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## Canon HG21 HD camcorder

Will this help you conquer Hollywood?

by Stuart Miles published on 29 October 2008

Canon's latest camcorder, the HG21 promises HD quality images and 120GB of storage, but should Steven Spielberg be worried? We made some movies to find out.

Following on from the HG10, the HG21 comes in a traditional camcorder format complete with flip out LCD display and electronic viewfinder. Comfortable to hold, the main control switch is found at the back of the device and allows you to switch between recording video and stills, as well as playing them back.

Zoom is found, as customary, on the top and there is also a hotshoe connector for attaching an external mic (recommended) or a top light. There is a hand strap on the right hand side. The screen flips out allowing you to see yourself if you're the only one present and it also hides a few select editing buttons as well as a SDHC slot for saving to SD Cards if the 120GB hard drive isn't big enough for you.

Access to the footage you've recorded and the menu system is via a simple toggle on the 2.7 -inch widescreen LCD screen and the menus are basic but easy to master.

Elsewhere you get an external mic socket, USB connection for transferring your footage or images to your computer and a HDMI socket so you can playback on an HD television without transferring elsewhere first.

Get recording and you get around 90 minutes of a single charge, although this will vary depending on how much you use the 12x optical zoom. Based on our experience with the HG10, the battery is considerably better.

In use and the camera is responsive focusing quickly on the subject in the variety of lighting conditions we used, however we were



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disappointed with the on board microphone. Unless you are in a very quiet environment you'll need to invest in a top mic for the sound to be any good.

Sporting the HD badge you'll get Full HD footage from the HG21 (1920 x 1080) at the maximum data rate of 24Mbps providing the best possible quality available and probably way too much for your needs if you are shooting little Johnny in the park on the swing.

Those going for the low-budget movie offering will be able to opt for the 25p Cinema Mode that gives you a more "traditional" film look and picture quality was good (beyond the resolution) although we did find that the auto white balance struggled in difficult lighting situations. We admittedly were pushing the camera to its probable limits, but it's something to bear in mind.

You can also take still images, and surprisingly the Canon HG21 wasn't as bad as we were expecting. It's no 12-megapixel DSLR but in still mode you can get 3.1-megapixel photos to SD card, as well as being able to simultaneous capture still images during movie recording or playback. These images are only captured at 2-megapixels and from your HD video footage.

You can also turn down the quality at the importing stage. Transferring footage to your computer is relatively simple. You can either use the software bundled in the box, or if you're using an Apple Mac, iMovie. One disadvantage due to the use of the hard drive, is that the camcorder insists on being connected to the power when transferring. It's not handy if you are out in the field as it means you'll not only have to carry the power pack, but also find a power source.

The way around this is to transfer footage to an SD card, which you can do in-camera, and then use that SD card to get the footage to your laptop. Still it kinda defeats the point of the hard drive.

## VERDICT

The Canon HG21 is a good option if you are  
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## At a glance

### What is it?

Full HD camcorder

### Good

Full HD, capture still images at the same time, quick to focus on subjects

### Bad

Needs to be connected to a power source to transfer footage to PC, mic isn't that good

### Verdict

The Canon HG21 is a good option if you are looking to shoot Full HD, however at almost £1000 it's not for the occasional user

**Price** £1000

**Our score**

**7/10**

**Your score**

**?/10**

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looking to shoot Full HD, however at almost £1000 it's not for the occasional user or someone just looking to catch video of their family at social gatherings.

Complaints? The fact that it needs to be connected to a power source when transferring footage off the camcorder to the computer and that the mic is awful, so you'll need to upgrade straight-away. We tested Canon's DM100 directional mic and found that it did the trick perfectly.

So should you invest? There are certainly cheaper options out there for recording HD (the Kodak Zi6 for example) however for those looking to max out on HD recordings ahead of the game then this is worth a closer look.