

Kodak and Canon reunited in a new digital SLR

A solid, capable, economic alternative for Canon lens owners

Eastman Kodak Company was the first to market digital SLR (DSLR) cameras, and its approach was an even-handed one—it released both Canon and Nikon versions.

As the market grew, Canon and Nikon introduced their own cameras. Canon, whose CMOS-sensor products put it more in direct competition with Kodak, abandoned the relationship. Over the next six years, and several technology generations, Kodak digital SLRs were compatible exclusively with Nikon F-mount lenses. Now, with the introduction of the Kodak DCS Pro SLR/c, photographers with Canon EF-mount lenses can again use them on a Kodak DSLR.

This time, however, the camera body is not manufactured by Canon, nor was it designed with any input from Canon. Kodak will not officially disclose its “partner firm in Japan,” but a quick examination of the camera’s top panel shows clear similarities to the Sigma SD10.

The new SLR/c incorporates the same 14-megapixel CMOS sensor and support electronics as the SLR/n, including the much-improved power management. Battery life should be even longer, as the new model doesn’t have a power-draining pop-up flash. (Wedding, location portrait and other professionals may miss the little sparkle that pop-up flash adds to the eyes.) Atop the pentaprism is a hot shoe for mounting Canon or Sigma shoe-mount flashes.

There are other minor differences between the Canon and Nikon models. Top shutter



The lightweight and excellent handling characteristics of the Kodak DCS Pro SLR/c make it a pleasure to use on location. It is responsive enough to capture fleeting expressions on the face of a five-year old before her birthday party.

speed of the SLR/c is somewhat higher, 1/6,000 second vs. 1/4,000 second. Flash sync of the SLR/c is also higher, 1/180 second vs. 1/125 second. With high-speed (FP) Canon flash units such as the 550EX, flash sync extends to 1/6,000 second. The PC-connector for studio flash units is on the side of the SLR/c as it is on newer Canons.

The autofocus system in the SLR/c is new and improved over the SLR/n, and Kodak says it performs better in low light. I found that to be true. However, in my



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Studio portraits made with the new sensor in the SLR/c and processed in PhotoDesk software deliver beautiful flesh tones, especially with all image sharpening turned off.

studio portrait session, it didn’t seem to be as sensitive, and in fact, did considerable “hunting” before achieving focus.

Externally, the Canon and Nikon versions also differ only slightly. The LCD display on the SLR/c is slightly smaller, at 1.8 inches. Warm colors, particularly flesh tones, looked somewhat over-saturated on the LCD, making it difficult to predict image quality. Fortunately, the camera’s histogram and other controls for evaluating image quality are excellent.

The buttons and switches for controlling

both the camera and digital functions are in slightly different positions on the two bodies, but are very similar, as is the menu structure. The SLR/c includes an IR remote trigger system that the SLR/n lacks. But this is the first digital SLR I've seen that does not have a backlight for the status screen on the top of the camera.

The body itself has a look, feel and weight that professional photographers will appreciate. However, as much alike as these two Kodak models are, the SLR/c is a very different camera than the Canon-made DSLRs. This may be the biggest obstacle for Canon digital camera users looking for a second digital body or for film shooters looking to transition to full-frame digital at a lower cost than the Canon EOS-1 Ds. The camera's operation differs in significant ways from that of other Canon bodies. The differences may take some getting used to.

For example, there is no rotary Quick Control Dial on the back of the SLR/c. Rather, there are four discrete switches in a circular pattern, more akin to the EOS Rebel or the four-position switch of the Nikon digital SLRs. And other control buttons are located in entirely different positions than they are on Canon cameras.

The autofocus system, as good as it is in low light, consists of only five positions, grouped very closely in the center of the frame. Switching from one area to another requires a double push on the same button that activates the exposure compensation with a single push, then a rotation of the Command Dial around the shutter release, which also serves to adjust the exposure compensation. It's too easy to change the exposure compensation while trying to change the autofocus area.

Whether the physical operation of the Kodak SLR/c fits your expectations or not, the image quality is excellent over the same wide range of shooting conditions as the SLR/n. As with other full-frame digitals, however, it is still possible to induce color fringing and other digital artifacts under the right combination of conditions. Kodak is at work on firmware upgrades to address this problem. There's an added bonus with the SLR/c, Kodak PhotoDesk

specs: Kodak Professional DCS Pro SLR/c

Resolution: 13.7 megapixels, 4,536x3,024-pixel (effective) CMOS sensor

Lens factor: 1X

Aspect ratio: 2x3, 4x5, square

Bit depth: 12 bits per channel in RAW format

ISO: 6 to 1600

Shutter speed: 1/6,000 second to 30 seconds, bulb, 60 seconds in Longer mode, flash sync from 30 seconds to 1/180, high speed (FP) flash sync up to 1/6,000

White balance: Auto, 12 presets, click balance

Burst rate: 1.6 frames per second up to 19-frame burst of hi-res RAW images, 512MB RAM buffer

Lens options: Canon EF mount and compatible; Canon tilt and shift lenses

Flash: Hot shoe for Canon 220EX, 420EX and 550EX shoe-mount flash; Canon Macro flash units; Canon ET-E2 transmitter; Sigma EF-500 DG Super shoe-mount flash; standard PC-outlet on camera side

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

Computer interface: FireWire to 50MB/sec

MSRP: \$4,995



software, which establishes one of the best workflows available, and unquestionably the best flesh tone reproduction, of any digital imaging production software.

For studio, location portrait, or wedding

professionals looking for a full-frame digital body for their Canon EF lenses at half the cost of the Canon-manufactured body, the Kodak Pro SLR/c is the answer. Just be prepared to relearn the layout of your camera. □