

OLYMPUS MJU 500

quick view

PRICE £280

- CCD 5MP effective
- LENS 35-105mm
- SHUTTER SPEED 4-1/1000sec
- ISO 64-640
- EXPOSURE MODES P, Sc, Mov, ±2EV
- FLASH GN 7.8
- VIEWFINDER/MONITOR None/ 2.5in TFT
- OTHER xD, PictBridge, 1.5fps for 4 frames
- POWER Li-Ion
- DIMENSIONS/WEIGHT 99x55.5x31mm/165g

5 mega pixels



Olympus Mju 500

Is the Digital mju 500 up to the standard of its mju predecessors? **Jamie Harrison** finds out

Just because something sells well, it doesn't mean it's any good – Westlife records prove the point. In the case of the Olympus mju range however, it has been consistently popular with both customers and reviewers.

The 35mm film compacts are among the biggest-selling cameras of all time, while the two-year-old digital range has proved itself to be worthy of the mju name. Beginning with the mju Digital 300 and moving to the 410, the original cameras followed the design essentials of the film cameras, with a sliding lens cover, rounded curves and weatherproofing. A radical design shift happened last year with Olympus' multi-coloured mini mju cameras, while with the latest in the range, the mju Digital 500, Olympus has adopted a more conservative approach.

SPECIFICATIONS AND HANDLING

A universal truth in technology is that there will always be a new model with higher specification, usually at a reduced cost. This is definitely the case with digital cameras and the mju 500 is a good example. The camera is larger than its forebears, mainly to accommodate the new 2.5inch LCD screen. This is a major upgrade over the previous models' 1.5inch screen and reflects the current trends in cameras. As with most cameras this also means the viewfinder has exited stage left. I used to moan about

this, but from regular observation of the tourists on London's South Bank, I don't think anybody uses normal viewfinders any more anyway.

The LCD screen on the mju 500 is a good example of its kind, with reasonable definition and clarity in bright sun and exceptional clarity in lower light.

There is another important upgrade to the new camera too. Gone are the three- and four-million pixel models, the mju 500 is, you've guessed it, a 5MP model. These pixels are packed onto a 1/2.5" sensor, with 5.4 million pixels providing the full resolution and five million doing the actual recording.

Since the mju 410, Olympus has used its TruePic Turbo processor, offering quick start up, good colour and faster shooting and processing. This system is still in the new model – it's not as fast as some, such as the Konica Minolta G-series or Kyocera's R-Tune cameras, but it's fine for everyday use.

The camera comes with a 3x zoom covering the 35mm equivalent of 35-105mm, with a maximum aperture of f/3.1-5.2. Olympus has rejected the manual sliding lens cover of yore, opting instead for an automatic lens cover, which slides away as the camera is turned on. The lens then extends and the camera is ready to start shooting. The whole operation takes a second or two, which is impressive. Meanwhile the mju 500 maintains the traditional mju weatherproofing feature, making this ideal for

LCD SCREEN

The big change to the Mju is the huge 2.5inch screen, bringing the range bang up to date. This screen is particularly bright, but suffers in extreme sunshine somewhat – but then, they all do. The menu has a new brushed-metal design but continues in the Olympus tradition



image quality

For all but the most critical, images from the mju 500 are more than adequate. Colour rendition is generally good, with nice skin tones and vibrant hues. Even images taken with the built-in flash offer better skin tones than many cameras.

At ISO 64 there is some noise evident in the red channel, but no more than I'd expect from a 1/2.5inch sensor with 5MP. This increases as the gain is raised but is still acceptable for average purposes.

Images are well exposed and sharp without looking overprocessed which is a common problem with compact cameras; even shooting handheld at 1/5sec I managed to get sharp pictures, and without the benefit of any image stabilisation, which some of Olympus' competitors are starting to include.

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www.whatdigitalcamera.com



MODE DIAL

The recessed milled mode dial is easy to operate and has everything a general snapper needs, but options are limited for the enthusiast

the more sporty types (or those who live in the UK).

Exposure is simple, Program AE is the main option, with a range of scene modes to cover common situations. A couple of new modes are included, which I don't recall seeing before, namely underwater modes, covering wide angle and macro. This reflects the rising

'Images are well exposed and sharp without looking overprocessed'

popularity of underwater housings for digital cameras, and Olympus obviously has one for the mju 500. I didn't have a housing for the test so was unable to try the feature in situ, but judging from the pictures it's main purpose is to reduce the amount of blueness typically seen in underwater pictures. Other unusual scene modes are Document, Behind Glass, and Cuisine; all of which are self-explanatory. There is also the mandatory video mode for 15fps movie clips with sound and the recording duration limited by the size of the xD Picture Card in the camera. Incidentally, 1GB xD cards are now available.

Olympus has given the camera quite a wide sensitivity range, with standard settings of ISO 64 through to 400

and an extended ISO 640 for indoor and candlelight shots via the scene modes. Metering is via Olympus' reliable Digital ESP metering with a spot option and a live histogram and playback histogram mode is available along with ±2EV. Similarly, the focus is controlled by iESP autofocus with a spot focus option and a Super Macro mode ensures pictures can be taken from 7cm away from the subject.

The camera has a Lithium Ion battery which, Olympus claims, will last up to 240 shots – which is quite impressive considering the power drain that the large and essential LCD must impose.

VERDICT

Olympus generally makes good, functional cameras with nice design and the mju 500 is no exception. The screen, style and weatherproof body put this at the upper end of 5MP compacts and while it may not be the smallest or slimmest it is certainly one worthy of consideration.

Most aspects of the image quality and certainly the ease of the camera should keep the most ardent snapshotter happy, but the limited manual functions and slightly noisy images may put off the more demanding photo enthusiast.

WHAT DIGITAL CAMERA

specifications

MANUFACTURER:	Olympus
MODEL:	Mju Digital 500
PRICE:	£280
CCD:	1/2.5" 5.4MP Total/ 5MP Eff CCD
MAX PRINT SIZE:	12.8x9.6in @200dpi
LENS:	35-105 mm f/3.1-5.6
SHUTTER SPEEDS:	1/2-1/1000sec (4sec in night scene mode)
ISO:	64/100/200/400 and 640 indoor and candlelight scene mode
EXP MODES:	Program AE, Mov, 19 Sc, ±2EV
FLASH:	GN 7.8
FOCUS:	iESP AF, spot AF
VIEWFINDER:	None
DRIVE MODES:	Single, continuous 1.5fps over 4 frames HQ mode
METERING:	Digital ESP, spot
WHITE BALANCE:	Auto ESP, 6 presets
MONITOR:	2.5in Hyper-Crystal, 215,000 pixels
CONNECTION:	USB, av, DC in
FILE:	JPEG
FILE SUPPORT:	PictBridge, PIM II, DPOF, DCF, EXIF2.2, Quick Time M-JPEG
VIDEO OUTPUT:	NTSC, PAL
POWER:	Rechargeable Li-Ion
STORAGE:	xD Picture Card
OTHER:	Seven digital filters, five autobracketing modes
DIMENSIONS:	99x55.5x31mm
WEIGHT:	165g

scores

PROS: Build quality and weatherproofing, image colour and sharpness, LCD

CONS: Some image noise, limited control, larger than some competitors

features	17
ease of use	18
image quality	17
design	18
value	17

87%

WDC