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Casio Exilim Card EX-Z700 digital camera

Can Casio impress with its 7 megapixel compact?

by Doug Harman published on 11 October 2006

Casio has a range of high tech and well-priced digital cameras of which the Z700 is one of the latest. The new all metal camera replaces the 6 -megapixel Z600 and offers another million pixels, 7.2 (effective) megapixels to be precise.

A series of neat technologies such as Anti Shake DSP for camera shake and blur reduction (though it does remove a lot of detail in the modes it is active in) and the new Best Shot modes (or which there are no less than 37) that includes the new Auto Framing and Auto Layout settings.

The former is akin to one of the new software gadgets appearing on many digital models, namely active face detection. Auto Framing tracks a moving subject within a moving frame, which keeps a moving subject in the centre of the frame. The downside here is, the resultant image is cropped (to ensure the subject is central for example) so you lose resolution in this mode.

Auto Layout meanwhile provides two multi-image collages one with two images, one with three. Multiple shots can be taken to create a neat multi-image layout within a single frame, all in camera.

Other Best Shot modes include the "usual" portrait, landscape, low light and night scene settings et al, with a host of other neat features. All these Best Shot modes are designed not so much to deflect from the fact the camera lacks manual controls, it's not in that market after all, but to; with practice and with imagination using them allow you to shoot almost any situation with them.

Other plus points are the great 2.7-inch Super bright LCD screen, which despite the brightest of sunny days, really is usable even in direct



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sunlight. The excellent lithium-ion rechargeable battery performs well. A claimed 460-shot life for a full charge looks about right, after around 200 -shots, the battery indicator still reads as full.

The 3x optical zoom lens is nice but does suffer from slight barrel distortion at the wide end and images are stored on either a modest 8MB of internal memory or SD/MMC external storage, which slots neatly into place next to the battery under a flap on the base.

Menus are all clear and simple to use with neat mode guides that tell you what the mode is you're going to use and reminds you each time the camera is turned on. You can also set up the camera to remember the settings you've used, from the focal length to the ISO sensitivity, from the flash mode you used last to the AF area mode you're in, so there are plenty of plus points that make this camera user friendly.

But, and there's always a "but"! Like the recently tested S770, noise is probably the biggest issue even at ISO 50 (you have ISO 100, 200 and 400 as well) there's a mass of noise in shadows. At higher sensitivities, like some lurking monster, it creeps out of the shadows and into every aspect of the images. The Anti Shake DSP system doesn't help because it's a software solution and as such, while images look sharper (or less shaky) noise is added and detail removed by the processing.

Compounding this is the AF system, which rarely gets things right and is too slow. I found more and more I'd use the camera's Pan Focus mode (it fixes the focus from around 3ft to infinity) but even this was not sharp enough in my view. Thankfully, the colour and metering performance are good however.

VERDICT

Once again, the watchwords here are "less is so much more". Casio has a great little camera in the Z700 but one marred by having more pixels

At a glance

What is it?

7.2-megapixel, ultra-compact digital camera

Good

Design and build, 37 automated snapping "Best Shot" modes

Bad

Close focus distance, barrel distortion at wide -angle end of lens, intrusive noise at all ISO settings, image quality

Verdict

A sparkling camera in almost all areas except the most important, the images it creates

Price £229

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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than it needs (given the market) on a sensor that's just too small. Drop this to a 5-megapixel camera and the noise would probably vanish - or at least be much less prominent. And that AF system is just flippin' frustrating so I cannot recommend this camera. However, to be fair, if you're not going to make prints bigger than 6 x 4 -inches the camera is probably okay (bar the AF foibles) as a lot of the noise problems won't show at that size. But why then do you need all that resolution? Exactly.