

WHICH DSLR?

Just when it seemed safe to conclude this comparison, two new cameras are announced.

This article was never intended to run over three – or more – issues, thought I can't say I'm surprised it's turned out that way, because the pace of change in DSLRs is now so astonishingly fast.

Two new cameras have been announced in the past few weeks and supplies of the Kodak DCS ProSLR/c (and /n) have finally petered out.

The first of the two new cameras to be announced was the Canon EOS 5D which is very much like a Canon EOS 20D on steroids – compare the pictures on this page.

I trailed this camera in the August 2005 issue and those predictions turned out to be spot-on. Better still, I have now had a 5D for a couple of weeks and have been able to use it on a number of different assignments.

One location in which I used the 5D was *The Horse & Jockey* pub in Stanford in the Vale.

Not only is my local hostelry full of interesting faces who don't mind being made famous in *The Photographer* but it also has the most taxing subdued and mixed colour lighting I have found. They call it atmospheric. I call it dark. The fact that fine English ale is served there is purely coincidental, though I confess that this does occasionally act as welcome stress relief when coping with the near impossible lighting – which might well have been purpose-designed to test DSLRs to the limit.

The pictures of Tom and Tigger on the facing page were both taken using the Canon EOS 5D's maximum ISO of 3200 and my Sigma 24–70mm f/2.8 zoom lens.

Look how well the 5D has coped

with the steep and hard – but dim – light on Tom's face and the bright colours of the fruit machine beyond. The colour temperature – only 2600K – used for this shot was assigned during acquisition from the raw file in Adobe Photoshop CS2.

The shot of quiz mistress Tigger is even more amazing. Quite strong amber light coming from the left is competing with soft frontal light, while the background (bar area) is relatively brightly lit. Assigning a colour temperature of 2500K, the 5D has coped beautifully with all this.

But wait. Take a look at that 300% enlargement of Tigger's right eye. Not only is the catchlight sharp on the Sigma 24–70mm, less than half a stop from wide open, but where is the noise? Remember that this is at ISO3200.

The results from the 5D at high ISO are nothing short of miraculous. This is the tightest, most controlled and lowest amount of noise I have ever seen in any digital camera at anything like ISO3200.

The 5D has the same brilliantly designed user interface as the 20D, with single-button access to all the main functions.

It is intuitive and a real joy to use.

Positioned mid way between the 20D and 1Ds MkII in price and specification, the 5D has a full-frame sensor and a larger LCD screen than its relatives.

My one criticism is that the embedded thumbnail image is still not of sufficiently high resolution to allow real appraisal of images, which are sharper when processed than when viewed on the back of the camera.

In short though, the Canon EOS 5D is one of the very best DSLRs yet made.



Canon EOS 5D



Canon EOS 20D



Canon EOS 5D



Canon EOS 5D



Canon EOS 20D



Canon EOS 5D



Canon EOS 20D



Canon EOS 5D

Studio flash ISO100 Auto White Balance



238%

Max ISO as shot

Greys corrected



Noise as shot



Noise as reduced



Section from below at 300%



ISO3200 1/60 f/3.5 48mm 2600K

ABOVE: The same test shots as were used for the other cameras (see September and October issues) in this review. The resolution is just what we would expect from a 13 megapixel sensor producing 36.4MB 24-bit images of 4368 x 2912 pixels. LEFT: At the top limit of ISO sensitivity (3200) the 5D is simply quite phenomenal. BELOW: In more normal usage, Auto White Balance and the lower ISO sensitivities (in this case ISO400) produce beautifully exposed shots with fine tone and colour.



ISO3200 1/60 f/3.2 24-70mm @ 52mm mixed light WB 2500K



ISO400 1/320 f/6.3 300mm Auto White Balance

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Coming soon – the Nikon D200

As you can see from Steve Bavister's photograph of me on the left, I've had it in my hands and I've even made a few exposures using it. Yet, if I look a little wistful, it's because this is a pre-production example of the new Nikon D200, which wasn't ready for me to put to the test when it was announced to the world on 1 November 2005. Oh, the frustration.

