



The successor to the Nikon D100 makes the scene with impressive features and performance passed down from the D2X

BY JOAN T. SHERWOOD

Worth the wait

NIKON D200

Though it's hard not to be completely spoiled after shooting the Nikon D2X, I find that the Nikon D200 holds its own and serves as a worthy successor to the D100, released back in mid-2002. The D200 brings speed, responsiveness, a new 10.2 effective megapixel DX Format CCD, and the same image processing engine and 3D Color Matrix Metering as the D2X. With so many features that can be customized for your shooting style or particular jobs, you can fine-tune this camera to your heart's desire.

I have been shooting with the Nikon D200 for a month now, largely using a Nikkor 18-

200mm f/3.5-5.6 G IF-ED AF-S DX VR lens, a less-than-pro-level 11.1X zoom lens designed for everyday photography.

With the Nikon D200, you get ISO sensitivity down to 100, and as high as 1600, and shutter speed as fast as 1/8,000 second. The synch terminal is built into the body now, with flash synch up to 1/250 second. The focal length conversion factor is 1.5X.

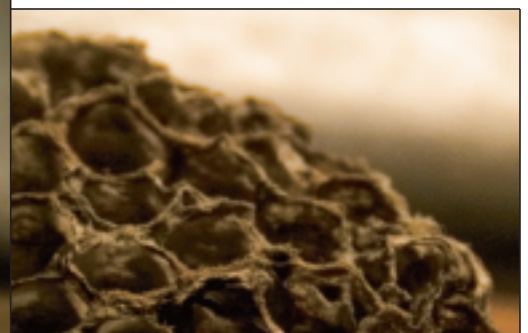
This model's speed matches the Nikon D2X, though not the rate of the high-speed crop mode, at 5 frames per second (fps). Shooting in JPEG (Fine) format, I could log 5fps for the first 5 to 6 seconds, 2fps

thereafter using a SanDisk Extreme III CompactFlash card. I took 56 frames in 20 seconds. Shooting NEF files kept up the 5fps capture rate for the first 5 seconds, then slowed to 1 frame every 2 seconds thereafter. In 20 seconds I captured 30 frames.

I let the camera make all the decisions on the bright sunny afternoon of Atlanta's Peachbowl Parade, an event that gave me both fast-moving and nearly still subjects. In this harsh light, the surrounding buildings cast heavy shadows across the parade route.

In my images, the skin tones look beautiful, and the vivid uniform colors really pop. The combined automatic settings may have blown out the most glaring whites, but they also preserved surprising detail in shadow areas (See parade photos in Bonus Content).

On a gray, overcast day, I took photos of field practice for the Atlanta Xplosion, a women's professional full-contact football team. I delved into the sophisticated Custom



Using a vibration reduction lens helped me get handheld, low-light images that otherwise might have been impossible to capture. Unsharp masking has been applied to the full image; the inset shows the unsharpened image at 100 percent.



In this combination of two versions of the same image, you can see the difference in color and sharpness between the unadjusted NEF (RAW) settings (bottom) and the Vivid setting in the Optimize Image options (top). By capturing the Vivid JPEG simultaneously with the NEF file (RAW + JPEG image quality shooting mode), you have an out if you don't like the results.

Settings menu, which shows the D200's close ties to the D2X. You can custom-design a slate of settings, then assign the group any

name you choose, like Action or Focal Lock. There are four banks with default names A, B, C, and D. It's not quite as

specs: Nikon D200

IMAGE PROCESSOR: Advanced Image Processing Engine (same as the Nikon D2X) with high-speed 4-channel data output; new Optical Low Pass Filter to help prevent moiré, color fringing and shifting, and improve resolving power

SENSOR: DX Format CCD

RESOLUTION: 10.2 effective megapixels (3,872x2,592-pixels)

METERING: 1,005-pixel 3D Color Matrix Metering II; algorithms evaluate a large area of highlight and shadow detail while the system references an onboard database of exposure info from 30,000 actual images, and makes instantaneous comparisons to factor into the exposure determination

SHOOTING SPEED: 5fps in JPEG or NEF mode, up to 5 seconds; 56 JPEG frames in 20 seconds; 30 NEF frames in 20 seconds
ISO: 100 to 1600 in 1/3 or 1/2 steps; boost to 1 EV over 1600 possible

