

Product news



Great pictures and great video for Sue Jones

Me & my buy

Sue Jones tells us why her new Panasonic DMC-FZ30 digital camera has proved invaluable – especially with a one-year-old in tow

We've had a film SLR camera for about five years – but with film we could never be sure how good the shots were until the pictures were back. We really enjoyed the flexibility our first digital camera gave us, but it was only a two-megapixel model, so the quality just didn't compare.

The eight-megapixel £360 DMC-FZ30 was a Best Buy in June's *Which?*. It's easy to use, lighter than the SLR and has a 12x optical zoom. In auto mode you just point and shoot, but more experienced photographers can choose from a wide range of modes and manual settings.

It has a decent video function, too. We've already recorded one-year-old Lola taking her first steps and can run it through the TV and show our friends the results.

The camera's 'baby mode' function lets you enter your child's date of birth and records the age on each photo you take. When you take as many photos as we do it's great to be able to see what she was doing on a certain day.

In the first two weeks we've already taken around 250 shots – I dread to think how much it would have cost me to develop all those reels of film.

Porsche adds its name to designer coffee

Designer cars to designer coffee

DESIGNER MACHINES

Porsche is a name synonymous with fast cars, but now it is trying something a little different. It's designed a Siemens Nespresso coffee pod machine. It's not for those who like to experiment with their own grinds, as it's compatible only with Nespresso's 12 blends of capsules.

Each capsule is simple to use and tops your espresso with a satisfyingly golden *crema*, or foam to the uninitiated. But it's not all good news. These capsules aren't widely available on the high street (they can be ordered online) and it's an expensive machine – the Porsche name has its price, after all.

Espressos were cool enough to drink straight from the machine –

great if you're in a hurry but not for those who like to savour their coffee. This coolness didn't favour the stronger blends, either, as a single measure of those we tested lacked the expected kick. But temperature is not an issue if you prefer a taller drink: latte machiatos were well balanced and hot.

You can adjust the quantity settings of both milk and coffee and, thanks to the tube attachment, steaming, frothing and adding milk is surprisingly quick and easy. You can also adjust the amount of froth to suit your preference.

As with many machines, cleaning is a chore and we found it a little noisy on start-up. And there's a definite knack to opening the automatic sliding window that



Great looks – but the coffee machine takes only a limited number of blends of capsules

covers the capsule holder.

But you can retire your kettle; the machine has a hot water button for making a cup of tea, though you'll have to supply your own tea bag.

VERDICT It's quick and great at frothing milk, but it would be better if you could control the temperature of single measures. The price tag of £699 will leave more than your espresso feeling cold.

For the games addict

A hardcore accessory

GADGETEER

Here's a product guaranteed to leave the hardcore games-console addict square eyed and oblivious to the outside world. It's a fully functioning 'games chair' compatible with most gaming systems.

Some of the seemingly extraneous features include 'ground effects lighting' (for action packed realism, apparently) and 'multiple-massage settings' – for unwinding after a hard day's gaming, naturally. All this for a mere £350 from digitalsales.co.uk.



Will it help you play, rest and play?

£5 billion
online pre-Christmas 2005
spending in the UK
INTERACTIVE MEDIA IN RETAIL GROUP

78.5%
of adults drink coffee
on a regular basis
MINTEL

Programme guide lets down new Sony

FREEVIEW PVRs

Sony's new Freeview PVR, the £230 SVR-S500, was released too late for our September report. We had high hopes for it, though, and rushed it in to testing.

But we're a little disappointed. This personal video recorder isn't bad and has plenty of useful features, including 40 recording hours, twin tuners, eight-day electronic programme guide (EPG), subtitle recording and some simple editing functions.

Overall, though, it doesn't make the grade and doesn't threaten our current Best Buy Freeview PVRs – the Humax PVR9200T and Topfield TF5800PVR.

The EPG is the main problem. The layout is rather poor, showing the channel listings for only one programme at a time and providing no detailed synopsis – just offering the programme title.

There's also an annoying lag between pressing a button on the remote control and something actually happening on screen –



The SVR-S500: we expected more

which makes navigating around the EPG rather frustrating. There's no auto-padding at the start and finish of programme timings either.

It's a power-hungry beast, too, using more than 20 watts when in use and an embarrassing 15 watts when it's just sitting there doing nothing in standby. Typically, other PVRs we've seen recently use about half this amount. To top everything off the fan noise is intrusive and louder than you'd normally get on a PVR.

It still crosses the line with a total test score of 71, which isn't a disaster, but we expected more from Sony.

VERDICT Avoid this model and buy the Humax or Topfield instead.

It doesn't threaten current Best Buys

Is it worth it? Yes

Last month we said you could make major savings on many products by shopping online. The Robosapien V2 is a two-foot tall robot (see p33 for more details) that is likely to feature highly on many wish lists this Christmas. But is it cheaper to buy online or look for a bargain on the high street? Prices correct as we went to press.

HIGH STREET	ONLINE
Argos £170	Amazon (amazon.co.uk) £100
Currys £170	Firebox (firebox.com) £170
Woolworths £170	LX Direct (lxdirect.com) £170

VERDICT Many high-street prices are similar to those online but it's usually worth checking before you buy. If the Robosapien V2 is the must-have present in your household this Christmas, you can save 41 per cent on the cost by searching hard on the web.

Just out

Sindy £10

Brit doll Sindy is back with a rounder face and general re-size portraying a younger look that it's hoped will raise her appeal with parents and children alike. She's endeavouring to regain her place in the market alongside rival Barbie and recent pretenders to the crown, the Bratz dolls. From Woolworths.



Dyson handheld £100

Dyson's cyclone technology is downsized for its first handheld vac, the DC16 Root 6. It's bagless, of course, and dust can be emptied at the touch of a button. Filters shouldn't need replacing and there are brush attachments to handle anything from upholstery to keyboards. It's widely available now.



Mobcharger £5

This is an emergency battery that gives your mobile phone an instant power boost. It won't replace your normal charger but gives up to 60 minutes of talk and 480 on standby. From Asda, BP Connect and WH Smith.



iTrip LCD £23

This nifty FM transmitter connects to your iPod and broadcasts music to an available FM channel, so you can listen on your hi-fi or car stereo. Devices like this have been available for some time but using them was illegal. Regulator Ofcom has announced that they will be made legal before Christmas. Available online.

