

Compact cameras

NEED TO KNOW

Digital photography might be all the rage but standard 35mm film compact cameras aren't dead. They produce better images than a same-priced digital camera, and you can buy a good one for under £70 – something you'd struggle with in the digital market. There's less shutter delay (see opposite) than on digital cameras, and batteries should last more than a year, compared with a few hours for a digital.

Recent reports that Kodak and others are cutting their film production might set alarm bells ringing but Kodak reassured us: 'Film will remain a significant part of our sales for many years to come'. We think you'll still get several years' happy use from a good compact camera.

SLR vs COMPACTS

Larger, more expensive single lens reflex (SLR) 35mm cameras offer more creative control and versatility than compacts. For example, you can adjust their shutter speed to freeze movement or create a blurred effect. Or you can attach a telephoto lens for a really close zoom. SLRs also have the edge for image quality, but the best compacts aren't far behind. And compacts are simpler to use and more portable.



BEST BUYS

All the cameras we tested take fairly good pictures (scoring at least a ☆ for picture quality). However, some aren't great for particular types of shot – close-up or flash, for example – so check the ratings in the table overleaf before you buy.

Our Best Buys all score ★ for picture quality, and don't fall down on any aspects of picture taking. The highest scorers – the **Nikon (1)**, £65 from Jessops, and **Nikon (2)**, £180 from Miller Brothers, are quite similar. Both have a slow-sync flash mode (see 'Flash', p48), and both are easy to use. A key difference is that the more expensive version lets you zoom in closer. But it's slightly less successful at reducing red eye when using the flash. Both have a dioptic eyepiece adjustment – useful if you wear glasses. By turning the small knob on the viewfinder, you can alter the view so you may not have to wear your glasses during shooting.

The **Konica Minolta (3)**, £70 from Argos, Boots and Jessops, also comes with slow-sync flash. In fact, it takes the best flash photos of all our cameras. On the downside, it lacks a dioptic eyepiece adjustment and the buttons to operate the flash and self-timer are fairly small and fiddly.

The **Samsung (4)**, £80 from www.littlewoods-online.com and also from Index from mid to late January, has a continuous shooting function that lets you take several pictures one after the other – useful if you could miss a good shot because the subject's moving. Keep the shutter button pressed down and you can take a picture every 1.5 seconds. The zoom buttons were a bit spongy so could be tricky to use.

ZOOM

All the cameras we tested have zoom lenses that let you fit more of a scene in your photo (by zooming out) or take a more detailed shot of something in the distance (zooming in).

The two 'focal lengths' – for example, 38-130mm – printed near the camera lens indicate the zoom range. The lower the first figure, the wider the possible angle of view, so lower numbers mean you can fit more of a landscape in your picture. The higher the second number, the closer you can zoom into distant objects. If you want more detail than a compact can offer, use an SLR with a long zoom.

Zooming in magnifies the effects of a shaky camera, meaning more risk of blurred photos, so try to keep the camera completely still or use a tripod.

The Nikon (2) has the biggest zoom range of all our Best Buy cameras (38mm-150mm).



SHUTTER DELAY

Shutter delay is the time between pressing the shutter and the picture being recorded on film. The average delay is 0.8 seconds, and the difference between best and worst is just a few tenths of a second. Even this can have an impact. You might think you've taken a perfect shot only to find that your subject blinked just after you pressed the button. The Samsung (4) is the speediest of our Best Buys, at 0.6 seconds. This Nikon (1) takes 0.7 seconds. Half-pressing the shutter button to autofocus before you take the picture cuts down the delay.



WIN

We've got 20 NIKON LITE TOUCH ZOOM 130EDs to give away See p56 or visit www.which.co.uk/whichextra

BEST BUY

3 Konica



Other options

If you can't quite stretch to the cost of our Best Buys, the Fujifilm (5) at £55 from Boots is an alternative. It works well, but had some particular drawbacks. Its maximum zoom is only 90mm, and it produces poor quality close-up shots.

