

Toshiba Camileo Pro HD camcorder

Does HD video work at this price?

by Chris Hall published on 10 June 2008

The Toshiba Camileo Pro HD has attracted a lot of attention because of the ability to record HD in a package which appears to be great value for money. But should the price sell this camcorder to you?

Taking the popular form factor of a handheld vertical unit with flip-out screen, the Camileo Pro HD comes in where the Camileo Pro left off and we've found that because of the names, there is a great deal of confusion about which camera you are talking about.

It is lightweight and almost pocketable. We say almost, because it will slip into a jacket pocket, measuring 70 x 110 x 33mm and weighing in at 180g, it is not as smallest option out there.

From a design point of view it is not the most advanced looking device, it is fairly conservative in fact - pushing toward the price point has obviously meant simplification in design and materials. There is also no lens cover, but you do get a case supplied in the box.

The screen is a 2.5in TFT LCD that flips out and will rotate on its axis so you can see yourself whilst filming yourself, if you are into that sort of thing. Whilst the screen quality looks ok, the info icons applied to it are basic and clunky, but can be turned off. Likewise, the menus are basic in their appearance but functional enough and easy to navigate.

Control buttons lie on the back, with a control stick, mode and menu buttons, still image capture, zoom control and record. There are three additional buttons lying on the edge of the screen, which basically control playback and are somewhat superfluous to requirements as their features could have been incorporated elsewhere.



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The control stick is handy allowing you to select white balance, flash settings, macro mode, as well as set the on-board illuminator. More on these later.

From a memory perspective, you only get 128MB on-board, which is of very little use, so at the point of purchase you need to be looking at getting an SD card. SDHC is supported, so get the biggest card you can afford. An indicator of the fact that you aren't really intended to use the internal memory is that you don't appear to be able to access it when an SD card is inserted - including in playback mode (although you can access both areas once connected to a PC).

Video shooting options at the highest settings give you 1280 x 720p (a 16:9 widescreen aspect ratio), with options to step down to DVD, VGA, or a web resolution. Video is shot in MPEG4. Whilst 720p isn't the full HD the device name might infer, it is reasonable quality for playback on your TV without taking up too much storage space and does mean it is easier to work with than the 1080p big brother.

And so to the all important video quality. Outdoors the camera works well, especially on near and middle distance subjects, but we found that at a distance things dropped off rapidly, with loss of definition and colour. Colours are pretty good on the whole, the brighter end towards the reds can be a little vivid, but not that you'd complain.

We tested the Camileo Pro at a street fair, which presented a range of challenges: fast moving rides, lots of noise, lots of people, flashing lights. Again, the Camileo performed well, dealing with the flashing lights and coping fairly well with the rides. It does sometimes suffer with focusing and the focus can motor back and forth trying to fix on the subject. There is no manual focus option, so you can't avoid that unfortunately.

The Camileo does tend to be noisy on the audio front, with little protection from wind or

At a glance

What is it?

HD camcorder

Good

Price, 720p video, good still snapper

Bad

Lack of memory, images on the cold side, struggles in lower light conditions, audio quality, no lens cover, no memory in box

Verdict

Sacrifices have been made to reach this price, but for filming the kids in the garden, then the Toshiba Camileo Pro HD represents great value for money

Price £139.99

Our score

7/10

Your score

8/10

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background noise, and no option for an ancillary mic. In our tests at the street fair, the audio is at times verging on overwhelming, but again it depends on what you want to film.

The 3x optical is very slow, sometimes you'll wonder if it is working, so it is best to line up on your subject before you start recording and not expect too much from the zoom. There is also a remote in the box that covers a range of functions, but we found it was a little hit and miss and sometimes didn't seem to work.

Enter a low light environment and the Camileo Pro HD begins to struggle. In a normal room in daylight, images are very cold, even when well lit with natural light. The on-board illuminator, in the form of two front-mounted LEDs, can be set to auto, and you'll find it on almost all the time you are indoors, although you can opt for it to be on, or off, at all times, but not changed whilst filming. This limits your range indoors - close work is no problem, but looking down a corridor is really gloomy.

In terms of connections there is an AV out which also doubles as the headphone socket. Under a small flap is the USB for connection to your PC and for charging, as well as the HD out, which is a standard 3.5mm jack. In the box you are supplied an AV cable and the Component cable - for the best quality playback you'll have to use the two in tandem, taking your video from the HD socket and your audio from the AV, in lieu of an HDMI socket.

As to the still camera options, the Camileo Pro HD has a 5MP CMOS sensor, giving you 8 megapixel images after interpolation/resampling. These are surprisingly good in fact, so you don't have to miss out on an opportune snap here and there because you left your camera behind, but again, it isn't a replacement for your digital compact. Interestingly there is also a dedicated flash - it doesn't rely on the LEDs from the illuminator.

In the box you'll also find bundled Roxio 8 Essentials software which you can use to create DVDs and so on. When connected to a PC, it is easy to transfer files across, but equally, you could just whip out the SD card and put it into a card reader. You can also set up the Camileo as a webcam and so on once connected and there is a standard tripod mount on the bottom should you need it. You can also opt for audio only recording if you want to use the Camileo as a voice recorder.

VERDICT

Despite the range of settings to give control to the user, we found the best results came from auto, as these play to the camcorders shortcomings. Of course, at this price, sacrifices have been made, but can you live with those sacrifices?

Given the quality of the outdoor performance, we'd say quite possibly, but if you intend to do a lot of filming indoors, then you might want to think again. The limited zoom is also a consideration when you are outside, so this will be of little use when you can't get close to your subject, but for filming the kids in the garden, then the Toshiba Camileo Pro HD represents great value for money.