This new DSLR from Nikon looks set to put the cat among the pigeons, because it will have a price just a penny short of £1,300 including VAT – little over half that of the new EOS 5D.

The D200's sensor moves back from CMOS (as in the D2x) to CCD. I can't help wondering if this is because of noise, which can be more acute in high resolution DX-size (half frame) CMOS sensors. ISOs go from 100 to 1600 on the main dial, with expansion to ISO3200 – all in one-third *f*-stop increments.

The new CCD has 10.2 megapixels, producing 28.7MB 24-bit images of 3872 x 2592 pixels. Do you really need any more?

The Nikon D200 is just slightly larger than the D70s and quite a lot smaller than the D2x. But, make no mistake, this is a truly professional DSLR with magnesium-alloy body and external seals against dust and water. **More to follow soon ...**



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LEFT: Two Delta launches at speed, captured from the deck of the Isle of Wight ferry in the Solent on 27 June this year. I spotted and grabbed this shot as the launches sped past, without fully realising what or whom they were carrying. Only when I converted the raw file on the computer did I see the tough and mean looking security officers with their guns. **BELOW:** A small section of the same image enlarged to show the kind of detail which it is possible to pull up from a Canon EOS 1Ds MkII image – currently the highest resolution DSLR on the market. Hand-held exposure from the deck of a moving ferry boat, 1/200 sec at *f*/5.6, 28–300mm zoom at 260mm with Image Stabilizer, ISO 250.

RIGHT: Section of a Canon 1DsMkII time exposure captured at the Trafalgar 200 celebrations in the Solent off Southsea on the evening of 28 June 2005. This is the kind of long exposure which taxes any digital camera because long exposures can build up the sensor's noise. Tripod mounted, approximately 20 seconds at *f*/22, 28–300mm zoom at 65mm, ISO100.



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So, after three months, 'Which DSLR?' The truth is, I now realise that I set myself a question which is quite impossible to answer. I still don't know.

If someone was to tell me that, for some reason, only one of the cameras I have looked at is now available, I would be happy to use it – however many megapixels, whatever brand.

The fact is that there is so little difference between today's DSLRs that the choice comes down to such factors as how it feels in your hands, how well you can get on with its interface and how much it costs. It's very personal.

Of course I have my own favourites.

The **Fuji FinePix S3 Pro** for its nice handling and lovely JPEGs, especially of flesh tones. The **Canon 1DsMkII** for its unequalled resolution and tank-like professional build quality. The **Nikon D2x** for its beautiful handling, that

gorgeous big LCD monitor and the fine crisp images it produces. The **Canon EOS 20D** – perhaps now the **Canon EOS 5D** – for its neat size and brilliantly straightforward interface.

I would be very happy with any one of these. That is the state we are at with today's DSLRs. Over the years I have seen them all – right from the first, fifteen years ago – and every current DSLR is a real credit to its designer and manufacturer.

Of course, some are more suited to professional use than others. But even the more lowly models – often referred to as 'prosumer' models – are digital marvels which would be ideal as bodies to back-up a first choice.

If pushed to make a choice of just one DSLR, for me it would probably be the **Canon 1DsMkII**. I like quality, and this has it all. Allow me to explain.

The shot at the foot of the previous

page was captured from the Isle of Wight ferry in the Solent on 27 June this year. Only when I converted the raw file on the computer did I see the tough and mean looking security officers with their guns. I've enlarged just a section of the image to show the kind of detail it's possible to pull up from a 1DsMkII image.

The shot below was captured the next evening, at the Trafalgar 200 celebrations in the Solent off Southsea. It is a lengthy time exposure – the kind which taxes any digital camera because long exposures build up the sensor's noise. Again, the 1DsMkII performs remarkably. For me this camera is close to perfect – and for close to £6,000 (you can now get it for much less) you may feel that it ought to be.

Finally, it's a fact that although we only really get what we pay for, none of today's DSLRs are really expensive.



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