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Epson Stylus D120 printer

Can the photo printer match its promised speed?

by Doug Harman published on 12 October 2007

Epson's Stylus D120 is a printer aimed at convincing you its high-speed output plus colour capability makes it a good alternative to a laser printer offering similar print speeds and the flexibility of colour with low running costs.

Out of the box, the D120 looks just as you'd expect a printer to look. It's an unassuming grey plastic box of electronics and gizmos with an articulated flip up paper feeder tray on the top for up to 120 sheets of paper which is driven through the heart of the printer to be delivered onto another articulated feed tray that slides out from the front of the printer.

The printer's top lid lifts up to reveal the five ink piezo-ejection print head. Interestingly the key to this printer and the thinking behind this is the fact it uses dual black inks alongside the more standard cyan, magenta and yellow ink tanks.

In terms of controls the D120 has three buttons across a glossy black strip atop the front panel and these are for power, ink cartridge swap over and paper feed should you need to clear a jam for example. On the rear, you find the power socket and USB 2.0 port but disappointingly, the printer is not supplied with a USB cable.

The inks employed are Epson's DURABright Ultra pigment based inks and the two black are there to add the extra ink capacity envisioned as a requirement for the higher use this printer is likely to get in an office situation. The D120 is suitably quiet in use when printing standard documents but once you bump up the speed (more on that in moment) noise increases noticeably and the mechanism drives the paper through at speeds up to 37 pages per minute (ppm).

To compete against laser printers, the D120 needs to have good text quality and at the two



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"standard" print speeds of 25ppm for black-only printing and 11ppm for colour, look good. In practise however, the speeds are slower; I got a black text print speed of around 10ppm and a mixed colour and black text document print speed of around 3.5ppm, so much slower than the claimed Epson speeds. However, these speeds are comparable to speeds for similar documents on personal laser printers but the D120 offers the advantage of having colour output into the bargain.

To attain those 37ppm speeds, the printer must be set to its fastest economy setting and, as you'd expect, print quality is seriously compromised though more than adequate for internal page proofs for example. Print quality on plain paper for both colour graphics and text is quite good, but even with the pigment inks, there's a little blurriness to text and there's visible dithering patterns where lighter tones are being reproduced. Draft mode is a tad faster than the standard print setting but draft print quality is good when compared with other printer's draft settings.

Photo quality output (including borderless printing from custom settings in the easy to use printer driver) is very good with nice colour and tonality, detail in shadows and subtle highlights is all retained well and, barring some just-visible dots in single-toned areas such as blue skies, this D120 is more than capable on the photo front.

VERDICT

The Epson Stylus D120 offers a good combination of speed (though not as fast as Epson claims) and versatility; print output is okay overall with good photo printing into the bargain.

The advantage of a personal inkjet over a personal laser printer has always been the flexibility in terms of colour printing - colour lasers are so much more expensive than the £70 RRP for the D120 for example.

At a glance

What is it?

A4 inkjet printer, fast print speeds, dual black (individual DURABrite Ultra) pigment inks, photo printing

Good

Ease of use and set up, fast, near laser quality text, borderless photos

Bad

Not as fast as claimed, some fuzziness on text, dithering patterns visible in lower quality (read faster) print modes

Verdict

The D120 provides a combination or near laser printer print speeds and text quality but with the added bonus of colour printing and photo quality output making it a good all rounder and one ideally suited the needs of busy office or home office environment. It is not without its flaws however

Price £70

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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And now we have faster output too and at a reasonable price for an inkjet capable of near laser quality text and speeds (in the right print mode) though not necessarily at the same time.

The Epson Stylus D120 is certainly worth a closer look on that basis.