Smooth, intuitive autofocus and the powerful DIGIC II Image Processor engine are the hallmarks of another Canon success.

BY RON EGGERS

Impressive

CANON EOS 30D

Built on the success of the 10D and 20D, the Canon EOS 30D could best be described as a solid, mid-range camera that delivers a big bang for your buck. Though priced $100 less than the 20D at its introduction, this new model sports some of the features and capabilities of the considerably more expensive EOS 5D, and delivers some of the responsiveness of the EOS-1D Mark II N.

Like the 20D, Canon's newest digital SLR body is designed around an 8.2-megapixel APS-C size CMOS sensor with a 3:2 aspect ratio and maximum effective resolution of 3,504x2,336 pixels. And, like other recent Canon pro DSLRs, it has a Canon-made DIGIC II Image Processor engine for optimum image quality and high-speed throughput.

In many respects, DIGIC II is the heart of the camera. Beyond image optimization, this processor helps speed startup, autofocus, shutter response and playback. In fact, it's probably a major reason for the success of Canon's digital SLRs.

Many aspects of the 30D impressed me, including its highly intuitive focusing system. As the camera performed the focus point selection, it almost seemed to know which element or elements of the com-

The EOS 30D is fast. Candid shots like this one of Olivia could be missed with a slower camera.

position I wanted to focus on. In the manual selection mode, it was easy to select focus points without taking my eye from the viewfinder.

The autofocus system is controlled with a TTL-CT-SIR AF-dedicated CMOS sensor and nine bright, easy-to-see focus points in a diamond pattern. The focusing options are One-Shot AF, Predictive AI Servo AF for tracking moving objects, and AI Focus AF, which involves automatic switching between One-Shot/Predictive and AI Servo AF, for tracking objects that start out stationary but then move.

Focusing was fast and tracking was excellent. I could quickly lock in on moving objects and keep them in focus. As with previous Canon models, in the AI Servo AF mode, the focus points don't light up to confirm activation, but the lens continuously adjusts to bring the main subject into focus. That worked well with not only a laterally moving subject, which is relatively easy to track, but also with the subject coming directly toward the camera, which is a more difficult task.

In the past, I've complained that some of the LCDs on low- to mid-priced Canon DSLRs are somewhat lacking, but that's not the case with the 30D. The 2.5-inch LCD screen—the same one on the Canon 5D and Mark II N—is 95 percent larger than those of previous mid-range models. It makes it far easier to review images and navigate through the three sets of menus.

The 30D has a 35-zone metering sensor with four metering modes (one more than the 20D): evaluative; partial, which takes about nine percent of the frame center into account; center-weighted average; and new spot metering that covers 3.5 percent of the viewfinder area at the center.

I tend to prefer evaluative and center-weighted average metering. I wasn't really happy with the new spot-metering mode, which made my pictures look a little underexposed. That could be due to my inexperience with it.

The 30D boasts the fasted startup of any EOS DSLR on the market, just 0.15 second. Shooting speed clocks at 5 frames per second (fps) in tests using a Kingston 100X Ultimate 2GB CompactFlash card, with the camera in high-speed continuous shooting mode.

The published burst rate has increased from the 20D's 23 (JPEG/large format) to 30 for the 30D. The RAW burst rate increased from 6 to 11. For longer bursts, the camera could consistently capture 55 to 62 highest-res JPEG frames in under 18 seconds. During long bursts, shooting speed lagged intermittently, but the hesitations had little impact on the overall frame rate, which was significantly better than the published specs. I'm not sure why that is, but

The 30D is a high-performance, high-resolution camera within the price range of most photographers.

specs:
Canon EOS 30D

IMAGE PROCESSOR: DIGIC II Image Processor

SENSOR: CMOS, 3:2 aspect ratio

RESOLUTION: 8.2 effective megapixels (3,504x2,336 pixels)

METERING: Maximum aperture TTL 35-zone SPC; evaluative, partial (approx 9% at center of viewfinder), spot (approx 3.5% at center of viewfinder), center-weighted average

SHOOTING SPEED: 5 fps; bursts to 30 frames in JPEG mode (Large/Fine), 11 in RAW

ISO: 100 to 1600 equivalence in 1/3-stop increments, expandable to 3200

EXPOSURE SETTINGS: Program AE (shiftable), shutter-priority AE, aperture-priority AE, auto depth-of-field AE (non-shiftable), full auto, E-TTL II autoflash program AE, manual, programmed image control modes

SHUTTER: Vertical-travel, mechanical, focal-plane shutter, 1/8,000 to 30 seconds (1/3- and 1/2-stop increments), X-sync at 1/250 second

WHITE BALANCE: Auto, preset (daylight, shade, cloudy, tungsten light, white fluorescent light, flash), manual (custom, color temperature)

LENSES: Canon EF (except EF-S lenses)

FLASH: E-TTL II autoflash, EX-series Speedlite compatible

STORAGE: Compact Flash Type I and II

PRICE: $1,399

it could be due to the high-speed Kingston CF card I used in my tests.

When shooting RAW, I could take 12 frames in less than 4 seconds, slightly better than the rated specs. Like previous models, the 30D can capture RAW (.CR2) and JPEG files simultaneously, storing the two files in separate folders on the CF card. In an improvement over earlier models, the 30D can store 9,999 images in each folder—that's up from 100 per folder.

Image review has also been simplified. There's an enhanced jump capability that lets you navigate between 10 or 100 images in one step; that's important with so many frames per folder. Images can also be searched by date.

Constructed of stainless steel and magnesium alloy, the 30D is lightweight but durable. The shutter rating is 100,000 frames—about average for mid-range professional digitals. Shutter speed ranges from 1/8,000 second to 30 seconds in either 1/3 or 1/2-stop increments.

One of the high-end capabilities that's migrated down to the 30D is the Picture Styles feature. Canon likens Picture Styles to selecting specific film types to achieve desired results. There are six preset Styles to choose from, including Standard, Portrait, Landscape, Neutral, Faithful and Monochrome. There are also three user-definable style settings, and photographers can shoot with their specific preferences for sharpening, contrast, saturation, and color tone.

For added exposure flexibility, the new Canon allows ISO settings in 1/3-stop increments from 50 to 1600. ISO 3200 is available through an ISO expansion option. ISO data has also been added to the viewfinder display, a handy feature for someone like me, who frequently resets the ISO for changing shooting requirements.

For high image quality during long exposures, Canon now offers automatic noise reduction instead of a simple on/off setting. That helps in when it's difficult to determine whether or not there will be noise degradation in the image. And the 30D provides enhanced camera-controlled direct print features, integrating both direct-print and direct-download capabilities with a single press of the print/share button on the body.

The 30D is compatible with all of Canon's EF lenses, including the EF-S series. With its APS-size sensor, there's a 1.6X lens conversion factor, as with the 20D.

The Canon EOS 30D Digital SLR body has a suggested retail price of $1,399. There's no question that you get a lot of camera for the price. ■