



# Compact and creative

We test cameras that give you more options than simple point-and-shoot models but are still portable

It is becoming much easier to buy what you might call a 'proper' camera that will still slip into a jacket pocket. The cameras in this report are for those who want a bit more than a simple point-and-shoot model, but still want the convenience of a compact.

Broadly, we're talking about cameras that cost from about £150 to £300. In this price bracket, you can usually expect a more powerful zoom and extra features compared with the small models we tested in December 2007 (see 'Diminutive digital delights' p52). The bigger zoom will help you to get closer to

faraway objects and to get a good shot where a smaller camera may struggle – a photo of a bird in a tree, for example. These cameras tend to have features like aperture priority and shutter-speed priority modes, which give you far more control over a photo (see 'Jargon buster', p61, for more on this).

Some people moving up from a small camera choose a digital single lens reflex (DSLR) camera. These have their advantages, but they can be bulky to carry round and expensive when you factor in the cost of lenses.



**74% Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ18**  
£260

The FZ18 is one of our all-time favourite cameras. Picture quality is very good, and the gigantic 28-505mm zoom makes it one of the best models for close-ups of distant objects and for taking wide landscapes. The delay between pressing the shutter and a picture being taken is short, so it's easier to capture spontaneous moments. It has an LCD viewfinder that shows you exactly what picture the camera will take. Cheapest at Comet, Currys and Jessops.

**WE LIKE** Effective image stabilisation.

Available Comet, Currys, Jessops **Megapixels** 8Mp **Optical zoom** 28-505mm **Weight** 450g **Size** 7.5x12.5x11cm



**69% Canon PowerShot S5 IS** £280

There's plenty to play with on the PowerShot S5 IS. The large 36-432mm zoom lets you snap distant objects with ease, and the screen is easier to see in bright sunlight than on most cameras. You can twist the screen, too, to take pictures from different angles. For example, you could hold the camera above your head in a crowd with the screen pointed down to compose the picture. It's cheapest at Currys, Jessops and John Lewis.

**WE LIKE** Its optical zoom works when taking video, unlike most cameras.

Available Currys, Jessops, John Lewis **Megapixels** 8Mp **Optical zoom** 36-432mm **Weight** 620g **Size** 8.5x12x9cm



The **Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ18** is one of our all-time favourite cameras



**68% Fujifilm FinePix S8000fd** £200

You can get great wide shots with this model, thanks to its 27-486mm optical zoom (see 'Jargon buster', p61). It has an effective image stabilisation system and takes very good close-ups. Overall picture quality is impressive. Like some other models, it comes with alkaline batteries, but you should buy rechargeables, as they will work out better value. It's cheapest at Currys.

**WORTH KNOWING** It takes xD, SD or SDHC memory cards. We suggest avoiding xD cards, as they work out most expensive.

Available Comet and Currys **Megapixels** 8Mp **Optical zoom** 27-486mm **Weight** 570g **Size** 8x11.5x9.5cm



**PORTABLE POWER**

**Neil Dalton 57,**  
*headteacher*

Neil was grateful for the powerful zoom on his Which? Best Buy camera when taking this photo of a brown bear in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Neil used a Samsung Pro815, a Best Buy from March 2006, to snap the bear from the safety of more than 40 metres.

He has taken pictures for more than 30 years but the Samsung is only his second digital camera. The first was a Canon Digital Ixus 40, 'perfect for family shots', according to Neil, but otherwise limited.

Trading up to the Samsung has, he believes, improved his pictures: 'I can be creative and versatile without carrying lots of lenses.'

Neil also makes good use of the Samsung's time-lapse feature, which lets the user take up to 99 pictures at intervals between a minute and an hour.

He said: 'I can set the camera up on a tripod and let it take photos of my grandchildren playing naturally without bothering them.'



## 66% Canon PowerShot G9 £300

The G9 has a classic look, a big LCD screen and features matched only by the S5 IS (2). It's a pity that picture quality is just good, not outstanding. There's a hot-shoe connector that lets you attach an external flash. Cheapest at Currys and John Lewis.

**WE FOUND** The G9, the FZ18 (1) and the S5 IS (2), have a feature called **dioptr correction** that lets you adjust the viewfinder's focus – good news for spectacle wearers.

Available Currys, Jessops, John Lewis **Megapixels** 12Mp **Optical zoom** 35-210mm **Weight** 390g **Size** 7.5x11x4.5cm



## 67% Canon Digital Ixus 960 IS £270

The 12Mp Digital Ixus 960 IS is our smallest and lightest Best Buy. It powers up quickly and is easy to use. There is also a good movie mode.

Unlike all other Best Buys, it lacks aperture- and shutter-speed priority settings, which are often found on cameras in this price bracket. The optical viewfinder is not very accurate. However, the LCD screen is very good and copes better than most in bright light. It's cheapest at Currys.

