

Lightweight Olympus E-520 digital camera in the frame

Olympus makes a scene

DIGITAL SLR

Digital SLRs are changing. Whereas previous models were complicated for newcomers, the latest cameras include new, consumer-friendly features that make taking photos easier.

The Olympus E-520 is the company's latest digital SLR that includes novice-pleasing features

such as using the LCD monitor to frame a shot rather than needing to peer through a viewfinder. It also includes a dust protection system and face-detection settings.

Olympus says that the TruePic III processor will reduce graininess and enhance edge reproduction. It has 32 scene modes, along with a shadow enhancement setting. Olympus says that the 2.7-inch LCD has a wide viewing angle and is easy to read in sunlight.

The lightweight camera has a 10Mp resolution – though the image quality on Olympus digital cameras that we've recently tested has generally been average. It has an integral image stabiliser that works regardless of the lens fitted, and it is compatible with the range

of E-system lenses. It works with a variety of flashes, some of which can be set up wirelessly around your subject.

Much like digital SLRs from Panasonic, the Olympus has a focal length multiplier of two. This means that if you attach a 50mm lens, it takes on the attributes of a 100mm lens. Most models from the likes of Nikon, Canon and Sony, have focal length multipliers of 1.5.

An underwater case will be available, waterproofing it to up to 40 metres. It's not the cheapest of models; the camera body will cost around £480, and with a single lens kit it will set you back £530.

VERDICT Built-in image stabiliser and dust-protection technology could make this one to watch.



Movie making on a budget

CAMCORDER

Having taken the US by storm since its launch earlier this year, the £99 Flip camcorder series has arrived in the UK. It promises to make taking video and uploading it online as simple as possible. This isn't a model for anyone looking for a huge amount of control or lots of features, as it lacks many of the complex buttons and fine control of more traditional camcorders.

It's more akin to a camera phone with video recording functions, and is slim enough to fit into a trouser pocket. The Flip has a 1.5-inch LCD display. It includes a USB connector for transferring video, which we found a little fiddly to connect to a PC, and it can store up to 60 minutes of footage on its 2GB of internal memory.

A single button-press uploads your footage to video-sharing websites such as YouTube and Myspace. We found that it was also easy to save videos to DVD or shrink them so they can be attached to emails.

Video quality certainly can't compete with higher-spec camcorders – no surprise given its 640x480-pixel resolution. The 2x digital zoom gives disappointing results, as the focus does not automatically adjust with the zoom.

VERDICT A cheap, pocket-sized digital camcorder that has been a hit in the US, but produces poor resolution video compared with traditional camcorders.

SodaStream fizzes with style

DRINKS MAKER

SodaStream has launched a range of drinks makers with stylish looks to suit modern kitchen counter tops.

The Pure model costs £59 and is finished in brushed and stainless steel. It comes with a canister of gas, enough to make 60 litres of fizzy drinks. Gas refills are £6.99 and flavoured drinks concentrates are £2.49 for 500ml, which makes 12 litres. That works out as 31p a litre for flavoured drinks or 11p for fizzy water – good value, but economy-label drinks from supermarkets can work out cheaper.

It's easy to set up and use. The gas cylinder fits snugly into the spine, and a water bottle screws securely underneath the top. Two presses on

the carbonating lever fill the bottle with bubbles. The water we produced was fizzy and the screw caps on the two bottles kept our water bubbly for hours.

There's hardly any waste to recycle and the range of flavours available has moved on since the 'busy with the fizzy' days of the 1980s, with sugar-free cranberry and raspberry sharing the same shelf as old favourites cola and lemonade. You can even create sugar-free tonic.

VERDICT Easy to use and a fun way to make fizzy drinks. But if you're looking to save money, own-brand economy supermarket drinks may be cheaper. (See our report on p33 for the environmental implications of bottled water.)



