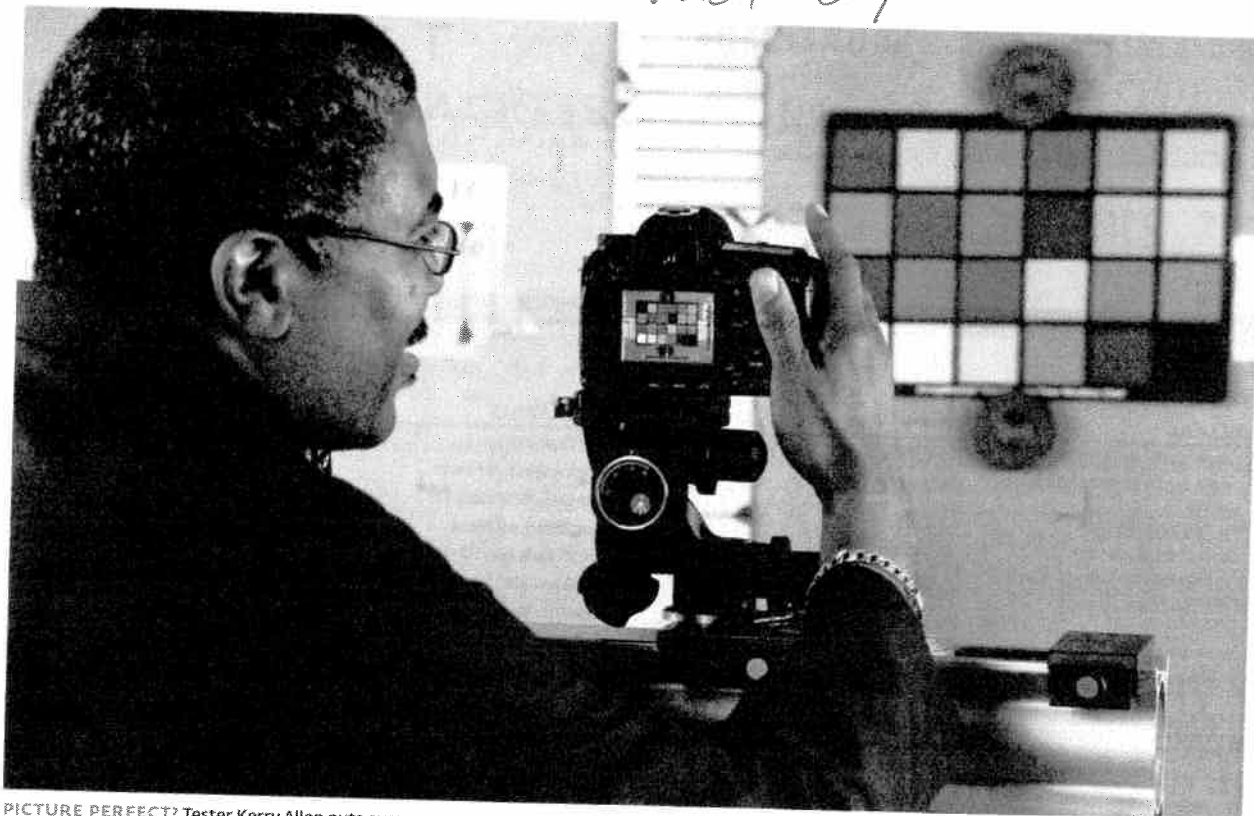


July 09



PICTURE PERFECT? Tester Kerry Allen puts every camera we rate, from the tiniest subcompact to the biggest SLR, through this color-accuracy test.

# Digital cameras

Exclusive Ratings of 77 models, plus all-star brands

## Inside

### Claim checks

Pages 25, 27

### Common goofs to avoid

Page 27

### Ratings:

#### Point-and-shoots

Pages 28-29

#### Ratings: SLRs

Page 30

#### Most and least reliable

Page 31

#### Cell-phone cameras

Page 41

**F**OUR CAMERA BRANDS perform better than others, model to model and year after year, across a wide range of prices, according to our first analysis of such trends among point-and-shoot brands we regularly test. Those standouts: Canon, Casio, Panasonic, and Samsung. By contrast, Olympus has been the brand least likely to yield a top performer.

That's not to say that those four brands have a monopoly on making fine cameras or that every model they make is a great choice. They just offer you the best chance of getting a superior performer when you buy a camera we haven't tested.

You'll find plenty of very good models among the 54 point-and-shoots and 23 single-lens reflex cameras we have tested, and not all of the best are from the top four brands. For example, the recommended Nikon Coolpix S610, \$220, a fine all-around

subcompact, has wide-angle capability and is one of just a few point-and-shoots tested that performed very well when handheld in low light without a flash.

Many of the models we recommend are bargains. Two point-and-shoot Canons, a compact and a superzoom, are CR Best Buys, delivering an unusually fine combination of performance and price.

