

MadisonPhotoPlus the Photo Summit e-Photo Newsletter

DECEMBER, 2006

Collected Articles

A couple of news articles crossed our desks recently which, hopefully, you will find as interesting as we did. The first is by David Pogue, who covers the Tech beat for *The New York Times*. As has been preached in this newsletter for several years, the megapixel race isn't what it's cracked up to be. Here in its entirety, is Mr. Pogue's article:

November 21, 2006, 9:35 am

The Truth About Digital Cameras

As loyal Pogue's Posts readers are no doubt aware, I've spent the last seven weeks in TV land, filming a first batch of six episodes of my new Discovery-network series, "It's All Geek to Me." It was an exhilarating, exhausting, enlightening journey. Someday when we're all together, I'll tell you about it.

Actually, I'll tell you about one thing right now. We did an episode on digital cameras. Part of the fun involved visiting a couple of big electronics stores, posing as somebody who didn't know much about cameras, and, later, commenting on what they told me.

The clerks at one store recognized me. The guy at the other store had no clue that I'm a tech writer. Both of them were surprisingly frank, pointing out, for example, that five megapixels is plenty for prints up to smallish poster size.

Now, every time I write that, I hear from furious or baffled readers. "I don't get it," wrote one. "A ten-megapixel camera produces photos about 3640 pixels wide—enough to make a 12-inch print at 300 dpi (dots per inch) on a good printer. Sure, you can go lower, but quality is sacrificed; you can't make an 11x14 print, let alone anything bigger."

I have to say, the math sounds right. But I also have to say that he's wrong.

On the show, we did a test. We blew up a photograph to 16 x 24 inches at a professional photo lab. One print had 13-megapixel resolution; one had 8; the third had 5. Same exact photo, down-rezzed twice, all three printed at the same poster size. I wanted to hang them all on a wall in Times Square and challenge passersby to see if they could tell the difference.

Even the technician at the photo lab told me that I was crazy, that there'd be a huge difference between 5 megapixels and 13.

I'm prepared to give away the punch line of this segment, because hey—the show doesn't air till February, and you'll have forgotten all about what you read here today, right?

Anyway, we ran the test for about 45 minutes. Dozens of people stopped to take the test; a little crowd gathered. About 95 percent of the volunteers gave up, announcing that there was no possible way to tell the difference, even when mashing their faces right up against the prints. A handful of them attempted guesses—but were wrong. Only one person correctly ranked the prints in megapixel order, although (a) she was a photography professor, and (b) I believe she just got lucky.

I'm telling you, there was NO DIFFERENCE.

This post is going to get a lot of people riled up, I know, because in THEORY, you should be able to see a difference. But you can't.

And I'm hoping this little test can save you some bucks the next time you're shopping for a camera.

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Why SLRs take better pictures

A second article appeared online November 30 at http://news.com.com/2061-10801_3-6139374.html?part=rss&tag=2547-1_3-0-5&subj=news. The premise behind the article is that Canon blew it on one of their high end compact, point and shoot cameras. This premise, however, again confuses hype and desire with physics, and as you would expect, physics won. The first couple of paragraphs may seem a bit ponderous, but by the article's end, it should make sense to everyone. Again, it is presented in its entirety:

Why Canon's PowerShot G7 lacks 'raw' support
November 29, 2006 12:16 PM PST

Canon caused a ruckus among digital-camera enthusiasts when it announced this fall that its new PowerShot G7 lacked support for "raw" images. But the company now has offered an explanation for the move: increasing the number of megapixels led to more noise per pixel and meant raw was no better than JPEG.

The G lineage aims to please a more discerning crowd than the average point-and-shooter, and earlier members of the family could produce the raw files that many photographers like for their greater flexibility and subtle tones. When Canon dropped raw support in the G7, reviewers complained loudly, some speculating that the company was trying to protect sales and profits for its more expensive digital SLR (single-lens reflex) line.

"If the G7 had raw mode, I would buy one in a flash. As I wrote in this article's subhead--It Could Have Been a Contender!" said the Luminous Landscape, speculating that Canon was trying to protect profit margins on SLR cameras that still feature raw support. "Many features that made the G series stand

out have been removed," including raw mode, said Digital Photography Review. Digital Camera Resources called the move a "dumbfounding downgrade," and CNET's own review opined, "Whoever at Canon decided to jettison raw-format support deserves a whack upside the head."

The PowerShot G7 has a 10-megapixel sensor compared to 7.1 megapixels for the G6. But the sensor itself is the same size, meaning that individual pixels in the sensor are smaller. Smaller pixels means it's harder to distinguish the signal from the incoming light from the random electronic noise in the sensor, said Chuck Westfall, Canon's director of media and customer relations.

