

Made to order

Kodak designs digital for portraits, weddings and events

Even more than film cameras, digital cameras are optimized for specific markets.

Until recently, few digital cameras were optimized to meet the criteria of portrait, wedding and event photographers who have tried to make do with models not particularly well-suited to either their shooting needs or their budgets.

True, the Kodak Professional DCS Pro 14n is extremely well-suited to studio portrait work, producing file sizes and image quality suitable for rendering large prints. But for location portraiture, event photography and available light weddings, the ISO equivalents of this model were too low. These photographers had to sacrifice the file size and workflow of the DCS Pro 14n to use digital SLRs with more exposure latitude.

That's changed. Kodak's new DCS Pro SLR/n delivers large files, a broad ISO range, image quality similar to top-end digital SLRs, and workflow enhancements that meet the specific needs of portrait, event and wedding photographers.

At first glance, the DCS Pro 14n and the DCS Pro SLR/n look the same. The only physical differences are a nameplate on the front and a tiny "Card Busy" LED in the media door. The camera controls and buttons for digital functions are identical. There are minor differences in the menus. For instance, the new model allows you to lock the digital function buttons, so you can't inadvertently change the settings.

But most of the changes in the new model are significant. One major difference is the imaging sensor. The supporting electronics have been enhanced as well. These modifications were made to address



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Turning sharpening completely off during the exposure produces smooth skin tones. A little sharpening around the eyes is all that's needed in post production, saving time. Color balance after "click balancing" on a white card is perfect with beautiful skin color. There was no hint of moire either in the jacket of the gray, fine-pattered shirt he was wearing.

many of the criticisms leveled at the 14n, which range from unacceptably high image noise at higher ISO settings to inadequate power management.

While the effective resolution of the new DCS Pro SLR/n is the same as the 14n's, its CMOS imaging sensor is an entirely new design, and unlike any other sensor on the market, according to Kodak Worldwide

Product Manager Jay Kelbley. Unlike other sensors, the sensing elements in the Pro SLR/n are symmetrical, resulting in a more even signal response across the sensor. Along with a different kind of cover filter, this gives the Pro SLR/n a net gain in sensitivity of 1- to 1.5-EV over the 14n.

The sensor itself is a 13.89-million pixel (13.5 effective megapixels), full-frame

(24x36mm) CMOS sensor designed by Kodak in conjunction with FillFactory nv of Belgium. Its maximum resolution is 4,500x3,000 (13.5 million recorded pixels), resulting in a file size of approximately 39MB (24-bits) after conversion to TIFF format. There is no provision to save data in TIFF format in the camera itself. The camera also supports resolutions of 3,000x2,000, 2,250x1,500 and 1,125x750 pixels. The three highest resolutions can be recorded in RAW format, standard JPEG format, or Kodak's proprietary ERI-JPEG (Extended Range Imaging JPEG) format. ERI-JPEG retains more highlight information than standard JPEG and allows some image adjustments to be made to the file without degrading the image. The fourth resolution, 1,125x750, can only be saved in standard JPEG or ERI-JPEG. With the custom settings, the user can store files as RAW, ERI-JPEG or JPEG, and in combinations of RAW+ERI-JPEG and RAW+JPEG at various RAW, ERI-JPEG and JPEG resolutions.

Both the analog to digital converter and the digital signal processing electronics are new in the Pro SLR/n, and the power management system delivers far longer battery life than the 14n's. When the Pro SLR/n goes into sleep mode, the power consumption is minimal—no worse than my Nikon D1X. Wake-up is virtually instantaneous, making the Pro SLR/n much more responsive than the 14n.

With the new electronics, improved calibration cycle and latest firmware, turn-on time is less than five seconds. That's hardly in the league of some other digital SLRs, but it's a vast improvement over the early 14ns, which took nearly 20 seconds.

The ISO-equivalent range of the Pro SLR/n is 160 to 1600 in 1/2-EV increments, and as low as 6 in Longer mode. A menu option allows the user to select Normal or Strong noise reduction. With files saved in RAW format, the Kodak Professional DCS Photo Desk software provides an expert-level feature for noise reduction that also maintains image sharpness.

Other options, in both the camera menus and in Photo Desk software, show that Kodak is attuned to the needs of the photographers for whom this camera was designed. In the Image folder of the menus, the photographer can choose one of four Looks (tone curves) to apply to the capture. The Product Look yields the highest contrast and color saturation. The Portrait Look has lower contrast with more highlight and shadow detail. The Wedding Look yields higher contrast and greater saturation while maintaining neutral shadows. And the Event Look results in a higher contrast image with strong color saturation, neutral shadows and optimized skin tones. If the capture is saved in RAW file format, these looks can be applied later in Photo Desk. Kodak also sells optional Custom Looks software with even more options, including instant conversion to black and white, sepia toning and more.

The Image menu also offers a selection of four sharpening levels, ranging from None to High. Where other cameras automatically apply sharpening, the Pro SLR/n puts the photographer in full control. You don't have to go through additional post-processing steps to soften a portrait, then re-sharpen critical features. Instead, the photographer can turn off in-camera sharpening to produce smooth skin tones, then slightly sharpen specific areas, if desired.

The Exposure Bias option on the Image menu will be of particular interest to studios using more than one Pro SLR/n, and especially to photographers covering events with more than one camera. This setting is used to adjust the exposure so that all of the cameras will produce consistent output. Settings are available in a ± 0.5 -EV range in $\frac{1}{10}$ -EV steps.

It is also possible to easily lock all of the exposure controls to prevent inadvertent changes in a studio with an established lighting setup, or at events where a less-experienced photographer may be operating the camera.

Because of the wide range of conditions for which the camera was designed, there are 13 white balance settings, plus a way to "click balance" the camera to a white card, save the setting, and apply it to subsequent captures.

The new Pro SLR/n retains the best qualities of the 14n, like its excellent balance and handling, intuitive menu structure and full range of features, but

with the addition of important capabilities that had been lacking. The Pro SLR/n should be able to handle any assignment that a location portrait photographer, a wedding photographer or an event photographer is

likely to encounter. Its MSRP, \$4,995, is the same as the previous model. Kodak will upgrade 14n cameras with the new sensor and support electronics, but not the improved power management, for \$1,500. □

specs: Kodak Professional DCS Pro SLR/n

Resolution: 13.5 megapixels, 4,536x3,024 pixel (effective)

Lens factor: 1X

Aspect ratio: 2x3, 4x5, square

Bit depth: 12 bits per channel in RAW format

ISO settings: 6-1600 at various settings

Shutter speed: 1/4,000 second to 30 seconds, bulb, 60 seconds in Longer mode, flash sync at 1/125

White balance: Auto, 12 presets, click balance

Burst rate: 1.7 frames per second up to 18-frame burst of hi-res RAW images, 512MB RAM buffer

Drive: Single or continuous

Viewfinder: Magnification, 0.75X; diopter adjustments, +0.8 to -1.8 DP; coverage, about 92 percent horizontal and vertical

Lens options: Nikon F-mount

Flash: Built-in, GN 17 (ISO 200 in meters); hot shoe for Nikon shoe-mount flash; standard PC-outlet on camera front

Storage: CompactFlash Types I and II (including microdrive) and MMC/SD memory card

Computer interface: FireWire up to 12MB/second

MSRP: \$4,995



Even with a 17mm wide-angle lens, there are no color artifact or sharpness problems from the edge to the center of the frame.

