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Fujifilm FinePix S8100fd digital camera

Get up close to the action with 18x zoom

by Chris Hall published on 9 May 2008

The S8100fd features an 18x optical zoom, falling squarely into the super zoom category. But will this cover all your digital photography needs? We get snapping to find out.

The design is dominated by the 18x optical lens, which gives you 27-486mm (equiv.), which is impressive considering the overall size. The right-hand of the body is formed of the hand grip, which also houses the four AA batteries. You might want to consider swapping these for good quality rechargeables to reduce ongoing costs.

The back of the camera has a 2.5in LCD monitor that looks a little small. The quality is pretty good at 230k pixels, certainly better than those further down Fujifilm's range of cameras. This is paired with an electronic viewfinder that is comfortable enough for everyday use, but has a washed-out look lacking colour. Fortunately any menu selections are visible through the viewfinder, although the viewfinder does have to be manually selected via the press of a button.

Control is spread perhaps too widely, as we also found with the S1000fd, across a number of buttons, menus and a control dial. With a camera so feature-packed, it is easy to miss entire sections. The top of the camera sees an SLR-type dial, which provides access to some main shooting options: full auto and manual settings, and various steps between the two, video, scene preset, zoom, two "natural" settings and picture stabilisation.

You also get dedicated buttons for face detection and image stabilisation (again) which seems like a duplication and we couldn't really fathom why this was the case.

On the back of the body you have a d-pad type control and a further four buttons: playback,



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Fujifilm F button, display options and a +/- button, which again affects your display options, but will give you a live histogram, which we like a lot.

Overall, it's somewhat confusing, even before you get into the menus on-screen. Oh, and you get a flash button too. The F button unfortunately falls under your thumb when you grip the camera, so you're forever entering that menu

On the dial the zoom setting gives you three images cropped down which is probably aimed at wildlife photography - you get the full frame image and a digital zoom and crop stepping down to 5MP and 3MP successively. This does all mean that you are putting more images onto the memory, which can be xD-Picture Card or SD.

You also get an option for two "natural" light conditions, the first just takes one shot, the second takes two, one with flash and one without. Why this warrants two spaces on the dial, and not in the scene presets isn't clear.

Whilst on the flash, it is a manual selection, so the S8100 won't pop it up for you. This is interesting as it hints at a more considered photographer and as a result you'll find you take a large number of photos without it. The resultant images can be noisy, but the image stabilisation does a good job of controlling hand shake for slightly longer exposures.

Hiding within the presets are the normal range of options, including an "auction" option with various layouts - see the Boba Fett image - which saves having to assemble these things manually in your computer.

The zoom itself is relatively fast and the included image stabilisation is welcomed, but at the far end you really need support. There is an additional digital zoom, but as digital zooms do, it suffers noise and is near impossible to frame your picture. Detail at the far end of the zoom suffers and when examined in detail looks more like a

At a glance

What is it?

18x super zoom digital camera

Good

Plenty of features, more advanced shooting options, live histogram

Bad

Dial feels cheap, controls too widely spread around, colour a bit dull, no dedicated playback, no memory card supplied

Verdict

We like the range of options presented by the S8100fd but the controls lose it marks

Price £299.99

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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water colour than a photograph - a tripod is perhaps the best option to control the shake.

At the other end of the scale the close shots are actually pretty good with plenty of detail captured. There is a macro and super macro setting, which claims to be effective from 1cm, which is almost true and this option is better than zooming in on the subject, but with the lens so close light becomes a problem.

Face detection is a bit hit and miss, not always finding the faces, but regardless, it is not essential for taking a good portrait shot. It has a dedicated button so you can turn it on or off, including the red-eye option and it is nice to have these features bundled together for ease-of-use.

We felt the colour was a little disappointing, with images being a little cold. Even in good lighting conditions colours are not as vibrant as they perhaps should be. Auto-focusing is sometimes an issue too for detailed or zoom work, but is pretty good in the middle ranges.

When getting into the manual selections, ISO can be cranked up to 6400, but the result is the sensor drops down to 5MP to compensate for the noise. ISO control lives in the F (F-mode) menu, along with quality and colour options (standard, chrome, black and white), which are probably better applied in photo-editing software subsequently. You do get full manual control, along with a shutter and aperture priority options as you'd find on SLR cameras.

VERDICT

At this price point the feel the dial quality could have been better and the F button is in a stupid place, but that's not a deterrent to buying the camera. It is something of a hybrid, providing at one end some technical options and at the other, options for your eBay gallery. We do like the range of options presented by the S8100fd but the controls lose it marks.

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Image quality on the whole is ok and certainly this is a super zoom in a compact form giving you a wide range of options from the one camera.