

# Film processing

One for the album? Good processing can make sure your snaps are photos to treasure

Overdeveloped: too bright

Scratched print

Wrong colour balance

Underdeveloped: too dark

(underdeveloped). There may be other defects such as scratches or missing edges. If any of your photos have faults, ask for them to be done again for free.

Most processors offer a little compensation if they lose or damage your film. A free film or free film processing is usually all you can expect but this is scant consolation if your photos are important to you.

Some processors offer their own insurance. Pay Bonusprint a £2.50 premium, for example, and it will compensate you up to £50 if your film is lost. Alternatively, if your processor doesn't offer insurance, you can contact an insurance broker to ask about insuring a film.

## CHOOSE YOUR FILM CAREFULLY

The film you use also affects print quality. Films are classed by speed, that is, their sensitivity to light.

A faster film (400 speed or 800 speed) will capture moving events, such as sports action, and is good for dull conditions. The colours in the final print will more accurately represent the colours you saw and, when taking photos of movement, there will be less blurring. But prints from faster films will have a more grainy appearance and the films cost more – about £1 a film more than a slow 100-speed film.

For photos of more static subjects in bright conditions, a slow 100-speed film is ideal. If it's a little dimmer (for example, a cloudy day or indoors during normal daylight), try a 200-speed film.

Choose the make of film carefully, too. Kodak film has a slight red bias, which brings out the colour in people's skin, making them look healthier. Fujifilm has a slight blue and yellow bias, giving bold colours to landscapes and helping to create a strong visual impact. Konica film has no colour bias so use it when you want your pictures to appear as close to reality as possible.

## OUR TESTS

To test picture quality, our photographic expert took 4,320 photos – in cloudy conditions, bright weather and indoors. His photos were tailored to test the processors' skills – so colour balance errors, for example, would stand out.

We sent nine films to each mail-order processor over more than two months and handed in films to several different branches of the same company, to assess the consistency of prints.

A panel of keen photographers was asked to rate some of our prints, and our expert gave his ratings. He also looked for defects, including scratches, spots and missing edges. For defects, nearly all services scored ★, reflecting consistently excellent performance.

Unless you have a darkroom and all the gear, getting your film developed means using the professionals. Despite the rise of digital photography, there are still plenty of traditional in-store film-processing services, and some mail-order ones, too.

High-street shops, such as Boots and Jessops, will produce your photos within an hour. Mail-order processors, such as Directfoto, take a number of days to deliver your prints, but they do come to your door.

All the processors except Truprint provide an index print which shows numbered thumbnail images of all your shots. This makes ordering reprints and enlargements easier.

For an extra fee, all our processors will create a picture CD, giving you a digital version of your photos so you can view them on a computer and email them.

Most processing services in our test also print digital photos. See 'Developing economies', August 2004, p20, for more on these services.

## COMPLAINTS AND COMPENSATION

Even good processors can develop photos badly from time to time. Common faults, which can affect some or all photos, include severe colour biases – check the colour of part of the photo you're familiar with, such as the sky, and if there's far too much red or green, the photo has been poorly developed. Watch out for prints that are too bright (overdeveloped) or too dull

# BEST BUYS

## ONE HOUR

Boots and Jessops have introduced better equipment so their results have improved since our last tests in August 2002. This time, they were joint top of the table, with consistently excellent prints. They were the only two processors that scored ★ for pictures in both dull and bright conditions and, along with several other processors, they scored ☆ for flash photos. Given their prevalence on the high street, there should be a branch of one or both near you.

We tested the processing services for consistency by sending them several films, and Boots and Jessops scored ★ here, too. This compares with Tesco's ● score for consistency which indicates that prints were sometimes good but at other times poor.

Asda is our third in-store Best Buy. It doesn't do a glossy finish on its photos, just a matt finish, but it's still a very good choice, with overall picture quality scoring ★. Again, it was highly consistent in delivering good-quality prints.

## MAIL ORDER

Our two mail-order Best Buys are Directfoto and Club 35. Both scored ☆ for overall picture quality. Directfoto's average turnaround was nine days, and Club 35's was an impressive three days. You can download an order form from their websites, [www.directfoto.co.uk](http://www.directfoto.co.uk) and [www.club35.co.uk](http://www.club35.co.uk). You send the completed form, together with your films and the payment. You then receive your photos back by post.

## TABLE NOTES

We tested the leading ten one-hour high-street and four mail-order processors.

## Specification

**Price** Typical price for 24 6x4-inch prints. **Matt** Gloss is standard for all but Asda. ✓ indicates matt finish offered. **Border** Thin white border. **Wait** Average time from posting film to receiving photos.

## Performance

**Dull, Bright, Flash** Panel's rating for photos in dull and bright conditions, and indoors with flash. **Expert view** Our expert's average rating, based on his ratings for the above conditions. **Overall** Picture quality score based on panel and expert ratings. **Consistency** How consistently good the processors were. **Defect-free** Our expert penalised spots, scratches, dirt and missing edges.

## KEY

★ ☆ ○ ● ●  
Best —————> Worst  
■ Best Buy



## SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:  
Image quality 70%  
Consistency 20%  
Defects 10%

Film processing	Specification				Performance							Score	
	Price (£)	Matt	Border	Wait (days)	Dull	Bright	Flash	Expert view	Overall	Consistency	Defect-free	(%)	
	ONE HOUR												
	1 Boots	5.99		✓	n/a	★	★	☆	☆	★	★	★	88
	2 Jessops	6.99	✓	✓	n/a	★	★	☆	☆	★	★	★	88
	3 Asda	4.32	✓	✓	n/a	★	☆	☆	☆	★	★	★	85
	4 Kodak Express	5.99	✓	✓	n/a	☆	☆	☆	○	☆	☆	★	71
	5 Colorama	4.99	✓	✓	n/a	☆	○	○	○	○	★	★	67
	6 Snappy Snaps	6.99	✓	✓	n/a	○	○	○	○	○	☆	★	60
	7 Morrisons	4.25			n/a	○	●	●	○	●	☆	★	49
8 Klick	5.29			n/a	○	○	○	○	○	●	☆	47	
9 Tesco	4.32			n/a	○	☆	●	○	○	●	☆	46	
10 Fotostop	5.99	✓	✓	n/a	○	●	●	●	●	○	★	44	
MAIL ORDER													
11 Directfoto	3.74			9	★	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	★	79	
12 Club 35	4.95	✓		3	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	★	★	77	
13 Bonusprint	3.80			2	☆	☆	○	○	☆	★	★	74	
14 Truprint	2.49	✓		4	●	●	○	○	●	☆	★	43	