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New Camera Species

Making an exception to this newsletter's normal reluctance to discuss particular products, a new camera system spawned by Olympus, Panasonic, and Leica is so evolutionary that a detailed look is deserved.

On June 18th, Olympus held a meeting in lower New York City to introduce the Olympus PEN E-P1 camera and system. Exactly 50 years prior, Olympus held a similar event to kick off what was then a revolutionary new product, the Olympus PEN camera. This camera revolutionized 35mm cameras as they were known at the time. They were smaller and lighter than ever before; in some cases by 50% or more! In 1963, they introduced the first PEN SLR.

The PEN-F was the first SLR without the big bump (prism) on the top without giving up reflex viewing. This enabled the camera to be at least 1/3 smaller and half the weight of previous SLRs. As a by-product of the smaller size, the 24mm x 36mm standard negative size was reduced to 18 x 24mm. This allowed negatives or slides of the same proportion as full frame.

This new SLR half-frame format (as it came to be called) allowed not only smaller bodies, but much smaller and lighter lenses. These lenses were so sharp that no detail was lost even though the negatives were smaller, even though the images were grainier than from full frame. Zoom lenses from this era were monstrously large and heavy, yet Olympus was able to design and manufacture their lighter versions without increasing prices.

As an additional benefit, twice as many pictures were now fitting on the same roll of film, e.g. 72 images on a 36 exposure roll of film. More information on the Olympus PEN film cameras and system can be found at <http://www.cameraquest.com/olympenf.htm>. This image, from an old ad for the



camera, shows a camera with normal lens, a telephoto zoom lens, film, filters and other accessories all fitting in nicely into a man's dress shoe! Keep in mind that back then everything was made of metal & glass, nothing with molded plastic. Everything was mechanical, nothing was electronic.

For years thereafter, Olympus was the king of the smallest, lightest 35mm cameras and lenses. Nothing is forever. The 35mm era is no more ...



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The new PEN E-P1 interchangeable lens body weighs in at under 12 ounces!. In comparison, a Nikon D5000 weighs in at just over 20 ounces, and a Canon 50D is over 26 ounces. And the E-P1 is made of stainless steel, not all plastic!

The Original PEN-F was the only camera in its day to allow users to mount most other camera manufacturers' lenses via Olympus adapters. Today, lenses made by Olympus, Leica and Panasonic all share the same lensmount called Four-Thirds. Last year Panasonic, and this year Olympus, are pioneering a mount called *Micro* Four Thirds. The 12.3 MP sensor is the same as found in the standard 4/3 mount, but the Micro system is a lens mount which is even smaller in diameter. The small distance has a profound effect on the rest of the camera, which allows an overall smaller size. With adapters, the EP-1 can use full size 4/3 lenses as well as Olympus OM-series lenses from 35mm SLRs.



In general, small lightweight cameras, especially those with just an LCD panel and no viewfinder

are at best difficult to hand hold. Rather than build stabilizing units into specific lenses, Olympus chose the route of building it into the body. This offers the advantages of image stabilization with any and all lenses you can attach.

The image quality on 20"x30" enlargements was very, very good, and the High Definition movies we saw were SUPERB!

The camera is capable of shooting 1080 x 720 High Def AVI files which play back via a HDMI cable. The same cable permits slide shows from the still images. The audio recordings are also digital (linear PCM). Olympus showed videos taken the day before at Coney Island (NY) on the Cyclone roller coaster. They were flicker free, perfectly exposed and captured the sounds of the ride faithfully. Literally, several viewers jaws dropped as the cars went through the hills and turns.

Olympus claims that marketing studies show that amateur photographers prefer to not bother using (and waiting for) a flash when good pictures can be taken using available light. With image stability, automatic noise reduction software and ISO 6400 capability, Olympus decided to not build a flash into this new concept camera. It can be added and can be totally automatic, but not built in. They just don't think it's necessary any more.





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So, will this new camera “species” survive in the market? It seems to do everything Olympus claims. It feels great in the hand, the LCD panel is clear, bright and sharp. The menus are very simple to navigate. It is designed to be THE step up from point and shoot cameras and overcomes many common complaints from photographers, including:

- a delay when depressing the shutter button before the camera takes the picture.
- red-eye.
- a charge of the battery allows more pictures to be taken (because there is no built-in flash).
- nothing seen on the LCD panel will be missing in the photo.
- the LCD panel can indicate when the camera is not level (optional)
- uses a neck strap, not a wrist strap

Olympus really seems to have done their homework with this camera system. It looks like a win-win situation. Cameras and some lenses are due to ship this month.

The summer trade show is this month and it's a safe bet that even more product announcements will be made. We'll report on them next month, along with photos from Macy's July 4th fireworks.

This Just IN!!!

If you've ever wondered if big brother is watching you, and have wondered, this article on the BBC may make you just a little more paranoid

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8143936.stm>

Enjoy the summer, and don't bet against more rain! Take pictures (it's fun, you know)

Summer School Sessions!

July 15, 2009 - Nikon Digital SLR

July 21, 2009 - Canon Digital SLR



July 22, 2009 - Landscape & Nature

August 5, 2009 - Photographing for EBAY

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