A Pentax subcompact that we recommend has a 5x zoom for just \$120. There are standout values even among SLRs: A Canon, \$700 with a lens, is one of just two basic SLRs that produced excellent image quality; the other, a Nikon, costs \$450 more. And an advanced Canon SLR that produced excellent image quality costs \$900 (body only), hundreds less than competitors.

## POINT-AND-SHOOTS

If your current camera is more than a couple of years old, a newer model will prob-

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL SMITH

ably have some features that your trusty old one doesn't. More cameras are making shooting easier with features like the ability to recognize certain types of scenes, such as portraits as opposed to landscapes. In a recent survey of more than 8,000 subscribers to Consumer Reports.org, many point-and-shoot owners said they found certain features especially useful, in the following order:

**Image stabilization.** When you are shooting at slower shutter speeds or zooming in very close to a subject, a shaky hand can blur your subject. A stabilizer compensates for that.

**Wireless capability.** It lets you transfer shots from camera to PC without a wire or card reader, a real convenience.

**Touch-screen display.** This minimizes the need to fiddle with buttons and dials. And larger displays in newer models can accommodate easy-to-read menus and show images with greater detail.

**Face detection.** It tells your camera to make the focus and exposure of faces the top priority when it adjusts its settings.

**Video recording.** Standard-definition video is the norm on most point-and-shoots, though high def is showing up on some and on a handful of SLRs. Forty percent of the subscribers we surveyed said they used their point-and-shoot to record video, and roughly 25 percent of those said it was very important that their next one have high def. That feature lets you shoot in 720p high-def mode. In our tests, though, the video quality of those models didn't match that of high-def camcorders.

Here are two important attributes you might have to hunt for, because camera makers are either phasing them out or generally don't offer them:

**Viewfinder.** In our subscriber survey, 72 percent of those who had one found it useful. And about half of point-and-shoot owners said it was very important that their next model have one. Without it you must use the LCD to compose shots, an ob-

**CLAIM CHECK**

## Abuse this camera?

### Olympus Stylus Tough-6000

**The claim.** Olympus says that its 10-megapixel Stylus Tough-6000, a \$300 subcompact, is "even shockproof up to 5 feet—extra protection against accidental drops and rough handling." The Tough-6000 is listed in the Ratings on page 28.

The need for a tough camera is underscored by our recent survey of subscribers to ConsumerReports.org. It found that the most common causes of damage to their point-and-shoots were drops or falls. Forty percent of those cameras were rendered useless.

**The check.** To see how Olympus' claim held up in a real fall, we dropped the Tough-6000 a few times from 5 feet onto a concrete floor. Afterward, the camera still functioned normally and showed no scratches or dents.

**Bottom line.** Our finding doesn't mean that the Tough-6000 wouldn't be damaged by more severe shocks or that a regular subcompact might not also survive such a drop. But it does provide some reassurance that this camera is built to withstand abuse. That might



**DROP TEST** After a 5-foot fall onto concrete, the Tough-6000 was unscathed.

make it a good choice for a physically active shooter.

Prevention, of course, is still the best way to keep your camera intact. To minimize the chance of a damaging fall, hold your camera with a strap and keep it away from the edges of tables, swimming pools, and other potentially hazardous locations.

vicious drawback for the 68 percent of point-and-shoot owners who found it hard to view images on their LCD in bright light. Yet this desire flies in the face of an industry trend of reducing the number of models with a viewfinder, presumably to accommodate larger LCD screens.

**High-quality low-light photography.** It's a rare point-and-shoot that can capture images in low light without a flash that are good enough to enlarge beyond a 4x6. Not so rare are the occasions when a photographer needs to do just that, whether to shoot a sunset or a candle-lit birthday cake. Thirty percent of subscribers who owned point-and-shoots said they often take such shots without a flash.

Yet roughly 20 percent of them were dissatisfied with the quality of the resulting image. Moreover, nearly two-thirds of all the point-and-shoot owners we surveyed said it was very important that their next model take good-quality images under those conditions.

Despite such demand, just four of the 54 point-and-shoots in the Ratings—those

with either 800 or 1600 in the column titled "Max. ISO with best quality"—are well suited for low-light shooting.

At the other performance extreme, more than one-third of the point-and-shoots in the Ratings can't take a good

## Consumers like viewfinders, but they're rare.

shot in low light without a flash at ISO settings above 100, confining you to brightly lighted scenes or turning on the flash. Virtually any 35-mm film camera, and even some of today's inexpensive disposables, can shoot with ISO 800 or sometimes higher film. That means that when it comes to shooting good images in low light without a flash, most point-and-shoot digitals can't match the performance of even yesterday's film cameras.

One footnote to our survey: Many sub-

*Continued on next page*

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**1,144**

That's the approximate number of highest-quality 10-megapixel shots that fit on a 4-gigabyte memory card.

scribers were underwhelmed with some features that camera makers widely promote. Geographic tagging (digitally stamping a photo with the location at which it was taken), smile detection, panoramic mode (combining multiple images), and blink detection were judged not especially useful by many whose cameras had them.

