DCS Pro SLR/n but, as Nikon introduce ever wider lenses for the smaller sensors, this is less necessary.

But look through a Sigma 12–24mm f/4.5–5.6 DG HSM lens on a full-frame camera just once and you'll definitely want that real 12mm ultra-wideangle. Good as it is, the Nikon 12–24mm DX does not cover the full 35mm frame.

This apart, if you are a Nikon system user, the D2x is *the* state-of-the-art digital camera for you.

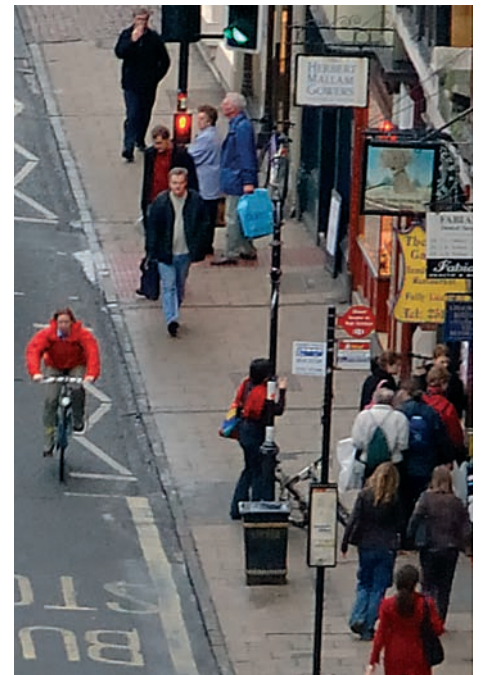
Quality isn't just in the *number* of pixels, importantly it's in the *quality* of those pixels and there's no doubting the quality of the pixels in the D2x's new CMOS sensor.

I find it difficult to describe the experience of using the D2x without

running out of superlatives. Cramping so much optical, mechanical and electronic technology into such a small package is nothing short of genius.

To be honest, the worst thing about the D2x was having to send it back. Nikon please send me another D2x, for a longer period, so that I can use the camera to shoot a wider range of subjects – including studio lighting and perhaps even sunlight.

The Nikon D2x is a masterpiece of DSLR design. At £3,500 including VAT for this level of sophistication it is a real bargain – especially when you take into account the fact that the



LEFT: Buses and vans of all colours brighten up High Street, Oxford, seen from the Carfax Tower on a dull February afternoon. ISO400 1/30 sec f/5.6 using 18–70mm zoom. Program mode, Auto white balance. ABOVE: A section from the same image at 200% (150ppi). At this size, the whole image would measure 19 x 28.5 inches (48.2 x 72.6 cm). BELOW: The familiar nameplate of Bear House at 400%.

