

Megapixel photo power in your pocket

Digital Cameras
Sony Cyber-shot DSC-P1

by Jason Lee

Sony is probably best known for creating broadcast quality video equipment, and its foray into the digital still camera market has until recently been targeted to hobbyists. The DSC-P1 is Sony's newest addition to the family of Cyber-shot digital cameras. This version seems to have the best features of the group, packed into a compact little model that is easy to carry in a purse, pocket, pouch, or even a fishing vest.

When I first showed off this camera to my girlfriend, she said, "Oh, it's so cute!" Little did she know the capabilities of this "cute" camera. The DSC-P1 shoots images at resolutions up to 2048x1536, with high quality results. And the small, ergonomic design allows one-handed access to almost every feature on the camera, from exposure and white balance to special effects such as solarize, sepia, negative, and more.



This is truly an automatic camera; if you want total manual control, this is not the camera for you, although it takes professional quality pictures. Other digital cameras that offer manual overrides, such as Nikon's 990, can be a bit confusing—even to the seasoned professional—and too often force you to carry the manual just to remind you how to use them.

To compensate for difficult shooting conditions, the Cyber-shot offers a selection of Program AE (automatic exposure) modes: Twilight (for low light), Twilight+ (night time), Landscape (wide depth of field), Pan-focus and Spot Meter.

For still image recording, there are selectable compression modes: Normal (JPEG), E-Mail (highly compressed JPEG), Voice Memo to include audio (MPEG1), TIFF, and Text (GIF). Sizes for capturing still images range from 2048 x 1536 and 1600 x 1200 down to 1280 x 960 and 640 x 480. The 8MB Memory Stick that comes with the camera is not sufficient to do high quality TIFF captures—a 32MB memory stick (at a cost of US\$80) is much more practical. Transferring the files from the camera's Memory Stick to my computer was very fast via USB—considerably faster than the transfers from my Nikon 990. The LCD display was remarkably clear and easy on the eyes.

The coolest feature of this camera is its ability to record video for CD-ROM or Internet delivery. Size and compression are selectable from High Quality (320 x 240), Presentation quality (320 x 240) and Voice Memo (160 x 112). Sony's experience in creating digital video equipment supports the decision to incorporate motion video into the Cyber-shot, utilizing the MPEG1 codec. The MPEG Movie Record Time Settings are fixed at 5 seconds, 10 seconds and 15 seconds, just long enough to send that personal greeting message to Mom. On one 8MB Sony Memory Stick, I captured six 15-second clips of MPEG video, at 320 x 240 pixels.

Battery life has become a big issue when using the new digital cameras with LCD viewing monitors. Most of the battery charge is used to provide image viewing and playback. The Cyber-shot excels

in this department. For still images, you have approximately 90 minutes or 1700 shots. For MPEG videos you have about 110 minutes of viewing time.

Cyber-shot's sleek design turned heads when I was testing this camera on the street, and I wound up explaining its features to many curious onlookers. It's easy to use and very powerful, making it great for those looking to buy a digital camera that the whole family can use.

Whether for professional quality uncompressed images, or for Mom to take short home videos of the baby, or for combining a photo with a voice message, this camera is great for the semi-pro who wants to point, shoot, attach and send without any hassle.

One final note: for those who want to use the DSC-P1 to shoot underwater pictures, Sony also offers the MPK-P1 Marine Case which will protect the camera down to depths of 30 meters. 🌊



SONY CYBER-SHOT DSC-P1

Specifications

Size (mm): 113 x 53 x 44

Weight: 208 gms.

3x Optical Zoom

6x Precision Digital Zoom

F = 2.8-5.3

Still image sizes: 2048 x 1536, 1600 x 1200, 1280 x 960, 640 x 480, 3:2 (2048 x 1360)

MPEG1 video: High Quality 320 x 240, Presentation 320 x 240, Voice Memo 160 x 112

Recording formats: JPEG, GIF, TIFF, MPEG1

Pricing

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