**WE LIKE** The good-looking titanium body will be a draw for many.

Available Currys **Megapixels** 12Mp **Optical zoom** 36-133mm **Weight** 200g **Size** 6.5x10x3cm



**One of the biggest strengths of the A720 IS is close-up photos**



## 67% Canon PowerShot A650 IS £250

This takes some of the best video we've seen on a camera for some time. It's a great all-round still camera too, with a multi-angle LCD screen.

It has 12Mp – useful if you're creating very large prints (about 7Mp are needed for A4 prints). It's cheapest at Jessops.

**WORTH KNOWING** It takes SD and SDHC memory cards. A 4GB card stores 728 top-quality photos (or more than half an hour of video) and costs £30 in the shops, £20 online.

Available Jessops **Megapixels** 12Mp **Optical zoom** 35-210mm **Weight** 420g **Size** 7x11.5x4.5cm



## 66% Samsung Digimax S1050 £100

The neat-looking S1050 is especially good at taking close-up pictures. It's capable all round, has a big LCD screen and its pictures just missed four stars for quality. It's our most basic Best Buy, though. Among the features that it lacks is image stabilisation, which we like to see on cameras with big zooms, as zooming in can increase camera shake and create a blurry picture. It's cheapest at Argos.

**WORTH KNOWING** This is the only one of our Best Buys that doesn't have a viewfinder.

Available Argos, Comet **Megapixels** 10Mp **Optical zoom** 38-190mm **Weight** 280g **Size** 7x11x5cm





## 65% Canon PowerShot A720 IS £150

One of this model's biggest strengths is close-ups. It has features such as face detection, image stabilisation and priority modes, a powerful zoom and is light and compact. Cheapest at Jessops. **WE FOUND** The low-battery warning came on after 44 pictures, but the battery lasted for more than 250.

Available Jessops Megapixels 8Mp Optical zoom 35-210mm Weight 270g Size 7x10x4.5cm



## 65% Nikon Coolpix P5100 £230

Nikon's top compact is good for indoor and low-light pictures. It has aperture- and shutter-speed priority modes but lacks manual focus, and the optical zoom is little bigger than a typical small camera. It's cheapest at Jessops and John Lewis. **WE FOUND** There's quite a delay between pressing the shutter and the picture being taken.

Available Jessops, John Lewis Megapixels 12Mp Optical zoom 35-123mm Weight 250g Size 7x10.5x4cm

### Contacts

**Canon** 0870 514 3723; [www.canon.co.uk](http://www.canon.co.uk)  
**Fujifilm** 01234 217724; [www.fujifilm.co.uk](http://www.fujifilm.co.uk)  
**Hewlett-Packard**  
0870 010 4320; [www.hp.co.uk](http://www.hp.co.uk)  
**Kodak** 0870 243 0270; [www.kodak.co.uk](http://www.kodak.co.uk)  
**Nikon** 0871 200 1964; [www.nikon.co.uk](http://www.nikon.co.uk)  
**Olympus** 020 7253 2772  
[www.olympus.co.uk](http://www.olympus.co.uk)  
**Panasonic** 0870 535 7357  
[www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk)  
**Samsung** 0870 726 7864  
[www.samsung.co.uk](http://www.samsung.co.uk)  
**Sony** 0870 511 1999; [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk)

