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Pentax Optio E30 digital camera

Can you get a decent 7 megapixel camera for under £100?

by Doug Harman published on 23 March 2007

The Optio E30 is a thoroughbred budget model but with a resolution remarkable at this price and unheard of only a couple of years ago. Key features include a nice 36-108mm 3x optical zoom lens, a 2.4-inch colour screen, 3-point AF system, SDHC and SD storage, dual AA battery power and you get 11MB of built-in memory, although the latter will only be enough for two top quality shots!

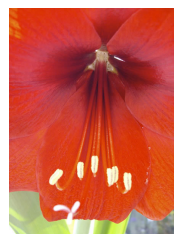
15 scene modes and a natty guide menu that describes what each mode does with large, bright, animated pop up boxes offer plenty of pre-set scope and help. A green "Green Mode" button activates the most basic point and shoot functions while a Program AE mode allows for minor manual controls to be utilised.

These include manual white balance setting (an excellent feature at this level) and exposure compensation mode, though this is buried within the menus. Main controls on the body include a big shutter release on the top plate along with the on/off button.

Other controls on the back include playback, menu, Green Mode/Guide menu control, the lens zoom buttons; a four-way jog button activates Scene mode selection, flash, self-timer, and a macro/landscape/AF/MF button. The "up" and "down" buttons allowing fine focus tuning.

The aforementioned scene programs include portrait, landscape, night scene, and a sports setting among others, there's a VGA movie mode - with audio - included too. The "OK" button completes (as you'd expect) confirms selections in menus and toggles the screen's display.

Performance-wise, the E30 does okay. Start up is slow at around two seconds but thanks to the AA batteries, you'll get around 200 and 550 shots



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depending on whether standard alkaline or high capacity NiMH AA rechargeable cells, respectively, are used.

A Pixel crammed sensor promotes more image noise so thankfully the E30 has its ISO restricted to 80, 160 and 320 in auto shooting or the same plus ISO 400 in Program AE mode. As a result, images are relatively noise free and my ISO 80; top quality JPEG shots are clean without detail loss.

Exposure, flash exposures or otherwise and colour control are vibrant but with strangely boosted yellows. Focusing is slow and the camera often picked the wrong AF point to use while macro focusing has a modest, 0.49m close focus point.

Image noise from ISO 160 upwards is there but not intrusive and only at ISO 400 could it be described as bad, though still not over the top. Processing images and saving them to the SD storage is slow and most unfavourable but common on cameras at this level, there's noticeable shutter lag.

VERDICT

Bearing in mind the price and target market for this camera and with such a high-resolution sensor, this camera is not bad at all. It may be built to a price, but it is still quite well specified and so is well perfectly for those snappers needing an inexpensive but capable camera that can be used without a lot of mucking about.

At a glance

What is it?

Budget 7.1-megapixel compact

Good

Image quality, ease of use, price, white balance control, scene modes

Bad

Focusing, shutter lag, build

Verdict

Budget it may be but it's certainly worth a lot for anyone requiring an easy to use but high-resolution budget snapper

Price £99

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10