### How to choose

**Select the right type.** For portability, look for a subcompact. Price and performance should be comparable to a compact's, though many compacts have better battery life. For sports or nature photography, choose a superzoom. They are often heavier and bulkier than other point-and-shoots, though.

**Match performance to your needs.** First consider image quality, a camera's most important performance attribute. Our assessment includes the sharpness of the images a camera produces, which depends on the camera's sensor resolution, lens system, and in-camera software. Among models of varying scores, differences in sharpness can be quite noticeable but are less so if you print mostly 4x6s.

If you often take action shots, also look for higher scores for first-shot delay and next-shot delay. If landscapes or group portraits are priorities, look for wide-angle capability; excellent or very good dynamic range is also useful for landscapes.

**Downplay megapixels.** Although most

of the rated models have 10 or more megapixels, 7 or 8 megapixels should be enough for most people. In comparing rated models, you needn't consider resolution unless you print poster-size shots or do major cropping. In those cases, we recommend higher-resolution models.

**Consider features.** If you often shoot in bright light, look for a viewfinder. For greater control over your images, opt for manual controls and RAW-file capability. If you often shoot above the heads of crowds, look for a swiveling LCD.

**Size up the design.** Consider a camera's tactile qualities. Some brands have fairly

## Few point-and-shoots perform well in low light.

consistent design traits across product lines. Sony excels in sleek, minimalist designs, particularly in its subcompacts, which have a nontelelescoping lens on the front and a large touch screen on the back. But you might find that sleekness sacrifices usability. Some larger models have handgrips to help steady the camera.

### SLRS

If your point-and-shoot suffers from too many limitations in challenging situa-

tions, it might be time to move up to an SLR camera. Basic SLRs, the simplest to use, are smaller, lighter, and cheaper than most SLRs you could buy a few years ago.

Also, SLRs are gaining some convenience features that originated in point-and-shoot cameras, such as these:

**Live view.** While this was once rare on an SLR, it is now featured on most of the SLRs in the Ratings. It lets you choose whether to compose on the LCD or the viewfinder that's standard on all SLRs.

**High-def video.** The first SLR with this capability, Nikon's D90, \$1,150 (with lens), now tops the basic SLR Ratings. Recently, Nikon announced a lower-priced competitor, the D5000, \$850 (with lens). In our initial tests, the D5000's video recordings were sharper than the D90's and its still-photo image quality was equally excellent. However, neither model's video recordings were near the quality of even the lowest-rated HD camcorder we have tested. Canon also has two high-def-capable SLRs, which we haven't tested. So this summer, at least four SLRs will be available with high-def video capability.

The Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH1, \$1,500 (with lens), due out in June, will also shoot high-def video. It's not an SLR, but one of a new breed that combines key SLR features—a large image sensor and interchangeable lenses—with the smaller size and weight of a point-and-shoot.

### CLOSE UP

## Protect your camera from a summer soaking

Beaches, pools, and cloudbursts can soak and ruin your camera. According to online subscribers we recently surveyed, 71 percent of point-and-shoots that became waterlogged stopped working; 36 percent quit after mere spills. Here's how to help your camera avoid a similar fate:

**Bag it.** When the forecast is rain, take along a plastic bag. If it rains, wrap most of your camera in the bag, cutting a small hole for the lens if you need to shoot.

**Accessorize.** If you often shoot in damp conditions, check online or in your local camera store for accessories specifically designed for shooting in wet weather.

**Go waterproof.** For the most protection, use a water-resistant or waterproof camera. Several manufacturers make them, and four such cameras are included in our Ratings:

the Olympus Stylus Tough-8000, \$400, and Stylus Tough-6000, \$300; Pentax Optio W60, \$250; and Olympus Stylus 1050SW, \$280. Before shooting underwater, check the camera's specs to see how deep it can go. Limits can range from several feet to 30 or more.

Before jumping into water with even a waterproof camera, check the instructions. Some models might malfunction under the force generated by a plunge.

**If you use an SLR, follow these tips:**

**Bag everything.** If you do lots of shooting in very wet terrain and you're hauling an SLR, lenses, and maybe a laptop, consider a waterproof backpack or sack, which can be pricey but is invaluable in such conditions.

**Get a pouch.** For kayaking and rafting, look



for a neoprene waterproof camera pouch that floats. It usually runs about \$10 to \$15.

**Change lenses cautiously.** Moisture can easily get into an SLR body when you change lenses. When doing so in wet conditions, shield the camera's lens mount with something that resists water and minimize the time the lens isn't attached to the body.

# Avoid these common goofs

Our survey of 8,250 ConsumerReports.org subscribers by the Consumer Reports National Research Center revealed that many failed to make the best use of their newest point-and-shoot:

Didn't regularly clean the camera's lens

**66%**

Clean the lens before each use, which minimizes the risk of focusing problems and blurry areas on pictures.

