



May 2008

You Oughta Be In Movies

Well, movies are outdated now. You know, film is gone. So the expression should be "Let's go to the video tape.". No, tape is basically gone, too. So the new expressions are, "Put on a reel of flash memory" or "Roll 'em, Lights, Action, Hard Drives!".

Video tape is taking its last gasps. No more Beta, VHS, VHS-C, 8mm, Hi-8, Super VHS, ED-Beta, Super VHS, Mini DV, ad nauseam. The digital video revolution now offers several formats, all designed for TV or computer display. To boot, most video cameras capture still photos, and most still cameras take moving pictures. Hard to know what you want? You bet it is! Let's try and navigate the world of movies ...



Entry level video cameras (and VERY expensive pro gear) use tape. Tape gives a great image, but has some drawbacks. As tape winds through a camcorder or playback deck, it creates friction. This friction permanently degrades the image. The more you play it and or reuse the tape, the more the tape degrades until it yields a poor image and sound. In fact, for posterity, the worst thing you can do with it is to play it. It's use in consumer grade camcorders and decks is pretty much a thing of the recent past.



Just like DVDs have replaced tape in movie rentals and home players, it is a popular format in camcorders. Instead a 5" disk, cameras use a 3.5" Mini DVD so that cameras can remain compact. These disks can be either WORM (Write Once Replay Many times) or Rewriteable. Disks can be edited in the camcorder, but then must go through a "finalization" process in the camcorder to allow WORM disks to be playable on devices other than the camera and are non erasable (which will keep your movies safe).

As with other DVDs, these WORM disks will **not** play the movie in all players. Some people reduce expenses by using Rewritable mini DVDs, but this increases the chances of camcorder/ player incompatibilities. In addition, precious video footage can be accidentally erased. Many customers have had problems to the extent that they can never see the movies they have recorded

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The newest breeds of camcorders use either flash memory or hard drives. The hard drive units are quite durable, max out (at least in the spring of 2008) at about 60 gigabytes of storage space. The movies must be downloaded to a PC or MAC and transferred to a DVD for easy viewing. Once the DVD has proved playable, the camcorder's hard drive can be erased and reformatted (if necessary) and reused. The images are as stable as the computer's hard drive, but not as stable as the DVD.

Another great thing about the SD HC camcorders is that they can be much smaller and lighter than other types. Also, because they have no moving parts (other than the lens) they can accept more light abuse than other type camcorders. Because they have fewer doors, flaps, etc., they can be weatherproof and even waterproof.

Regardless of the video recording media used in a camcorder, all use an SD or SD HC memory card (other than SONY, which use the proprietary memory stick Duo) to record still images. With very rare exceptions, these images are designed for viewing as slides or still images on a TV or computer monitor. Even though they average 2 megapixel resolution, they are recorded in a lower image quality than other JPEG files, and yield mediocre 4x6 inch prints at best. They are an unacceptable substitute for a photo taken with a still digital camera.



Flash memory camcorders have no moving parts in the recording mechanism. No misadjustments, no friction, no misalignments; potentially exceptionally long life. These units contain some flash memory (15, 30, 60GB, etc.) and have the provision to accept memory cards for added recording time. Most of these cameras use SD HC memory cards which are common. As of this date, 16GB cards are readily available, cost less than internal memory, and are easier to work with.

A great number of recent still digital compact cameras can record satisfactory video at computer resolutions. With the immense popularity of such web sites as YouTube, Facebook, and Myspace, these cameras often shoot movies for direct upload to the web. These movie modes will rarely yield images that will fill an entire monitor display, but typically a small window. In this writer's judgment, these movies are a better by-product from still cameras than the still images captured by 2 camcorders.



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Have you checked out our new web site yet?

Our new, improved web site is up and running! Feel free to poke around, there's lots of new features. First and foremost, you can finally buy most items directly from the web site. So if you can't make it in, just fire up the web browser. Second, the Photo Blog is alive! This will feature tidbits about new products, new services, sales, or just interesting photo-related news. Plus, you can add your own comments on any topic on the blog.

You can also see our full photo class schedule, as well as purchase your class tickets online. As always, Photo Newsletter subscribers will get first crack at sign ups for new classes and events before we post it on the web site. Coming soon – upload your prints directly from the web site!

So check it out, and let us know how we can improve it to make it even more useful for you.

Have fun taking pictures.

We'll be back with another informative issue next month.

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These two consecutive photos were taken at Yankee Stadium on Sunday, May 4, 2008. They were not cropped in any way. The only difference between them is that the photo to the left was shot with the lens set to widest angle, and the photo at the right was shot with the lens set to maximum telephoto. The digital zoom feature was not used. Name that camera! Each person visiting either of our stores who names the correct camera during May will win a prize!