"The net result is that even if the G7 offered raw image capture...there would be no discernible improvement in image quality compared to...superfine JPEG mode," Westfall said.

More specifically, a pixel on a Canon Rebel XTi SLR is 5.7 microns across, and on higher-end models such as the 5D or 1D Mark II N with "full-frame" sensors the size of 35 mm film negatives, pixels are 8.2 microns wide, Westfall said. (A micron is a millionth of a meter.) A G7's pixels are less than 2 microns wide, in comparison, and therefore produce more noise and are worse at discerning subtle brightness differences.

"Do the math for surface area, and you'll see how much of a difference there really is," Westfall said.

The greater the surface area, the more light a pixel on the sensor can detect. For the record, here's the math: assuming pixels are circular, a 2-micron diameter means a surface area of 3 square microns. A 5.7-micron pixel has 26 square microns of surface area, able to capture 8 times the amount of light as a 2-micron pixel. And an 8.2-micron pixel has 53 square microns of area, able to capture 17 times the amount of light as a 2-micron pixel.

Posted by Stephen Shankland

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This concludes our eighth year of publication, and all of us at Madison PhotoPlus and the Photo Summit take this opportunity to wish you and your family a safe Holiday Season and a Happy, Healthy 2007. We have tried to make this newsletter informative and fun to read. Taking pictures is fun, as is sharing them with others. We sincerely hope your picture taking has improved by reading this newsletter and that you've enjoyed your photography more than before.

As we have done each of the previous 7 years, we present our gift guide - the only store advertising we do here during the year. If you wish, stop reading here, but we look back on our prior recommendations, and we've consistently picked winners. As an informed consumer, you stand a better chance of making a good buying decision.

Lynne & Jerry

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Compact Cameras

During the past 3 years, Casio cameras have taken the lead in overall customer satisfaction. The photos are very good, the cameras are easy to use, the menus are in straightforward simple English, and the battery life is considerably better than average. The Exilim EX-S770 is extremely thin, yet easy to hold. It is available in several colors, and has a very large LCD screen for easy viewing.



Pentax is the originator of the miniature digital camera. The Optio S7 is the 6th generation model, and takes wonderful photos. The sharp 3X zoom lens will allow you to make poster size prints. It comes packed with rechargeable battery, international charger, case, 128MB memory card, 3 year warranty, card reader, spare battery and more. It is our best value in a compact camera this year!



\$384⁹⁹

(Your final price after receiving \$15 mail-in rebate. Pay \$399.99 in the store.)

Samsung has come a long way as a camera maker. Having purchased Rollei and Schneider (2 of Germany's best camera and lens makers), Samsung adds electronic expertise and ISO 9001 quality manufacturing to make stunning cameras. The new NV (New Vision) 10 camera boasts a 3X Schneider zoom lens, 10 megapixels, the industry's best anti shake system* and a menuless system for setting the controls of the camera.



\$349⁹⁹

Kodak's V705 is quite a small camera with the equivalent of a 23mm wide angle lens - fantastic for travelers. It also offers a 3X zoom and rechargeable battery system. The Easyshare system makes printing and emailing your photos very simple.



\$349⁹⁹

*in a compact camera

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DECEMBER, 2006 Compact Cameras

The 7.2 megapixel Nikon Coolpix L5 boasts a Nikon 5 times zoom lens, vibration reduction, and in camera red eye elimination. The L5 is loaded with Nikon innovations to make your picture taking second nature.



Canon's stainless steel Digital Elph SD800 IS is a 7 megapixel camera with 28-105 (35mm equiv.) zoom and Optical Image Stabilization. It is one of the few cameras offering a 2.5" LCD panel and an optical viewfinder.



The Kodak P712 camera isn't really compact, but it doesn't fall into any other category. It has an image stabilized 12X zoom lens and its controls are easy to navigate. It can accept filters and accessory flash for *much* better indoor flash photos. Made in the former Chinon factory, it is probably Kodak's best quality amateur digital camera to date.



There's a bit of klutz in all of us, and Olympus has made the first real klutzproof camera. Not only can you spill something on it, take it to the beach and drop it in the tub, but you can even drop it without voiding its warranty (within limitations). If that's not enough, it also has a 3X optical zoom, 2.5" bright LCD panel, and digital image stabilization.