Left photos in the camera for at least a month

**45%**

Photo files should be copied to a backup device, such as a hard drive, soon after they are captured. That reduces the risk of theft or deletion.

Didn't know whether the camera had scene modes, image stabilization, face detection, or burst mode

**39%**

Check the manual for features you might be unaware of that make shooting easier and can improve your photos.

Cleaned the lens with a shirtsleeve, household tissue, or canned air

**28%**

Clean your lens gently with a microfiber lens cloth and lens-cleaning fluid so that you don't scratch or otherwise damage the surface.

Disposed of a camera in the trash (of those who got rid of a camera)

**13%**

If possible, sell your camera or give it away. For recycling options, contact the manufacturer or check for a program near you at [www.eiae.org](http://www.eiae.org).

## How to choose

**Select the type.** For an SLR that's simple to use, choose a basic model. Advanced SLRs are more rugged, weather-resistant, and versatile but also bulkier and heavier. Their advanced features can be daunting if you're not highly experienced.

**Decide on a lens.** SLRs are sold with "kit" lenses that are adequate enough, but have limitations. See Close Up, page 31.

**Consider accessories.** Extras such as external flashes sold by the camera maker are often pricier than aftermarket alternatives, but at least you know they'll be compatible with the camera and take full advantage of its features.

**Don't skimp on performance.** All the SLRs we tested are competent, but narrow your choice to those models that scored at least very good for image quality and versatility and can shoot to at least 800 ISO without graininess in the image. That includes most rated models. Battery life is important too; most of the better performers took more than 400 shots per charge.

**Consider special needs.** If you often shoot in crowds, look for a swiveling LCD and live view, which let you compose shots on the LCD. If you take lots of action shots, look for a model with the burst mode that can capture the greatest number of images per second.

**Get some hands-on experience.** Try out the SLR you're considering. Make sure that it's comfortable to hold and not too heavy, and that all buttons and controls are intuitive and logically positioned.

## CLAIM CHECK

### Versatility at a price

#### Fujifilm FinePix F200EXR

**The claim.** Fujifilm says that its new FinePix F200EXR, a \$400 subcompact with an unusually flexible image sensor, "seamlessly adapts to any situation."

The F200EXR has three operating modes, which you can set manually or let the camera set automatically: high-sensitivity priority with low noise, wide dynamic-range priority, and high resolution.

If you're shooting in low light, for example, the most appropriate sensor setting would presumably be high sensitivity with low noise to capture the image without using a flash. For scenes with both bright and shadowy subjects, the best setting would probably be the wide dynamic range to better handle the extremes. When capturing image detail is utmost, you'd use the high-resolution mode, since the other two modes cut the sensor's 12-megapixel resolution in half.

**The check.** We tested the F200EXR by manually setting it to each of the three modes as well as letting it automatically select each of those modes based on various scenes.

In high-sensitivity mode, the F200EXR captured the subject with smooth



**SMART** The Fujifilm FinePix F200EXR automatically adapts to changing conditions.

texture, natural brightness, and minimal visual noise (specks of false color). In wide-dynamic-range mode, images showed subtle shades and details of the subject, even in high-contrast lighting. In high-resolution mode, images contained appropriate detail. The F200EXR was also quite adept at automatically choosing the best mode for a particular scene.

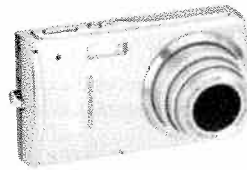
**Bottom line.** The F200EXR lived up to Fujifilm's claims. It's a pricey camera, but one that's worth considering if you value such adaptability—say, because you often shoot in low light and don't want to fiddle with the controls to get decent shots.



A3 Nikon



A8 Canon



A14 Pentax



B1 Canon

## Ratings Point-and-shoot cameras

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A, B, etc.)

### Overview

All models offer good or very good overall performance and image quality. Most have 2½ inches or so of LCD screen. For some, we note successors that we haven't yet tested.

#### CR Best Buy

These models offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.

#### Recommended

These are models that stand out in our lab tests for the reasons below.

#### For a camera that fits in a pocket:

**A3 Nikon** \$220

**A8 Canon** \$150

Among subcompacts, **A3** has the best low-light performance without a flash. It also has wide-angle capability. **A8** is very versatile and has very short next-shot delay. (Also available: the 10-megapixel Canon PowerShot SD1200 IS Elph, \$230, with face-detection self-timer.) Though pricey, **A6** is worth considering if you value its ability to easily and quickly upload both stills and video to online sites via Wi-Fi.