MODEL	SPECIFICATION								
	PRICE (£)	MEGAPIXELS (Mp)	OPTICAL ZOOM (mm)	WEIGHT (g)	SIZE (cm) (hwxwd)	BATTERY	VIEWFINDER	LCD SCREEN (mm) (wxh)	MAXIMUM ISO
1 PANASONIC Lumix DMC-FZ18	260	8.0	28-505	450	7.5x12.5x11	R	LCD	49x37	6,400 <sup>a</sup>
2 CANON PowerShot S5 IS	280	8.0	36-432	620	8.5x12x9	NR	LCD	50x37	1,600
3 FUJIFILM FinePix S8000fd	200	8.0	27-486	570	8x11.5x9.5	NR	LCD	50-38	6400 (at 4Mp)
4 CANON Digital Ixus 960 IS	270	12.0	36-133	200	6.5x10x3	R	Optical	50-37	3200 <sup>a</sup> (at 1.9Mp)
5 CANON PowerShot A650 IS	250	12.0	35-210	420	7x11.5x4.5	NR	Optical	50x37	1,600
6 CANON PowerShot G9	300	12.0	35-210	390	7.5x11x4.5	R	Optical	60x45	3,200
7 SAMSUNG Digimax S1050	100	10.0	38-190	280	7x11x5	NR	None	60x45	1,600
8 CANON PowerShot A720 IS	150	8.0	35-210	270	7x10x4.5	NR	Optical	50x37	1,600
9 NIKON Coolpix P5100	230	12.0	35-123	250	7x10.5x4	R	Optical	50x37	3,200 (at 5Mp)
10 SONY Cyber-Shot DSC-S800	140	8.0	37-222	265	7x10x4.5	R	None	50x37	1,250
11 HEWLETT-PACKARD Photosmart R937	197	8.0	39-118	235	7.5x10.5x2.5	R	None	73x55	1,600
12 FUJIFILM FinePix A900	90	9.1	39-156	220	6.5x10x4	NR	None	50x37	800
13 KODAK EasyShare Z1275	155	12.0	35-175	235	7x9x4	NR	None	50x37	3,200 (at 3.1Mp)
14 SONY Cyber-shot DSC-H3	200	8.0	38-380	340	7x11.5x6	R	None	50x37	3,200
15 KODAK EasyShare C613	75	6.1	36-108	198	7x9.5x4	NR	None	48x35	1,250
16 KODAK EasyShare Z885	111	8.0	36-180	225	7x9x4	NR	None	50x37	8,000 (at 2.2 Mp)
17 HEWLETT-PACKARD Photosmart Mz67	153	8.0	38-212	240	6.5x10x4.5	NR	None	50x38	n/a
18 KODAK EasyShare Z712IS	180	7.1	36-432	385	7.5x11x8	NR	LCD	50x37	3,200 (at 1.2Mp)

a In high-sensitivity mode b This doesn't have priority modes, but has a full manual mode. The same results can be achieved as with priority modes, but not as

### USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

#### Specification

**Price** For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price. Prices for other models are a guide to what to pay. See [www.which.co.uk/shopping](http://www.which.co.uk/shopping) for latest prices. **Megapixels** Pixels are the tiny dots of colour that make up a digital image. The figure is the maximum number at which the camera takes pictures. **Weight** With battery, memory card and strap. **Battery** R=rechargeable, NR=non-rechargeable.

**Viewfinder** An LCD viewfinder is more accurate than an optical one. **Maximum ISO** The higher the manually selectable ISO, the more sensitive the camera is to light. This means you can more easily take good pictures in dimmer light without a flash. Sometimes, the maximum setting restricts resolution. **Image stabilisation** Whether a camera has a true (ie non-digital) image stabilisation system. This means that parts of the lens or light sensor in the camera move to compensate for small hand movements.

Some cameras try to stabilise an image using digital processing – this produces worse results. **Burst mode** Whether a camera can take pictures continuously while the button is held down. The number shows how many it can take in a row. Unlimited means it shoots until the memory card is full. **Burst mode shot-to-shot time** How quickly the camera takes pictures at the highest resolution possible. **Test performance** **Shutter delay** How rapidly a photo is taken after you press the shutter. **Viewfinder/screen** How clear and

bright the screen is and how accurately and clearly it shows a shot. **Flash** Correct intensity and evenness. **Ease of use** Includes the manual, how easy it is to access the memory card, how quickly the camera is ready after being turned on, and how well the controls and menus work.

#### Score

Ignores price and is based on:

Picture quality	30%
Ease of use	25%
Features	12%
Viewfinder/monitor	12%
Battery life	10%
Flash	8%
Movie quality	3%



							WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE							SCORE %
APERTURE PRIORITY	SHUTTER-SPEED PRIORITY	MANUAL FOCUS	IMAGE STABILISATION	FACE DETECTION	BURST MODE	BURST MODE SHOT-TO-SHOT TIME (secs)	SHUTTER DELAY	PICTURE QUALITY	MOVIE QUALITY	VIEWFINDER/SCREEN	FLASH	BATTERY LIFE	EASE OF USE	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Unlimited	1.14	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	74
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Unlimited	0.66	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	69
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Unlimited	1.97	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	68
			✓	✓	Unlimited	0.78	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	67
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Unlimited	0.95	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	67
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Unlimited	0.87	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	66
✓	✓	✓		✓	Unlimited	1.53	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	66
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Unlimited	0.75	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	65
✓	✓		✓	✓	Unlimited	3.14	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	65
					3	0.54	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	60
					Unlimited	0.96	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	59
					None	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	57
	✓	✓			3	0.74	★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	57
see <sup>b</sup>	see <sup>b</sup>		✓	✓	100	0.47	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	55
					None	n/a	★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	54
	✓	✓			5	0.51	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	51
					3	0.99	★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	47
✓	✓	✓	✓		6	0.47	★★★★★	★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	46

quickly or easily

## Jargon buster The features to look for and what they mean

### ■ APERTURE PRIORITY

This helps control which parts of a picture are in focus. When you take a portrait of someone in a busy place, for example, you might blur the background so it doesn't distract from the subject.

