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Pentax A30 digital camera

Is this the 10 megapixel compact to prove them wrong?

by Stuart Miles published on 10 May 2007

If you've just bought an A20, sorry to break the news, Pentax has updated it with the A30 complete with 10 megapixels and a host of other features for under £200.

Can Pentax be the first manufacturer to break the 10 megapixel compact imaging problem? We get snapping to find out.

Housed in a tough, lightweight aluminium casing and finished in black, the camera sports a 3x optical zoom camera also features a 2.5-inch LCD monitor.

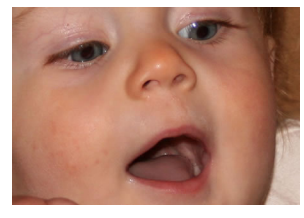
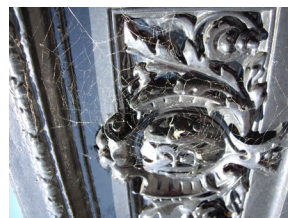
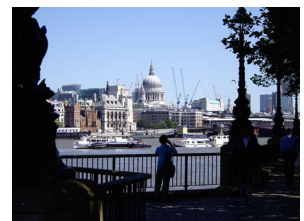
One of the main boasts though of the A30 is its promise of blur free images thanks to its anti-shake technology.

According to Pentax "the shake detection accuracy of the Optio A30 has been further enhanced by incorporating a new, high-accuracy gyro sensor and a control algorithm".

In English it means that the company has basically lifted the technology straight out of its DSLR range and slapped it in the A30 to positive results. In practice on our various test shoots we struggled to take a blurry image in any lighting condition, be it indoors or outside. That's not to say we didn't have any at all, but it was a good 9:1 blur-free ratio.

Other features on note include a "Face Recognition AF & AE" function that automatically detects and focuses on faces, regardless of where the people appear in the frame and a crazy ISO setting that goes all the way up to 3200.

Like other manufactures, it's a trend that is starting to appear in an attempt to offer users yet another number that you've got to have, and we have to say the results while getting you that shot



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in near darkness are so noise filled that you'll wonder why you bothered.

While the A30 does offer a number of manual controls, for the beginner it has 15 playback modes for different scenarios that you'll find yourself at, including the beach ready for the summer.

Furthermore there is a "Green button" that enables users to assign functions that are frequently used, and recall them at a single touch.

With 10 megapixels you'll whiz through the 22MB of on-board memory, so make sure you invest in some more, and this is one of the first cameras to support the new SDHC memory card format.

When it comes to movies, the Pentax is DivX approved like other models in the Pentax range and a variation of the technology used for the image stabilising is also used here in movie mode to great effect.

When it comes to picture quality it is disappointingly the same story as with other 10 megapixel compact cameras on the market, the sensor just can't cope with that much detail and so the images are noise filled.

Our test images were taken on a bright sunny day on the default auto setting (see pictures). When used small the pictures are stunning, when viewed at full size the noise is certainly apparent.

To show this, in the image gallery we've included a section of a photo we took with the A30 at full size and one of a photo, again at full size, from Canon's 400D DSLR with the standard 18-55 lens. As you can see from the images the difference is striking.

VERDICT

On the surface and for the average digital photographer the A30 is a great camera that is

At a glance

What is it?

10 megapixel camera

Good

Anti-Shake, image quality from afar, DivX support

Bad

Image quality up close

Verdict

On the surface and for the average digital photographer the A30 is a great camera that is both stylish and easy to use

Price £200

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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both stylish and easy to use.

However as soon as you start to delve deeper you see that Pentax is merely number chasing in an attempt to make sure it has a 10 megapixel offering.

While image quality from afar is fantastic, on closer inspection its noise filled. Furthermore, the introduction of a 3200 ISO setting is so crazy, that like newspapers keen to have a bigger page supplement in order to beat the competition, we get the feeling that Pentax is doing the same here, just making sure its one up on the competition.

You can hear them down the pub as we type:
"What you mean you've only got a perfectly decent 7 megapixel model with 1600 ISO? Mine's got 10 megapixels and a 3200 ISO setting so there".

Worrying.