#### Best point-and-shoots under \$150:

**A14 Pentax** \$120

**B2 Canon** \$140

**B3 Canon** \$110 **CR Best Buy**

**B12 Canon** \$90

**A14** is small enough to fit in a pocket and has very good first-shot delay and a 5x zoom but only a simulated stabilizer. **B2**, **B3**, and **B12** all have short next-shot delay and better battery life than most point-and-shoots. **B2** and **B3** have image stabilizers, viewfinders, and excellent dynamic range. **B3** is the only one of those Canons with manual focus and controls. (Also available: the 10-megapixel Canon PowerShot A480, \$130, with a 3.3x zoom.)

#### For flexible editing and composition:

**B1 Canon** \$450

This full-featured compact has very good image quality, short next-shot delay, excellent dynamic range and wide-angle capability. It has manual controls and focus, an optical

Recommendation Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Specifications			Test results				Features		
				Megapixels	Weight (oz.)	Optical zoom	Battery life (shots)	Image quality	First-shot delay	Next-shot delay	Versatility	Dynamic range	Max. ISO w/best quality

A SUBCOMPACT For those who need a camera that fits in a purse or pocket.														
1	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W300	\$310	72	13.6	7	3x	300	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	0	●●●●●
2	Canon PowerShot SD880 IS Elph	260	72	10	6	4x	310	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	400	0	●●●●●
3	Nikon Coolpix S610	220	71	10	5	4x	290	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	1600	0	●●●●●
4	Canon PowerShot SD990 IS Elph	400	70	14.7	6	3.7x	280	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	400	0	●●●●●
5	Nikon Coolpix S710	280	68	15	6	3.6x	250	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	400	0	●●●●●
6	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-G3	500	68	10	7	4x	200	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	0	●●●●●
7	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FX150	330	68	14.7	6	3.6x	330	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	0	●●●●●
8	Canon PowerShot SD1100 IS Elph	150	68	8	5	3x	240	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	400	0	●●●●●
9	Casio Exilim Card EX-S10	350	67	10	5	3x	280	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	5	●●●●●
10	Casio Exilim Zoom EX-Z85	180	67	9	4	3x	240	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	100	5	●●●●●
11	Pentax Optio P70	200	66	12	4	4x	200	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	5	●●●●●
12	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T77	300	66	10	5	4x	220	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	0	●●●●●
13	Leica C-LUX 3	500	65	10	5	5x	280	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	400	0	●●●●●
14	Pentax Optio M50	120	64	8	5	5x	210	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	5	●●●●●
15	Olympus Stylus 1010	230	64	10	5	7x	260	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	M	●●●●●
16	Kodak EasyShare M1093 IS	170	64	10	5	3x	220	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	800	5	●●●●●
17	Olympus Stylus Tough-8000	400	64	12	7	3.6x	240	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	100	M	●●●●●
18	Pentax Optio E70	140	64	10	6	3x	210	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	100	5	●●●●●
19	Pentax Optio W60	250	64	10	5	5x	205	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	50	5	●●●●●
20	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FX35	300	63	10	5	4x	290	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	400	0	●●●●●
21	Nikon Coolpix S560	200	63	10	5	5x	160	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	M	●●●●●
22	Casio Exilim Zoom EX-Z150	150	62	8	5	4x	280	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	M	●●●●●
23	Olympus Stylus 1050SW	280	61	10	6	3x	200	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	5	●●●●●
24	Nikon Coolpix S60	280	60	10	6	5x	140	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	100	M	●●●●●
25	Olympus Stylus Tough-6000	300	60	10	6	3.6x	230	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	100	M	●●●●●
26	Nikon Coolpix S210	130	60	8	4	3x	220	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	100	5	●●●●●
27	Fujifilm FinePix Z20fd	140	59	10	5	3x	200	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	100	5	●●●●●
28	Fujifilm FinePix Z200	220	59	10	5	5x	170	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	100	M	●●●●●
29	Fujifilm FinePix J10	90	57	8	5	3x	150	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	200	5	●●●●●



B3 Canon



B12 Canon



C1 Canon



C5 Canon

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Specifications			Test results				Features		
					Megapixels	Weight (oz.)	Optical zoom	Battery life (shots)	Image quality	First-shot delay	Next-shot delay	Versatility	Dynamic range	Max. ISO w/best quality

0 100  
P I F I G I V G I E

viewfinder, RAW-file capability, and a hot-shoe for an external flash.

**If a long zoom is a priority:**

**C1** Canon \$350

**C5** Canon \$210 **CR Best Buy**

Both run on AA batteries—**C1** uses four and **C5** uses two—and have longer battery life than most point-and-shoots. **C1** has one of the longest zooms available, 20x, which includes wide-angle capability. It performs very well, with very short next-shot delay and short first-shot delay. **C5** is slim and has a large, 3-inch LCD. A recently introduced superzoom, the 9-megapixel Sony CyberShot HX1, \$500, costs nearly as much as a basic SLR, but has a 20x zoom plus some innovative features, including a speedy flexible-burst mode, 1080p resolution HD video, and flexible "panorama sweep" mode.