13%

the percentage of camcorder sales in the US for the Flip video camera

PURE DIGITAL

11

the number of flavours available for use with SodaStream

SODASTREAM

Electronic book reader puts an entire library in your bag

iLiad has a novel approach

EBOOK READER

Aiming to do for the novel what the iPod did for music, digital book readers let you download an entire library and take it with you.

iRex Technologies' £399 iLiad Book Edition is the latest attempt to replicate the look-and-feel of books in a digital form.

It displays crisp text as dark grey on a very light grey background. The matte screen means you can view it in bright sunlight in comfort without eyestrain. It's as close to ink on paper as any electronic device we've tested, although it isn't backlit so you can't use it in the dark in the same way as you can a laptop.

It's slightly larger than an airport paperback but much thinner. Weighing just 420g, iRex claims its

battery life is good for 15 hours of continuous reading.

It's fairly intuitive to use. You can leaf through pages using a pivoting sidebar, and use the included stylus to zoom into text, add annotations, and scribble notes and diagrams.

The iLiad includes 50 classics loaded on the device, such as *Wuthering Heights* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and you can buy new books through an online store, but book choice is limited to around 44,000 titles, compared with Amazon, which has over 22 million books available.

It's hampered by a fiddly set-up, complex instruction manuals and the need to download additional software. Some features are limited: you can currently download just two digital newspapers – one



French and one Chinese. You can subscribe to news websites, such as the BBC's, and download stories. It's available at Borders and online.

VERDICT Recreates the feel of a book surprisingly well, but choice is limited and it's too complex. Not quite an iPod for paperbacks.

Automatic bins that watch your waste line

SENSOR BINS

If you find that opening your kitchen bin is a bit of a struggle, then a new range of automatic sensor waste units may prove a real kitchen boon. Waving your hand over the lid opens it automatically.

We looked at two family-sized bins, the square Emsa 52L Kitchensense Sensor Bin (pictured, £100) available at independents and online, and the round Brabantia 50L Sensor Bin (£140) which is available from John Lewis and Robert Dyas. First impressions of both are good – the Emsa is available in both mirror and brushed chrome finishes; the Brabantia only in fingerprint-resistant brushed stainless steel.

The difference is in the way they open: the Emsa uses louvres that slide back into the lid, but have side channels that could harbour dirt and germs. The Brabantia lid swings up, so you need to move your hand out of the way. Both close automatically after several seconds.

Both run on batteries.

Emsa's motorised lid mechanism is louder, but the Brabantia was whisper quiet.

The infrared sensor on the Brabantia is much larger, and when left in a sunny spot we found that the lid sometimes opened and closed by itself. Both bins need space above them

so that the sensors operate properly, so can't be stored under a worktop.

The Emsa doesn't have a safety mechanism – stick your arm inside and the louvres will close on it, though it's unlikely to injure you. The Brabantia senses protruding objects and will gently try to close six times before reopening until the object is removed.

The Emsa model has independent open and close buttons, but only the Brabantia has a stay-open function – good if you're throwing away lots of leftovers.

VERDICT Both bins are expensive, but Brabantia is the most appealing.



Just out

Kenwood Smoothie 2GO

£25

Snacking on-the-go can be healthy with Kenwood's latest compact smoothie maker. It comes with two 0.5-litre travel mugs that act as blender jugs, so you can detach and go once you've mixed up your favourite fruit. It is widely available.



Simplehuman sensor soap pump

£25

Simply place your hand under the infrared sensor and liquid soap is automatically pumped out – easy and hygienic. It holds around 400ml of soap, washing-up liquid or moisturiser, and is powered by four AA batteries. It's available at Argos, John Lewis and Lakeland.



Tefal Vitafruit Le Confiturier

£80

Promising homemade jam within an hour, the Vitafruit from Tefal features low-sugar and vitamin-preserving cooking programmes. The 1.5-litre non-stick bowl has a splashguard lid to keep things safe, and an auto-cleaning programme. It is available from September from Lakeland – we'll be carrying out a first look then.



Pure One Mini DAB radio

£39.99

Pure has just launched the One Mini, a compact version of its Best Buy Pure One digital radio. The One Mini is much smaller than the Pure One, but shares many of its features. It is now widely available on the high street and comes in black, white or 'baby pink'.