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Oregon Scientific ATC3K Action Cam camcorder

Go hardcore with your camcorder

by Chris Hall published on 6 August 2008

The ATC3K is the latest iteration of Oregon Scientific's range of cameras aimed at those wanting to capture themselves or friends in more adverse conditions. To this end, the camera itself is a fairly chunky device, weighing in at about 200g including batteries. It measures approx 110mm in length and 47mm in diameter at the widest point.

Wrapped in a fair amount of black rubber, it looks pretty much like the Predator's shoulder cannon, which should please action fans. The lens is protected by a front rubber moulding, so unless you are very unlucky, it should withstand impact with branches, snow drifts and so on.

Control of the camera is handled by three main buttons on the body: power, record/enter, and menu. Which need a good press and hold to get a response. There aren't a huge range of options available, but you can step down the resolution from 640 x 480, to 320 x 240, to get more on the card or if the sole purpose is to share it online.

The camera is powered by two AA batteries which slot neatly into the body through the back panel, which is also home to the SD card slot, Mini-USB and 3.5mm AV connections. The entire back is then covered with a screw-down rubber-sealed cap to protect the delicate parts.

In the box you get the things you expect, the camera, cables and manuals. But you also get a range of mounting options to take your camera on the move and a storage bag. You have a handlebar mount, a helmet mount with various straps, as well as a tripod for static moments. The clever thing is how all these elements integrate - you slide the camera into a ring, which will allow rotation so you could side mount the device and still have a level image. You then screw the ring



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onto a clip which can be locked down in pretty much any plane, so you have fixing options via a number of methods, through a number of axis.

So how does it fair in action? Well, the camera seems to just record whatever you throw at it. As the maximum resolution is 640 x 480, you can't expect too much from it: it isn't going to stand up on your massive LCD screen. We carried out a number of tests, and yes, it will film in water (down to 3 metres).

We found that the Action Cam was pretty good with colour, but it takes some time to adjust to changing light conditions, so if you go from bright sun into a shadowed wood, then expect a dark patch. Although it shoots at 30fps, you'll also find that fast action is somewhat jerky. We filmed in the rain and whilst the rain was captured, it tended to flash in speckles, but the effect is rather cool. When the sun does come out you'll find lens flare is common.

Mounted on the handlebars of a bike we encountered the first real issue with the camera: the image appears to wobble as the camera moves with the vibrations from the road. This image wobble can cause some interesting effects if you have the camera pointing at the rider, as their face will distort in unnatural ways.

Taken off the harsh road surface and things improve. Mounted on something that experiences less vibration, such as the head of the rider, the results are better and you get relatively smooth video as a result. The key thing is ensuring that the camera is securely attached to the head, and that it is pointing the right direction. Also consider the weight, as it does feel heavy when mounted on your head and tension quickly builds in the neck.

Unfortunately there is a problem with sound, presumably because of the weather-proofing on the camera, so you'll get muffled noise, and on a road, with wind, all you'll hear is hissing. Many

At a glance

What is it?

Action camcorder

Good

Weatherproof, kit contains all the bits you need, takes SD card

Bad

Sound is poor, image wobble, heavy when head mounted, no SD card supplied

Verdict

A robust self-contained unit that can capture good images but let down by poor sound and overall weight

Price £99.99

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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people will probably want to add a sound track, or cut the Action Cam into footage from a static camera so using that audio track is advised.

To watch your movies you can simply plug the SD card into a PC and play back the AVI files, or connect via USB. If you want to play directly onto your TV, the supplied cable will hook-up to your AV input. Basic (very basic) on-screen options allow you to view the recorded files. A 4GB card will give you around 2 hours of film, which should be plenty for a day in the mountains, or some white-water rafting.

VERDICT

The range of accessories you get in the box are a real credit, but you need to make sure that you try to avoid too much vibration to keep the image from wobbling. Sound is also a problem so you need consider whether you want to capture sound or not. Weight is an issue if it is going to be helmet mounted.

Using SD cards makes the ATC3K very flexible and easy to use and the robust camera just keeps rolling whether above or below the water.

Great fun, bu not without problems.