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## Casio Exilim EX Z1200 digital camera

### Can Casio impress with 12 megapixels

by Doug Harman published on 25 July 2007

The Z1200 is Casio's new flagship model and as such, it steams into port with a level of specification befitting the role. To start the build is great, the black and lustrous gunmetal-coloured alloy body is beautifully made and feels rock solid with stylish silver accents around the 3x optical zoom lens on the front to finish off the smart styling.

That lens offers a focal range of 37mm to 111mms and has a fast F2.8 maximum aperture so, while not particularly ground breaking in terms of field of view it affords, the lens gives a workmanlike focal range that would benefit from a wider-angle to make this camera an even more attractive catch.

Other kit includes that headline grabbing and "world leading" high-resolution CCD that provides a 12.1-megapixel effective resolution on a 1/1.7-inch sized sensor, a sensor that also utilises CCD-shift anti-shake to help reduce the effects of camera shake.

The camera's focus system is suitably sophisticated boasting both a face detection set-up and a focus tracking system, both of which work well enough. That is until you look closely at the tracking AF, which struggles to work with subjects moving vertically within the frame or if a subject approaches or recedes from the camera head on.

Sensitivity is limited to 50, 100, 200 and 400 ISO with ISO 800 and 1600 available only in the camera's Best Shot (or scene) modes, of which you get a suitably large number to play with, 30 no less.

Of these, the usual suspects are floated out including portrait, landscape and night scene modes but examples that are more novel include a two Layout options for inserting multiple images



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within one file, an autumn leaves mode, ID photo and old photo modes. A set of coloured filter effects are to hand as well that allow the more usual black and white or sepia effects as well as purple, pink, red, green and blue filters, among others.

A widescreen movie mode of 848 x 480-pixels is on offer; saved as H.264 clips and you get SDHC compatibility although only a very modest 11.4MB of internal storage is included; enough for just one high quality shot!

Handling this surprisingly sophisticated vessel is actually a cinch thanks to a deceptively simple control layout that'll be a boon for the choppy waters of the more technologically challenged who otherwise find themselves all at sea with more than an on/off and shutter button.

On the top plate is the on/off button, it is small and nicely recessed to boot, a camera mode button and playback mode button activate those two options according to your needs while the shutter button is encircled by a swivel-type lens zoom control.

Over on the back plate a 2.8-inch colour screen dominates the real estate on offer and provides a big, bright, view although the 230,000-pixel resolution is not able to do justice to the images the camera can shoot. The colour seems to be bled out in brighter conditions and to make things worse, the screen is not great to use in direct sunlight either so the lack of an optical viewfinder can be bothersome.

Colours look somewhat unnatural on the screen too, but the information display options (activated by the "DISP" button on the top plate) and those for controlling the camera are superb. You can have a panel display of control options or the information scattered around on the back. There's an active histogram, and framing guides too. In terms of information displayed, I prefer the panel option and although it does bite into the available

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## At a glance

### What is it?

12.1-megapixel digital compact with 3x optical zoom

### Good

Build and design, low ISO image quality, low ISO image detail, easy to use, manual shooting options

### Bad

Focus tracking, slow shot-to-shot speed (no burst mode), Loss of detail at higher ISOs, noise issues over ISO 200

### Verdict

This 12.1-megapixel camera is capable of some great results but is flawed by the sheer number of pixels harboured by its sensor

**Price** £240

**Our score**

**8/10**

**Your score**

**?/10**

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image display it makes using the camera very easy.

Menus, Best Shot modes, Face Detection AF and flash options are all got to via buttons on the right of the screen while a press of the Set button, which sits inside the circular four-way jog dial, quickly activates options in the control panel or allows mode changes.

It has to be said, the control panel display Casio use is one of my favourite features of any digital camera, it allows you to quickly access features such as ISO, exposure compensation, manual shooting modes of aperture and shutter priority modes, manual and a neat snap shot setting all quickly and clearly displayed. Thankfully, a memory feature can be used to store your favoured settings because otherwise, the camera will always boot back in at its default settings next time you use it.

In terms of image quality, neat advanced features such as the dynamic range booster help get detail out of shadows and/or highlights but it takes some trial and error to get used to knowing when it's best to use it.

I found it is best to use this mode only when subjects are low key (so generally dark where plus two in the menu worked well at getting at the shadow detail) or high key (generally bright subjects and plus one worked best), but as I say, trial and error was the key at first.

Metering was good and pretty well accurate although you do have exposure compensation to play with to +/-2EV and while there are manual control options you only F2.8 or F8 in terms of apertures to play with while a range of shutter speeds from 30-seconds to 1/200th sec offer more scope to play. And as for image noise problems, well, things are slightly more complicated here.

The Z1200 does a good job - at lower ISOs. As

you'd expect, with 12-megapixels of resolution available surprisingly detailed images are achievable at ISO 50 and 100 and without much noise. Above ISO 200 though, things get worse, much worse. Detail drops quickly away (particularly in backgrounds) as noise processing tries to sort things out for you.

The noise problem is quite dramatic at ISO 800 and 1600 (via the High Sensitivity Best Shot mode) and only serves to concretise my thoughts that having too many pixels on a small sensor actually makes things less detailed - not more - at least at higher ISO in this case.

Focusing is fast and accurate in "normal" modes; the face detection system suffers - as do most such systems - with only working well on faces directly facing the camera and the tracking AF was flawed when subjects moved vertically through the frame or moved directly towards or away from the camera.

In short, despite these shortcomings, sensitively used and shooting at ISO 50 or 100 can produce good results and the level of detail achievable at those settings is remarkable thanks to the 12-megapixel sensor. Finally, cropping to enlarge an area of the shot (one undoubted advantage to having more pixels) is a reality with this camera.

## VERDICT

This new Casio is certainly a plush model and a neat performer under the right conditions; it's easy to use and a good price. And, as the new Casio Exilim flagship, thankfully it's no Titanic, set to sink on its maiden voyage.

Yes, while the noise issues and focus tracking are slight icebergs, they're not ones to hole this vessel below the waterline particularly if you're in the market for a high-res' easy to use but sophisticated ship. No, sorry, I mean snapper.