Scoring two points less is the Fujifilm (6), costing £100 from Jessops. This is a good option if you want to take wide landscape shots as its minimum zoom length is just 24mm. It's easily



Leica C3

the cheapest camera with a minimum zoom of under 35mm. Unusually, it also has two shutter buttons so you have the option of taking photos with either hand. Its main drawback is the relatively poor quality of its flash photos.



Pentax Espio 24 EW

The two most expensive cameras we tested are the Leica (15), £298, and the Pentax (9), £230 (pictured above and left). These two good

lookers both have stylish aluminium bodies, and the Pentax has a useful 24mm-105mm zoom but, in terms of picture quality and features, they're not really worth the money.

AUTOFOCUS

All the cameras we've tested, including this Konica (3), use automatic focusing (AF). This means there's no need to focus the lens manually to bring your subject into focus.

Instead, when you press the shutter button to take the picture, the AF system simply focuses on the largest object closest to the centre of the camera's view. This works well most of the time, but it's not ideal if you want to focus on something off-centre. In that case, you need to move the camera so that your chosen subject appears at the centre of the view, then half-press the shutter, which will cause the camera to automatically focus on it. With the button still half-pressed down, move the camera back to recompose your shot. Finally, fully press the shutter button to take the picture.

Several cameras on test – but none of our Best Buys – have a spot autofocus feature. In this mode, the camera focuses on the object dead in the centre of the camera's view – whatever its size. So if you took a picture of a person holding a trophy, you could choose to focus on the trophy. With normal AF, the camera would focus on the larger object – the person – leaving the trophy less sharp.





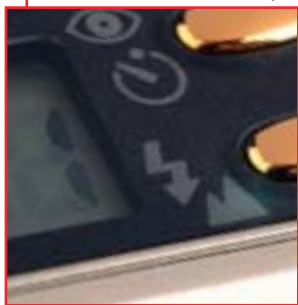
FLASH

In 'auto flash' mode, the camera measures how bright a scene is and decides whether flash is needed. If you use flash to shoot something that's more than a few metres away, it can create a hazy effect and leave the subject in the dark. So, for a picture from up in the stands at an evening football match, turn the flash off, and use a fast film (400 or 800) to increase light sensitivity.

All the cameras tested have a forced flash (or fill-in flash) mode, which lets you turn on the flash in any light. It's handy if there's bright background light, such as photographing somebody in front of a window. Without flash, they may appear too dark.

To highlight the background as well as the subject – in a night-time shot of a person in front of a landmark, say – use 'slow-sync flash' mode (see table for cameras with this feature). Keep the camera still or use a tripod to minimise blurring.

All our Best Buys take good flash photos. The Konica (3) and the Samsung (4) are particularly good.



KEY

★ ☆ ○ ●
Best Worst
■ Best Buy

SCORE

This ignores price, and is based on:

Picture quality 70%
Ease of use 30%

TABLE NOTES

We tested best-selling models from leading manufacturers, in the middle to upper price range.

Specification

Weight Batteries included.

Features

Slow-sync See 'Flash', left.

Continuous shooting The camera can take a series of shots (one per 1.5 seconds) when the shutter is held down.

Spot AF See 'Autofocus', p47.

Multi ST Multiple self-timer.

See 'Self-timer', opposite.

Dioptric The eyepiece can be adjusted to help focus what you see, so spectacle-wearers may be able to remove their glasses when taking pictures.

Performance

Shutter delay See 'Shutter delay', p47.

Red eye See 'Red-eye reduction', opposite.

Viewfinder How well the image in the viewfinder matches the final image produced.

Close-up How well the camera reproduces images taken at close range. **Picture quality** Overall rating, taking into account sharpness, flash photos, red-eye reduction, and viewfinder accuracy. **Ease of use** Includes overall feel, everyday use, film and battery loading, instruction manual and advanced features.