AUTOFOCUS: 11-area AF system, convertible to 7-wide area AF

WIRELESS: iTTL wireless Speedlight control built in (use the camera to control remote Speedlights in Nikon's Creative Lighting System); wireless image transfer available with optional WT-3 wireless transmitter (release imminent)

LENSES: Compatible with the digital-exclusive DX Nikkor lenses and the 35mm/digital-compatible AF Nikkor System

FLASH: Built-in flash, GN 12/39 (ISO 100 m/ft); accessory shoe compatible with SB series Speedlights, including SB800, SB600, 80DX, 28DX, 28, 27, 23, 22S, 295, and the new R1 and R1C1 Wireless Close-Up Speedlight System

SYNCH: Synch terminal built into the body, X-contact only, flash synch up to 1/250 second; ISO 519 standard terminal

STORAGE: CompactFlash and microdrive, no secondary media slot; NEF (RAW) and JPEG files

PRICE: \$1,699.95 (body only)

THE GOODS: PRO REVIEW

complex as it looks. Once you've read a bit of the manual and worked with Custom Settings, it's a huge feature for a pro to have at her fingertips. The customizable settings are broken down into six groups, designated by lowercase letters.

- a: Autofocus
- b: Metering/Exposure
- c: Timers/AE&AF Lock
- d: Shooting/Display
- e: Bracketing/Flash
- f: Controls

When you go back to your custom settings, an asterisk next to the setting letter-number (e.g., a5 or b1) will let you know which ones are set to something other than the default. I set up the camera to fire only when the in-focus indicator was displayed. Of course, what is in focus and what you want to be in focus aren't necessarily always the same



Exposed for 1/250 second at f/9, ISO 400, using a Nikkor 18-200mm f/3.5-5.6 G IF-ED AF-S DX VR lens at 200mm focal length. The continuous autofocus mode did well at tracking fast-moving subjects, but if you want tack-sharp sports action, you'll need a pro-level zoom lens.

thing. Sometimes I'd want the face in focus, but tracking a running player with the center Focus Area Selection on her torso, I'd get the shirt in focus instead.

I also turned Focus Tracking Lock-On to Long (time), which asks the camera to pause before adjusting focus if the distance to the subject changes abruptly. It comes in handy when something or someone passes between the lens and the subject you're tracking. This feature worked well.

I set the VR lens on M/A (autofocus with manual priority), turned on Vibration Reduction, and set the VR mode to Normal, which is better for panning. The camera was set in Continuous-servo AF, and CH (Continuous High Speed) Shooting Mode.

I also used a custom White Balance at the Xplosion event. Taking a reading required reading the manual, timing, and dealing with

flashing codes on the top LCD Control Panel. It took me a couple tries to get it right.

Overall, I'm very pleased with the Nikon D200's performance, especially considering all the pro features you get for the price. The Nikon D200 body feels great—sturdy, but not like a brick. The start-up is super fast, 0.15 second, and according to Nikon's specs, the shutter release lag is 50 milliseconds. I have no way of measuring time in such tiny increments, but I can say the camera was ready to shoot when I was.

The menu interface is intuitive and not too deep. I never had to go to more than three screens before reaching an OK/Enter option.

My biggest frequent problem with the camera is the hair-trigger response of the four-way rocker you use to navigate the menu. It would sometimes zoom three menu items past the one I was trying to select.

One of my favorite functions is the Battery Info, or Fuel Gauge, which tells you how many shots you've fired on a particular battery charge, and the percentage of charge remaining. After 495 shots, my battery read 40%. Nikon says the EN-EL3e rechargeable lithium-ion battery can deliver enough power for up to 1,800 images, but when you factor in such variables as driving a zoom lens motor, using flash, and viewing photos on the LCD, the Fuel Gauge is an excellent way to see if you've got enough power left to do what you want. It also reports the remaining life of your battery so you know when it's about to reach the end of its charge-holding ability. ■

You can view additional images and download full-size JPEG and NEF files captured with the Nikon D200 at www.ppmag.com in the March Bonus Content.