**B COMPACT** For those who want the basics at a low price or advanced features.

✓	1	Canon PowerShot G10	450	74	15	14	5x	400	●	○	●	●	●	200	0	●	●	●
✓	2	Canon PowerShot A1000 IS	140	71	10	7	4x	450	○	○	●	●	●	100	0	●	●	●
✓	3	Canon PowerShot A590 IS	110	70	8	8	4x	450	○	○	●	●	●	100	0	●	●	●
	4	Nikon Coolpix P6000	450	70	14	10	4x	260	●	○	○	○	○	400	M	●	●	●
	5	Nikon Coolpix P60	160	69	8	7	5x	350	●	○	○	○	○	100	M	●	●	●
	6	Nikon Coolpix P5100	310	69	12	8	3.5x	240	●	○	○	○	○	100	0	●	●	●
	7	Canon PowerShot SD790 IS Elph	190	69	10	6	3x	330	○	○	○	○	○	100	0	●	●	●
	8	Kodak EasyShare M1033	170	68	10	5	3x	220	○	○	○	○	○	400	S	●	●	●
	9	Fujifilm FinePix F60fd	220	67	12	6	3x	230	○	○	○	○	○	200	M	●	●	●
	10	Samsung L100	110	66	8	5	3x	260	○	○	○	○	○	400	0	●	●	●
	11	Panasonic Lumix DMC-FX500	260	66	10	6	5x	280	○	○	○	○	○	1600	0	●	●	●
✓	12	Canon PowerShot A470	90	65	7	8	3.4x	400	○	○	○	○	○	100	S	●	●	●
	13	Canon PowerShot A2000 IS	180	65	10	8	6x	500	○	○	○	○	○	100	0	●	●	●
	14	Olympus FE-370	170	63	8	5	5x	200	○	○	○	○	○	200	M	●	●	●
	15	Fujifilm FinePix J150W	140	59	10	6	5x	150	○	○	○	○	○	100	S	●	●	●
	16	GE A735	90	59	7	6	3x	130	○	○	○	○	○	200	S	●	●	●

**Guide to the Ratings**

**Overall score** is based mainly on image quality, first- and next-shot delay, useful features, battery life, and weight. **Megapixels** is the number of pixels, in millions, on the sensor. **Weight** is with battery and included memory. **Optical zoom** is the ratio of focal lengths in the lens. **Battery life** is as the manufacturer states. **Image quality** combines analytical tests and subjective judgments of images made at the best resolution and compression settings. Scores aren't comparable with those of SLRs, which are factored differently. **First-shot delay** is how quickly the camera takes its first shot. The fastest took about half a second; the slowest, 1 second or more. **Next-shot delay** is how quickly it takes its next photo. Less than 2 seconds is excellent; less than 3, very good; less than 5, good; and less than 7, fair. **Versatility** assesses controls, features, menus, and settings. **Dynamic range** uses analytical tests to gauge how wide a range of dark to light tones is captured while producing a good image. **Max. ISO with best quality** is the highest ISO setting at which the model produces a quality image, based on tests that determine the degree of an image's visual noise ("grain" or spots of color). Models with higher ISO values should excel in low light. **Image stabilizer** indicates the type included: M=mechanical; O=optical; S=simulated; . Simulated is considered a less effective type than the others. **Wide angle** shows whether the lens zooms as wide as the equivalent of 28-mm or wider on a 35-mm film-camera lens. **Manual controls** let you adjust shutter speed and lens opening for better pictures. **Price** is approximate retail.

**C SUPERZOOM** For those who need an extremely versatile zoom lens.

✓	1	Canon PowerShot SX10 IS	350	78	10	24	20x	600	●	○	●	●	●	400	0	●	●	●
	2	Casio High Speed Exilim EX-FH20	500	73	9	21	20x	430	○	○	○	○	○	200	0	●	●	●
	3	Nikon Coolpix P80	300	70	10	14	18x	250	○	○	○	○	○	100	M	●	●	●
	4	Fujifilm FinePix S2000 HD	240	69	10	17	15x	400	○	○	○	○	○	100	0	●	●	●
✓	5	Canon PowerShot SX110 IS	210	69	9	10	10x	400	○	○	○	○	○	200	0	●	●	●
	6	Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ5	270	69	9	8	10x	300	○	○	○	○	○	800	0	●	●	●
	7	Fujifilm FinePix S100FS	600	69	11	35	14.3x	250	○	○	○	○	○	400	0	●	●	●
	8	Samsung HZ10W	390	68	10	8	10x	270	○	○	○	○	○	200	0	●	●	●
	9	Fujifilm FinePix S1000fd	180	67	10	15	12x	500	○	○	○	○	○	200	S	●	●	●

1. Has no stabilizer.



A3 Pentax



A4 Canon



B1 Nikon



B2 Canon



B3 Olympus

## Overview

Most models are fine overall performers. Differences between basic and advanced models are mainly in body construction and the complexity and versatility of controls.