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SLR Cameras

The Olympus E•Volt E-500 camera comes with 2 lenses in a special package. This camera uses the four-thirds lensmount, becoming the standard mount with many manufacturers. You'll even be able to put a Leica or other brand lens on this Olympus beauty! (Something never before possible). This camera is so sophisticated that it even vibrates the sensor each time the camera is turned on - shaking any dust off the sensor before it can leave a spot on your photo. Olympus still can boast the only line of SLR digital cameras designed solely for digital photography - not cameras modified from 35mm.



Pentax recently introduced the K100D, evolving SLR photography to a new level. The camera has a shake reduction system, with moving parts inside the camera, that permits vibration reduction picture taking with any Pentax mount lens made since 1962! Old Spotmatic or K1000 lenses will work correctly on a K100D body. This very small, lightweight SLR is easy to use and will allow you to make poster sized prints that are tack sharp. Pentax offers out-fits with lenses or you can use your existing lenses. We also offer the camera with a variety of lenses from other companies to advance you beyond starter lens quality.

So far, we have had the most raves from our customers on this camera.



Nikon has 2 wonderful SLR cameras available right now - the D200 (for advanced photographers) and the D80 (for intermediate photographers). Many features are shared by both cameras, with differences in speed and available accessories. The D80 uses the newer SD memory cards while the D200 uses Compact Flash cards. The quality of the two cameras is definitely above average. Both cameras use a battery made by Sony which has been in short supply due to Sony's recent manufacturing issues. We have had NO problems with any battery we've gotten, but Nikon must be quality controlling each one before shipping them.



Nikon packages the cameras as body only (the prices shown here) or bundled with specific Nikon lenses. Nikon is having trouble manufacturing enough lenses this year, so these lens kits will be in VERY short supply. In fact, Nikon has yet to ship its initial allocation of D200 bodies with 18-200 zoom lenses from March, 2006!



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Camcorder

As much as we like the idea of DVD camcorders, they have been very problematic, regardless of brand. We've had many customers ranging from the disappointed to the irate. Video tape has about reached its limit and is now regarded as entry level. With DVD as the today's media of choice, Sanyo's media corders have made many of our customers VERY happy for over a year now.



These shirt pocket sized cameras record DVD quality movies in standard or High Definition 16x9 format and include the software for direct transfer to DVD via your home computer. They record on SD memory cards and also take 5 megapixel still images as well as movies. The top of the line model HD-1a is fantastic to travel with because of its amazingly small size and light weight.

5

\$699⁹⁹

Interchangeable Lens

This is a real no brainer from our side of the counter. The lens of the year is the Tamron made Promaster 18-200 XR EDO zoom lens for digital SLRs. Of the hundreds we have sold so far, we've received but one complaint! We've had no repairs (other than one dropped and bounced). The pictures are clear, sharp and show neutral color with normal contrast. It is packed with lens shade and comes with a LIFETIME WARRANTY.



\$399⁹⁹

Storage Media



\$37⁹⁹/100

Promaster PhotoImage Gold CD-R discs are manufactured by Hotan Corporation in Taiwan. Hotan uses phthalocyanine dye + gold and is the longest rated life available today. We find them to be unsurpassed in quality. They are available in packages of 10 (in jewel boxes), 50, 100, or cases of 600.

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Miscellaneous Items

A memory card reader is a very simple device and offers safety, speed and convenience than cannot be achieved by using the USB cable which came packed with a digital camera. This card reader, a little larger than a baseball, reads Compact Flash Type I and II, MultiMedia, Secure Digital, Mini SD, SmartMedia, Memory Stick, Memory Stick Duo, Memory Stick Pro, Memory Stick ProDuo, xD Picture Cards, xD-M Picture Cards, and xD-H Picture Cards. It transfers data at Hi-Speed USB 2.0 speed and functions as a virtual hard drive on your PC or MAC computer. For users with USB connections located only on the back of the computer, there is also a pass through Hi-Speed USB 2.0 USB port on the front.



\$399⁹⁹

Epson has introduced the new Ultra High Definition Stylus Photo printer series, including the R380 letter size printer. The color and ease of use is superior. It is fast, quiet and isn't limited to printing on paper - it will also print directly onto inkjet ready CDs and DVDs. It's also very affordable.



\$199⁹⁹

Promaster Infinity binoculars were introduced in the spring of 2005 and have won many industry awards for quality since then. They are reasonably priced, optically superior, armored, nitrogen filled, waterproof glasses that have a NO FAULT LIFETIME WARRANTY. They all feature BAK-4 prisms and completely coated optics. Availability is 8x25, 10x25, 7x32, 8x45 and 10x45. All come with spacious case.



\$199⁹⁹

8x45