



February, 2009

Know Thine Camera

More than 99% of cameras manufactured during the past decade have been digital cameras, and this month's newsletters will involve taking a look at them - in depth.

Still cameras fall into 2 main categories: compact cameras primarily used for snapshots and SLR (single lens reflex*) cameras used for snapshots and higher quality pictures.

Compact cameras share the following characteristics:

- small to ultra small size
- very light weight
- designed for highly automated use
- use very small image sensors
- have a flash built in
- have no adjustable diaphragm in the lens**
- offer a digital zoom in addition to an optical zoom lens
- very convenient to keep with you.
- have a permanently attached lens
- suppress creativity
- inhibit learning photography
- cost relatively little.

SLR cameras share common characteristics:

- larger size with better ergonomics
- heavier than compact cameras
- designed for highly automated use as well as semiautomatic and manual use
- have much larger sensors
- accept interchangeable lenses
- accept interchangeable flashes

Reflex means that there is a mirror located within the camera which reverses an image.

**The diaphragm is akin to the iris in your eye in that it can change it's diameter in response to changes in light levels.

- lenses have diaphragms
- offer an eye level viewfinder
- accept numerous accessories
- encourage creativity
- overwhelming ease of use
- outstanding picture quality
- higher quality parts and construction
- highly adaptable to different picture taking situations
- looks intimidating compared to compacts
- some are now priced lower than many compact cameras.

Some compact cameras are too small and light. As a camera's mass becomes more disproportionate to your own mass, it becomes harder to hold steady. You can prove this by trying to hold a piece of paper steady vs. a book. Hold them about 15" in front of your face. The book is easier.

Additionally, most compact cameras have more "easy to drop" designs. They are designed to be attractive, even sexy. Some people have more than one compact camera for different occasions, or different color cameras and cases. Very often people are heard saying, "I don't like what the camera looks like" when considering which camera to purchase. Sometimes the physical appearance masks the fact that there is no good way to keep the camera from slipping out of the users' hands during use. (A higher proportion of compact cameras require servicing due to impact than SLRs.)

SLRs, on the other hand, allow the user to comfortably hold the camera right up the user's face (a great benefit in bright light). The camera's weight and design supply the user with something to hold onto. When looking through the large viewfinder,



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the rest of the world disappears - it's easier to see the picture. If something isn't part of the picture, you can no longer see it! This allows the camera to be WYSIWYG*. This permits the photographer to pre-visualize the photo, allowing for change before the shutter is tripped. Holding the camera securely also decreases the possibility of impact or dropping.

In a recent survey, no photography store employee or professional photographer has ever heard a potential camera buyer as for a camera with less zoom lens than his or her previous camera. That just doesn't happen. Some people say you can never have too much zoom. Most compact cameras have a permanently attached 3X zoom lens. Entry level SLRs also typically come with a 3X zoom, but it is exchangeable for any number of different lenses. A common starting zoom lens for a modern SLR has close to a 12X zoom! If you've never used an SLR, please understand that even with such a powerful lens, the camera remains easier to use than a compact camera.

Please take this short multiple choice test. Which is most difficult to use?

- a. a modern SLR camera
- b. a sewing machine
- c. a snowblower
- d. a one time use (disposable) camera

The answer is "d" because even though it is two button simple, only with the help of extraneous circumstances can the user succeed in getting a respectable photograph. As an example, using a single use camera with flash in a ballroom dooms the camera to failure. The workings of the camera are so simple that it offers no assistance to the user in any situation. It's only film with a lens.

*WYSIWYG=what you see is what you get

A better camera, which is one button simple, is capable of assisting the user in such a situation. It will (automatically) turn on the flash, focus the lens to the proper distance, fire the shutter shortly after its button is pushed, use the flash, adjust the proper shutter speed and sensor sensitivity for the situation, expose the sensor at just the right time, then reset itself for the next photo. For all this to happen, only one button needs to be pushed.

An even better camera (an SLR) can still be one button simple, but have more functions to assist the camera in automatically taking a better quality photograph. The technology of a SLR camera makes it the easiest camera with which to get the best quality picture. It just looks more imposing, and too many people shy away from one for that reason alone!

An SLR's larger sensor size is in itself capable of delivering a superior picture compared to any compact camera. It is safe to say that any 8 MP (megapixel) SLR will take a clearer, sharper better exposed photo than any 12MP - 14MP compact camera. Because of its larger size, more information (delivered through a better lens) can be recorded on each pixel with less interference from electronic "noise". The tighter tolerance of its moving parts allow the camera to work with greater precision than a compact camera.

The user does not, however, have to let the camera do its own thing all the time. One can set the extent of the camera's automation to use by default or on any one picture. Because the picture is seen immediately, inadequate photos can be avoided!

Nothing makes a photographer better than having a tool capable of taking better quality photos.



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OPTERA a New, uh, Thingamajig



Rounding out a supporting cast of camera accessories is the Trek-Tech Optera Pro 460, seemingly the world's largest "pipe cleaner" design pod. This will hold up to 14 pounds of camera and lens with a special anti-rotation mount. Each leg is flexible, yet can bear the weight. For skiers, skateboarders, etc, this is big enough to go around your head or helmet for true action photography. It's padded enough to be comfortable. These photographic engineers at Trek-Tech have done it again!

A Site Worth Seeing

Seeing quality photos taken by others often helps you see how yours stack up. Consider visiting <http://photo.net/learn/making-photographs/light> to see some good photos with hints and comments by the photographers.

Looking Ahead

The annual U.S. Photo Trade Show will be in early March this year, which will delay the next newsletter for several days. During that time we'll be learning all that's new and will keep you up to date (photographically speaking).

Taking you into the light!



The winter/spring schedule for our classes is attached to this month's newsletter. Tickets are available at <http://www.madisonphoto.com> and <http://www.photosummit.com>, as well as in our stores. We hope you'll come out to one or more as the weather continues to improve.

We'll be back next month with new ideas for you, but we hope to hear from you before then. Thank you for coming to us with your photographic needs and concerns. Enjoy your pictures - enjoy your memories.

MadisonPhotoPlus

40 Main St., Madison, NJ 07940

v. 973-966-2900; f. 973-377-1458

<http://www.madisonphoto.com>

*Eric, Jerry, Joy, Marie, Mario, Rob,
Sybil & Vincent*



the Photo Summit

383 Springfield Ave., Summit, NJ 07901

v. 908-273-7427; f. 908-277-0218

<http://www.photosummit.com>

*Bret, John P., John T., Lynne,
& Mark*