

The 4800 and 4800 Professional units are much better than the models they replace. The problem will be choosing between the two.

BY BRYAN LINDEN

A sure thing

EPSON STYLUS PRO 4800 PROFESSIONAL ED.



The Epson Stylus Pro 4800 Professional Edition featuring the Epson UltraChrome K3 ink set retails for \$2,495; the standard model 4800 for \$1,995. That extra \$500 gets you a 10/100-BaseT Ethernet Card—great for adding it to your network—and a full-featured Adobe PostScript 3-compatible RIP, SWOP certified for proofing, custom designed for Epson by ColorBurst.

Unless you've been hiding under a rock, you've heard of Epson's new UltraChrome K3 printers, the Stylus Photo R2400 and Stylus Pro R4800, R7800 and R9800. K3 inks are a complete reformulation of the UltraChrome pigment inks, and the set includes a new color, Light Light Black (LLK), bringing the total to eight. (The other colors are photo black or matte black, light black, cyan, light cyan, magenta, light magenta, and yellow.)

If you're thinking of trading in your Stylus Pro 4000 to go with the 4800 or 4800 Pro, there is something you should be aware of. If you normally switch back and forth between glossy and matte paper, you'll want to swap Photo Black ink for Matte Black when printing to matte sur-

faces. Although the Photo Black is compatible with matte surfaces, the Matte Black has a better D-max for matte and you'll want the richer black once you see the difference.

The 4000 model did come with 8 channels, including both Matte Black and Photo Black, and the capacity to auto switch between them, but the 4800's 8 channels do not include Matte Black. Switching Photo Black for Matte Black takes several minutes and consumes about \$44's worth of ink. Still, that's about half the time and expense of making the swap in the 7-channel Epson Stylus Pro 7600 and 9600 models. Epson also reports that the inks for the Pro 4800, 7800 and 9800 models cost about 50 percent less per milliliter than the UltraChromes used in the 2400 and 2200.

Why didn't Epson simply add a ninth channel for Matte Black? According to the company, the research and development required to do so would have significantly delayed the release of the K3 printers and added to the cost. Epson stated that customer feedback indicated that users tend to print mostly matte or mostly glossy, so switching inks isn't

a significant factor. If you disagree, please let Epson know.

The first UltraChrome printers could produce beautiful color prints that would last generations on a variety of media, as well as very good black-and-white prints. But attaining a neutral print often required a third-party RIP. Prints made with the UltraChrome printers looked fantastic, but there were a couple of drawbacks to using them, if only in certain circumstances. Gloss differential and bronzing were evident on Premium Glossy Photo Paper and, to a lesser extent, Premium Luster Paper. In my tests, however, these effects weren't generally evident unless I viewed the prints at unnatural angles or held them a certain way toward a light source.

With extensive testing the Epson Stylus Pro 4800 exhibited negligible if any bronzing (depending on the nature of the image) when printing on glossy surfaces. Using the ColorBurst RIP gave me a fraction more bronzing than the Epson drivers, most likely because of ColorBurst's ink-limiting setup, but that can be changed. The Epson Stylus Pro 4000, on the other hand, produced moderate to heavy bronzing, especially in black-and-white prints. Gloss differential wasn't a problem with the 4800 with either the Epson driver or the

ColorBurst RIP. The 4000 produced moderate to heavy gloss differential on Premium Glossy Photo Paper, less on Premium Luster. Prints on matte surfaces did not exhibit bronzing or gloss differential because the paper absorbs the ink, and has no inherent gloss to compete with the gloss of the inks.

Using the ColorBurst RIP is a piece of cake, and I made my first print just moments after installing the software. Images are printed easily to the RIP, via drag-and-drop, a watched hot folder, or even bypassing the Epson print driver completely, going straight to the RIP from Photoshop. Images to be printed appear on a job list with such relevant info as status, copies, dimensions, file type, user and more. After printing, the info moves to a done list directly below the job list. From there, the user can drag items back to the job list for reprinting, which is great for productivity and consistency if you often print the

same images. The dimensions and other settings can be changed prior to printing, so outputting images at multiple sizes is easy and consistent. Epson includes the LFP Remote utility with the 4800 and 4800 Pro. It has some of the job list features of the ColorBurst RIP, but it's limited, and also gives document size in millimeters rather than inches or pixels.

In my past tests, RIP software yielded better print detail than the standard driver, and the differences were visible to the naked eye. With the 4800 models, the print detail looks identical, even viewed through a loupe. This isn't due to any shortcomings of the RIP software, but to the excellent job Epson has done with its own driver and screening algorithms. Color consistency among ColorBurst RIP profiles is excellent, and no special setting is required to print neutral black-and-white. The 4800 comes with

professional profiles for excellent color consistency among paper types. Black-and-white prints are very good with the standard Epson profiles, but a bit better when using the new Advanced Black and White mode, slightly outperforming the ColorBurst RIP in my tests.

With either the Epson driver or going through the ColorBurst RIP, the K3 inks demonstrate a definite overall improvement in density and tonality over the previous inkset. Black-and-white images are now more neutral and color images exhibit more depth.

Epson's Precise Color Technology, a process used in making all 4800, 7800, and 9800 units, ensures consistency among models through hand-assembly, testing for color accuracy, and loading adjustments into the printer memory.

The 4800 and 4800 Professional units are much better than even the great models they replace. With the improvements in Epson's own drivers, choosing between the two models is more complicated than it would have been a couple of years ago. Though the Professional Edition costs only \$500 more and comes with Ethernet Networking and a full-featured RIP, you'd likely do well enough with the standard model unless you do regular reprints, need Pantone-certified proofing, or have a high volume network.

With print speed double the 4000's, elimination of bronzing and gloss differential issues, excellent print profiles out of the box, and deep, rich prints, the 4800 models are sure bets. ■

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specs: Epson Stylus Pro 4800 Professional Edition

INK SET: 8-color pigment-based UltraChrome K3 Ink System with Microcrystal Encapsulation Technology (Photo Black or Matte Black, Light Black, Light Light Black, Cyan, Light Cyan, Magenta, Light Magenta, and Yellow)

PRINT TECHNOLOGY: 1-inch wide print head with 180 nozzles per channel; variably sized droplets as small as 3.5 picoliters; proprietary Active Meniscus Control technology to control the curvature of every ink droplet before it's released; Epson PreciseColor Technology; automatic print head alignment; automatic print head cleaning

MAXIMUM RESOLUTION: 2,880x1,440 dpi

PAPER: roll media widths—8.3-, 10-, 12-, 13-, 14-, 16-, 17-inches; full bleed on roll media only; automatic and manual cutting; maximum paper width 17 inches; 17x22-inch cut sheet input tray; paper thickness—12-pound bond to 1.5mm posterboard

LIGHT RESISTANCE/PRINT LONGEVITY: Epson UltraChrome K3 Ink prints are color-fast up to 108 years; black-and-white print longevity over 200 years.

Visit www.wilhelm-research.com for latest information

INCLUDES: Ethernet Card and ColorBurst RIP

PRICE: \$2,495.