### CR Best Buy

These models offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.

### Recommended

These are models that stand out in our lab tests for the reasons below.

#### For a basic SLR:

**A3 Pentax** \$700

**A4 Canon** \$700

**A3** is better designed to keep out moisture and dust, with the lens on, than other basic SLRs. It's one of the few basic models with an LCD on top that displays exposure and other settings. **A4** is very easy to use, is one of only two basic SLRs with excellent image quality, and has a 3-inch LCD with live view. It includes a 4 percent spot meter and an image-stabilized lens. (Also available: the 15-megapixel Canon EOS Rebel T1i, \$900, with an image-stabilized 18-55-mm kit lens and HD video capability.)

#### For a more advanced SLR:

**B1 Nikon** \$1,600

**B2 Canon** \$900 **CR Best Buy**

**B3 Olympus** \$1,400

Although **B1** is quite pricey and a bit bulky, it has a sturdy construction, can shoot six frames per second and has 51 autofocus points. It's one of the few SLRs that has an LCD with more than 900,000 pixels, which makes for a very sharp display. It also includes a jack for an HDTV. **B2**, one of the few advanced SLRs for less than \$1,000, has the fastest burst mode among our recommended SLRs: 6.5 frames per second for up to 75 JPEGs or up to 17 RAW files. Its autofocus system has nine cross-type sensors. Like all Olympus SLRs, **B3** can accept lenses with a Four Thirds lens mount (which means it has a 2x magnification factor) and is the only one of the three with body-based image stabilization, which will reduce shake on any lens attached to the camera. It's one of the few models with a swiveling LCD and live view. It also accepts two types of memory cards.

# Ratings SLR cameras

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A and B.)

● Excellent  
● Very good  
○ Good  
○ Fair  
● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Specifications			Test results			Features		
					Megapixels	Weight (oz.)	Battery life (shots)	Image quality	Versatility	Dynamic range		Max. ISO with best quality	Image stabilizer
					Lens included								
					0								
						P	F	I	G	I	V	G	I

## A BASIC For those who want simplicity.

	1	Nikon D90	\$1,150	72	12	25.1	850	●	●	●	3200	L	●
	2	Olympus E-30	1,250	70	12	26.3	750	●	●	●	800	B	●
✓	3	Pentax K200D	700	67	10	24.3	400	●	●	●	800	B	
✓	4	Canon EOS Rebel XSi	700	67	12	18.5	500	●	○	●	800	L	●
	5	Canon EOS Rebel XS	500	66	10	17.7	500	●	○	●	800	L	●
	6	Nikon D80	800	65	10	24	600	●	●	●	1600	L	
	7	Olympus EVOLT E-510	550	65	10	16.4	650	●	●	●	800	B	●
	8	Panasonic Lumix DMC-L10	950	63	10	19	450	●	●	●	800	B	●
	9	Sony DSLR-A350	600	63	14	23.4	730	●	○	●	400	B	●
	10	Olympus E-520	550	63	10	19.7	650	●	●	●	800	B	●
	11	Olympus E-420	500	62	10	15.7	500	●	●	○	800	L	●
	12	Canon Digital Rebel XTi	600	61	10	20	500	●	○	●	800	L	
	13	Panasonic Lumix DMC-G1	800	60	12	14.9	330	●	●	●	800	L	●
	14	Nikon D60	550	60	10	19.1	520	●	○	●	800	L	
	15	Nikon D40	450	57	6	19.2	470	●	○	●	800	L	
	16	Pentax K2000	500	57	10	20.8	400	●	○	●	400	B	
	17	Sigma SD14	700	54	5	26.5	500	○	○	○	400	L	

## B ADVANCED For those who want advanced features, controls, and performance.

✓	1	Nikon D300	1,600	76	12	32	1000	●	●	●	3200	L	●
✓	2	Canon EOS-40D Digital	900	76	10	28.8	800	●	●	●	800	L	●
✓	3	Olympus E-3 Digital	1,400	76	10	31.6	610	●	●	●	800	B	●
	4	Canon EOS-50D Digital	1,400	75	15	29	640	●	●	●	1600	L	●
	5	Sony DSLR-A700	1,000	72	12	27.2	650	●	●	●	400	B	
	6	Pentax K20D	700	70	15	28.2	530	●	○	●	800	B	●

✓ Stabilizer available only with non-Olympus lenses. ✎ Uses Foveon technology; effective resolution is similar to that of other models. Ⓜ SLR-like camera; uses removable lenses.

