



DIGITAL SLRs

Big cameras, small prices

Will Nikon or Olympus win the battle of the budget SLRs?

OWNING A DIGITAL SLR used to mean you were either shooting Premiership footballers or papping WAGs. These days, though, you can snap one up for less than the price of a season ticket to your local five-a-side league.

Introducing the cameras

Nikon is trying to make digital SLRs easier to use. Its six-megapixel D40 is smaller, lighter and cheaper than its previous budget best-seller, the D50. Alongside manual features, it includes sample images for different locations and light levels, to help choose white balance and sensitivity settings. There's also a friendly Retouch menu to quickly fix red-eye, boost lighting, add digital effects and trim photos in the camera.

Olympus's latest camera, meanwhile, is the smallest, lightest digital SLR ever. Despite its size, it has a grown-up spec, including a cutting-edge ten-megapixel sensor, fast burst shooting, and full manual control over exposure, focusing, metering and processing.

So, Nikon or Olympus... which super-snapper is worth the splash? **MH**

MAKE/MODEL	NIKON D40	OLYMPUS E-400
PRICE	£450	£600
WEBSITE	www.nikon.co.uk	www.olympus.co.uk
EASE OF USE	Many settings can be tweaked on the pin-sharp 2.5-inch LCD with just a few button presses. Some settings, including scene modes, are accessible via the main dial	It's smaller and lighter than the Nikon, but lacks a proper right-hand grip and the screen isn't quite as sharp. Adjusting common settings is quicker
PERFORMANCE	A disappointing lens means autofocus is a bit dumb and manual focusing awkward. There's a handy, programmable function button. Continuous shooting is 2.5fps for 100 frames	Focusing is very nippy, even in low light. The flash is potent but not as powerful as the Nikon's. A "Supersonic Wave" filter keeps the CCD impressively free of dust
PICTURE QUALITY	Colours are sexier and detail sharper than the Olympus. The pop-up flash is strong, and causes little graininess. Exposure is spot on, but the 3x zoom is poor	Pictures have more detail than the Nikon, thanks to excellent exposure and a better lens and sensor, though the colours aren't as natural. Graininess is well controlled
RATING	★★★★★	★★★★★
OVERALL	Nikon has delivered a quality camera at an amazingly low price. It produces sharp, colourful pictures, but that cheap lens, although understandable at this price, still feels a bit of a let-down	This is a superb, breakthrough ten-megapixel digital SLR that's also a cinch to use. Pictures aren't quite from the top drawer, but at this price, it's pretty much perfect if you're upgrading from a compact
CARD SLOTS	SDHC	CF, xD
SUPPLIED LENS	18-55mm	14-42mm
SHOT SPEED	2.5fps	3fps
MEGAPIXELS	6	10
SCREEN (INCHES)	2.5	2.5
BATTERY LIFE	470 shots	240 shots
WEIGHT (G)	522	430
DIMENSIONS (MM)	126x64x94	130x91x53