### ■ FACE DETECTION

Useful for people pictures. The camera detects faces, focuses on them (see picture, right), and makes sure they're not too

bright or dark (you can turn it off if you're not snapping people).

### ■ HOT SHOE

A built-in flash lights subjects just a few metres from the camera. A hot shoe connector (shown, bottom right) lets you add an external flash, which extends this distance significantly. Most can be directed away from the subject (for example, off a white ceiling) to give a softer photo. It also helps to tackle red eye in pictures of people.

### ■ IMAGE STABILISATION

This helps you to create sharper pictures, especially if you're shooting in dim light or zooming in from far



away – situations where it's easy to end up with blurry pictures.

### ■ OPTICAL ZOOM

This is usually shown as a range of two numbers. The lower shows how far you can zoom out to get width in your photo. The second number is how far you can zoom in on distant objects. For close-ups of distant objects, go for a camera with a high

second number, for tight indoor shots or wide landscapes go for a camera with a low first number.

### ■ SHUTTER-SPEED PRIORITY

This is great for capturing fast-moving action or to blur an image to give the impression of movement. A shutter speed of 1/500 will give a crisp shot of a moving cyclist, for example, while 1/30 creates more of a blur.





## Buying and using your camera

■ The cameras in this report are a step up in size from the small cameras we looked at in December last year. They're not heavy, but try them to make sure the controls are comfortable.

■ Many cameras have 12Mps (megapixels), which sounds great, but you'll need this quality only if you're creating prints well over A4 in size. About 7Mp are needed for A4 prints.



2500mAh (this is a measure of how much power the battery contains). Cameras take two or four.

■ You may be offered an extended warranty when buying a camera. Digital cameras are reliable. In our last survey in July last year, only 4 per cent broke within the first six years of life.

■ Water and salt are the biggest enemies of non-waterproof cameras. You can buy a waterproof case for some cameras, or consider a waterproof



■ Buying online is usually cheaper than the high street. See [www.which.co.uk/shopping](http://www.which.co.uk/shopping) for the latest online prices.

■ Cameras often come with a small internal memory or memory card, but these can usually store only a handful of pictures. A 1GB card (shown above) costs from £10 and stores about 250 8Mp images.

■ If your camera comes with non-rechargeable batteries – for example, alkalines – you're probably better off in the long term buying rechargeables. These cost around £15 for four AA-size batteries with a rating of about



single-use camera (£10) for seaside snaps.

■ Most home contents insurance policies don't cover expensive items outside the home, but you can usually add cover for an optional extra such as a camera.

■ If you take your camera abroad, carry it in hand luggage – some insurance policies may stipulate this. Ninety per cent of policies we looked at have a single-item limit of £300 or less.



## Worth tracking down

We have added new tests of how quickly cameras take pictures and perform in low light. The models below were tested before we made the changes, so they aren't directly comparable. However, they performed to Best Buy standard in our other tests



**FUJIFILM FINEPIX S5700 £130** The huge 38-380mm optical zoom on the S5700 lets you get really close-up pictures. But there's no image stabilisation to ensure they are sharp. The 7.1Mp camera produces good-quality images and has an LCD viewfinder. But after you've taken a picture it's slow to get ready to take the next one. Even in burst mode, you'll take only about one picture every two seconds. **SCORE 66%**



**OLYMPUS SP-550UZ £270** This is one of the few compacts that zooms out as far as 28mm, so it's a good choice for wide landscapes or tight indoor shots. There's an LCD viewfinder, too, but shutter delay is long. Use manual focus or pre-focus (half-press the shutter button to focus before fully pressing to take the picture). **SCORE 66%**



**PANASONIC LUMIX DMC-FZ8 £210** The FZ8 starts up in 3.5 seconds and in burst mode takes two pictures a second. You also get aperture priority mode, shutter-speed priority mode and manual focus. Movie mode is quite good but takes up a lot of space – a 512MB card will hold just four minutes and 40 seconds. Unusually, you can't zoom in, even with a digital zoom, during recording. **SCORE 71%**



## How we test

One of the most frustrating aspects of owning a digital camera can be finding that it isn't charged when you want to take that important photo. So battery life is a key part of our camera testing.

First, we make sure the battery is fully charged. If the camera doesn't come with a rechargeable battery, we put in a set with a rating of 2600 mAh. Generally, the higher a battery's rating, the longer it lasts.

We use the LCD screen to compose the shot, zoom the lens in to its full extent and then all the way out again. We take the picture, set the



camera to play back and view the picture for five seconds to see how using the LCD screen eats into battery life. We delete the picture and repeat the cycle, alternating between taking pictures with flash and without.

We count how many pictures we take before the first battery warning appears, then the pictures taken until the camera turns off. Most cameras took more than 250 pictures before the battery died.