

Samsung A503 £85

The compact A503 offers 5MPs, a generous 2-in LCD screen and 11 exposure modes, though no optical zoom. The screen quality is pretty poor, making it hard to see outdoors (there's no viewfinder). The macro ring around the lens is a tempting target for curious fingers, causing blurred pics. Overall picture quality is unremarkable. The red finish made it the kids' favourite but if we'd had the silver version it would have been a different story. **Score: 78%**



Nikon Coolpix L3 £99

Similar in shape to the Olympus but slightly smaller, the L3 boasts a 5MP sensor, 3x optical zoom and 2-in LCD. Its unique feature (in this company) is its face priority AF, in which the camera can recognise (and focus on) a face in the scene. The L3 is mid-table in looks, handling and screen clarity. But the images are a let-down. Dark and over-saturated, when magnified they're the softest of the bunch and over-processed. **Score: 78%**



Olympus FE-170 £95

By far the best specified camera here. Six (count 'em!) megapixels, 3x zoom, a big 2.5-in screen, 14 exposure modes plus an 'Image Stabilisation' anti-shake mode (actually just a high ISO/high shutter speed combo, but still useful). The kids liked its slim profile and it has a great on-board help guide too. The LCD screen was easily the best and easiest to see, and image quality was the best too, putting the FE-170 head and shoulders above the rest. **Score: 85%**



Fisher-Price Kid Tough £60

The Kid Tough is aimed specifically at young children – hence the chunky dual-hand grips, binocular-style finder and minimal functionality. Sadly the image quality is so poor (even allowing for its VGA sensor) that a packet of wax crayons and a sheet of paper could give it a run for its money. A novelty toy for pre-schoolers only. **Score: 35%**



Canon Powershot A430 £95

Another camera which owed its popularity to its colour, the A430 offers 4MPs, 4x optical zoom, 1.8-in LCD, eight scene modes plus extras such as panoramic stitching. It's also one of only two cameras with an optical viewfinder. It's a shame about the poor LCD screen, the confusing button layout on the back and the fact it's rather too fat to fit easily in a pocket. Picture quality was fairly good, placing it just behind the Olympus and Fuji. **Score: 81%**



Fuji Finepix A400 £99

'Boring' and 'ugly' were the two most popular adjectives for the A400. The spec (4MPs, 3x zoom, 1.8-in LCD) is fine but the scarcity of buttons makes navigation confusing. Its LCD is poor, though it does have a viewfinder. But for image quality it's only narrowly beaten by the Olympus. Such a seemingly intangible benefit failed to impress our young testers however, who gave it a big thumbs down. **Score: 82%**



Kodak C433 £90

I'd say this beats the Fuji to the Ugliest Camera award, but this 4MP, 3x zoom model has its good points. It handles OK and the interface is clear and simple. The dial on the top makes it quick to access the various modes, and the 1.8-in LCD is passable. Image quality falls mid-table. While not the worst camera here, it doesn't excel in any area, giving little reason to choose it. **Score: 79%**



Cameras For Under £100

Nigel Atherton tests six models under £100 – with a bit of help from a few young friends



We seldom review sub-£100 cameras because historically they haven't been very good. When we tested a selection in 2003, the highest spec model had just 2MPs, a 1-in LCD and no zoom. But times change and you can now get 6MPs, a 4x zoom, 2.5-in LCD and, dare I say it, even a bit of style. To help me with this test I've roped in my kids and their friends to help. Not because these cameras are designed for children – all but one are aimed at adults on a budget – but we think they make great presents for kids and offer an opportunity to get them interested in a creative, rewarding and inexpensive hobby. All the cameras tested here offer between 4MPs and 6MPs, an LCD screen of at least 1.8-in, and run on AA batteries. All but one has a zoom, and most important, all can be bought for under £100, if you shop around.

THE KIDS' VIEW
If you want to sell cameras to kids, make the cameras red, I've discovered. The Samsung A503 was the runaway choice, with the Canon a close second. The Nikon and Olympus were liked for their slim profiles, while the chunkier Kodak and Fuji drew few compliments. But after using them, opinions softened. Many of the LCD screens proved completely unviewable on our bright, sunny test day, making it impossible for them to see what they were photographing. The Canon and Fuji are the only two with optical viewfinders but these also have the worst screens, so you can see where the compromises have been made. The camera with the best screen, and therefore the easiest to use, is the Olympus. But despite this, style won over substance in the final assessment. If only the Olympus had been red.

Main image: Nigel Atherton