Compact cameras

	Spec
MODEL	Price (£)
1 Nikon Lite Touch Zoom 130ED	65
2 Nikon Lite Touch Zoom 150ED	180
3 Konica Minolta Zoom 130c	70
4 Samsung Fino 140 DLX	80
5 Fujifilm Zoom Date 90S	55
6 Fujifilm Zoom Date f2.8	100
7 Canon Sure Shot 150u	120
8 Fujifilm Zoom Date 120V	75
9 Pentax Espio 24 EW	230
10 Olympus mju-III 115	80
11 Samsung Fino 800	40
12 Praktica Zoom 900 AF	40
13 Olympus mju-III 80	70
14 Vivitar PZ3815	50
15 Leica C3	298
16 Kyocera Yashica Tzoom	200
17 Canon Sure Shot 105u	70
18 Olympus mju-III 150	100
19 Canon Sure Shot 80u	45



SELF-TIMER

All the cameras on test have self-timers, saving you the hassle of asking a stranger to take your photo. To use, turn on the self-timer mode, compose your picture, and press the shutter button. You then have ten seconds to get into the shot before the camera automatically takes the picture.

Cameras with a multiple self-timer (see Multi ST column in table) let you take more than one self-timed shot without having to reset the camera. There's about eight seconds between each shot, so try to keep smiling.

RED-EYE REDUCTION

You've probably seen scary-looking people with red eyes staring out at you from the dark. In photos, that is. 'Red eye' occurs when the flash reflects off the retina at the back of the eyeball. Fortunately, all the cameras on test have a red-eye reduction function – and nearly all manage this well. Most of our test prints had no visible red eye. The camera either emits a pre-flash, like the Samsung (4), or a light beam, like the Konica Minolta (3), just before the main flash. This makes the subject's pupil smaller so there's less reflection and less red eye. Try to warn your subject about the pre-flash or they might think the snapping's over before it's begun. The Nikon (2) scores a ○ due to a slightly misaligned beam in both the models we tested.



WHICH? EXTRA

For more on compact cameras, including more ratings than we've got room to print here, test results from 25 previously tested models, along with useful buying tips, see www.which.co.uk/compactcameras.

Specification		Features					Performance								Score
Weight (g)	Zoom (mm)	Slow-sync	Continuous shooting	Spot AF	Multi ST	Dioptric	Shutter delay	Red eye	Viewfinder	Close-up	Flash	Picture quality	Ease of use	(%)	
208	38-130	✓				✓	☆	★	○	○	☆	★	☆	78	
243	38-150	✓				✓	○	○	○	○	☆	★	☆	78	
210	38-130	✓					○	☆	○	○	★	★	☆	76	
246	38-140		✓			✓	★	★	○	○	★	★	☆	75	
227	38-90	✓			✓		☆	★	☆	●	☆	☆	☆	72	
183	24-50	✓					☆	★	○	○	◐	☆	☆	70	
207	38-150	✓	✓	✓			○	★	○	★	★	☆	○	70	
201	38-120	✓			✓		☆	★	○	○	☆	☆	☆	70	
208	24-105	✓		✓		✓	◐	★	○	☆	○	☆	☆	70	
223	38-115	✓				✓	○	★	○	☆	☆	☆	○	68	
216	38-80				✓	✓	○	★	○	●	☆	☆	○	67	
230	38-90	✓					☆	★	○	●	☆	☆	○	67	
193	38-80	✓					○	★	○	○	○	☆	○	66	
204	38-150	✓					☆	★	○	○	☆	☆	☆	66	
286	28-80	✓	✓			✓	☆	★	○	●	○	☆	○	66	
211	28-70	✓		✓		✓	◐	★	○	○	○	☆	☆	66	
203	38-105	✓	✓	✓			◐	★	○	★	☆	☆	○	62	
239	37.5-150	✓				✓	☆	★	○	○	○	☆	○	61	
195	38-80	✓	✓	✓			○	★	○	○	☆	☆	○	61	