## Guide to the Ratings

**Overall score** is for body only, based mainly on image quality, ease of use, versatility, and battery life. Flash, viewfinder, weight, and body construction are also considered. Scores are rounded; models are listed in order of precise score. **Megapixels** is the number of pixels, in millions, on the sensor. **Weight** is for body only, including battery and memory card. **Image quality** combines analytical tests and expert

judgments on a reference monitor of images made with best resolution and compression settings. Dynamic range and maximum ISO for best quality are factors. **Versatility** is our assessment of physical controls, useful features, menus, and degree to which you can adjust settings. **Dynamic range** uses tests to indicate how wide a range of dark to light tones a camera captures while producing a quality image and

## Should you buy an SLR with a 'kit' lens?

Most SLRs are offered with a standard "kit" zoom lens, usually with a range of the film-camera equivalent of 28-85-mm (about the same as the 3x magnification range of a typical point-and-shoot camera). The camera/lens kit is usually cheaper than if you bought the two separately.

A kit lens is fine if your photographic budget and ambitions are modest; it yields fine basic shots, especially in bright light. However, it lacks the magnification to capture distant subjects, such as wildlife, and the wide-angle capability to shoot broad perspectives, such as landscapes. It might not take great portraits, either, because its maximum lens opening (aperture) probably won't be wide enough to noticeably blur the background, a technique that draws attention to your subject. And it's less rugged than most advanced lenses because it usually is encased in plastic rather than metal.

If you opt for anything but the kit lens, choose a lens that's either made by the SLR's manufacturer or that uses the unique mount for that camera brand. Olympus and Panasonic SLRs, however, share a lens system known as Four Thirds that ensures interchangeability of their lenses.

There are many brands of lenses, and quality can vary even within a brand. Look for Ratings of SLR lenses in a future issue.

Performance aside, a key buying issue is zoom range. Here's a rundown of each basic zoom category, its typical focal-length and zoom ranges and usual prices:

**Standard zoom.** 18-55 mm; 3x. \$300-\$1,000. Similar in range to a kit lens but of higher quality.



**NEAR AND FAR** A full-range zoom lens includes everything from 10x magnification to wide-angle capability.

**Telephoto zoom.** 50-200 mm; 4-5x. \$250 and up. Suitable for portraits, routine landscapes, and moderate zooming, such as for sporting events or wildlife.

**Full-range zoom.** 18-200 mm; 10x. \$600-\$1,000. Comparable in magnification to a telephoto, but with wide-angle capability too. Ideal if you want to shoot nearly every type of subject with one lens. The priciest have the widest apertures, best for shooting in conditions of lower light.

fine detail. **Max. ISO with best quality** is the highest ISO setting that produces a good-quality image. It's based on analytical tests that determine the degree of an image's flaws ("grain" or specks of false color). Models with higher ISO values should excel in low light. **Battery life** is as the manufacturer states. **Image stabilizer** shows type

used—lens-based (L) or body-based (B). **Live view** lets you compose directly on the LCD. **Price** is approximate retail with the kit lens included, where noted in the table. For models that don't come with a lens, expect to pay \$150 to \$300 for the equivalent of a kit lens. Models were tested with a high-quality, 50-mm, same-brand lens.

## Can't find a model in the Ratings?

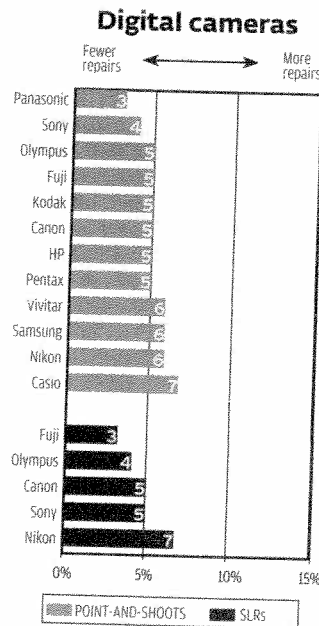
Then choose brands of point-and-shoot cameras that have most consistently done well in our Ratings over the past 2½ years. Canon, Casio, Panasonic, and Samsung have done so across a range of prices. Among higher-priced models, Sony also has performed consistently well. Among lower-priced models, consider Pentax, which finished close behind. (Our analysis didn't include some point-and-shoot brands or any superzooms or SLRs, because we lacked sufficient data to analyze.)

Our Ratings of models from Fujifilm, Kodak, and Nikon have varied too much to reliably generalize about whether each brand will consistently do well. All three have produced some highly rated models, plus some that were not highly rated. For these brands, it's more difficult to predict performance based on historical data.

Olympus, too, has produced some highly-rated models. But among brands we analyzed, it has been the least consistent at doing so. If you choose an Olympus model that we haven't tested, it's less likely than other brands to give you top performance.

## Most and least reliable brands

Most cameras are very reliable, and few differences exist among brands. That's what we found out when we asked more than 275,000 readers who bought a digital camera between 2004 and 2008 about their experiences. The graph shows the percentage of brands that needed a repair or had a serious problem. Differences of fewer than 3 points aren't meaningful. Models within a brand might vary, and design or manufacture changes might affect future reliability. Still, choosing a brand with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable model.



Source: Annual Product Reliability Survey, Consumer Reports National Research Center.