

Out with the new and in with the newer—Nikon replaces the 18-month-old D2X with the D2Xs.

BY ELLIS VENER

Charge up

NIKON D2Xs



Managing not to throw out the baby with the bathwater, Nikon institutes conspicuous changes with the D2Xs, including: a new LCD display that incorporates a larger viewing angle for easier image review; better implementation of the high-speed crop mode (HSC) framing in the viewfinder; longer battery life; finer-tuning of the high ISO sensitivity range; improved metering system; substantially larger internal buffer; and for those who shoot JPEGs, an sRGB-based black-and-white mode; and even more tweaks and changes under the hood.

What hasn't changed? The 23.7x15.7 mm (APS-C format) CMOS image sensor still delivers 4,288x2,848-pixel images (12.4 effective megapixels) at full resolution, and 3,216x2,136-pixel images in HSC mode. If you still judge the angle of view with a given focal length to that of the same lens on a 24x36mm format camera, the "crop factors" are the same: 1.5X and 2X in the HSC mode.

The D2Xs is slightly more user friendly to handle than the D2X, which is saying something, as the D2X was a pleasure to use. According to Nikon, if the two models are set the same way, the images captured will be identical.

The D2Xs controls are much the same as



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Improvements in the Nikon D2Xs largely benefit the photographer rather than improve the image. According to Nikon, two models set the same way will produce identical images.

specs:

Nikon D2Xs

SENSOR: CMOS

RESOLUTION: 12.4 effective megapixels (4,288x2,848 pixels)

LENS FOCAL LENGTH CONVERSION FACTOR: 1.5X (2X in HSC mode)

METERING: TTL exposure metering using 1,005-pixel RGB sensor; matrix, center-weighted, spot

SHOOTING SPEED: up to 5 fps for 16 seconds before slowing for NEF + JPEG (8 fps up to 28 seconds before slowing in high-speed crop mode)

ISO: 100 to 800 in steps of 1/3, 1/2 or 1 EV, with additional settings approximately 0.3, 0.5, 0.7, 1 or 2 EV over ISO 800

EXPOSURE SETTINGS: Program auto, shutter-priority, aperture-priority, manual

SHUTTER: Electronic vertical-travel focal-plane shutter, 1/8,000 to 30 seconds (1/3-stop, 1/2-stop or 1-EV increments), X-sync up to 1/250 second

WHITE BALANCE: auto (TTL white balance with main image sensor, 1,005-pixel RGB sensor, and ambient light sensor), six manual modes with fine-tuning, color temperature setting

VIEWFINDER: Optical fixed eye-level pentaprism, ships with B BriteView III focusing screen installed

LENSES: Nikon F mount; Type G or D AF Nikkor all functions supported; other AF Nikkor all functions except 3D color matrix metering and 3D multi-sensor balanced fill flash; other Nikkor (except IX Nikkor) lenses with limited function support

FLASH: sync contact and standard hot shoe; TTL flash control by combined 5-segment TTL multi-sensor; with Nikon Creative Lighting System-compatible flash units supports Advanced Wireless lighting, Auto FP High-Speed Sync, Flash Color Information Communication, modeling illumination, and FV lock

STORAGE: Compact Flash Type I and II, microdrives

PRICE: \$4,699.95

the other members of the DX family. The larger LCD affords an easier to read menu of programmable functions and improved histograms. The histogram display will show luminosity as a semi-transparent overlay of the photograph or will split the screen into separate red, green and blue channels alongside a small thumbnail.

I was annoyed with the sensitivity of the multi-selector button when changing from one AF sensor to another. Maybe it needs a more delicate touch, but I could rarely get the AF sensor to move in exactly the direction or number of steps I desired. On a positive note, as with all Nikons since the introduction of autofocus and auto-exposure, there's no data blackout when changing control modes, or exposure compensation.

The High Speed Crop mode doesn't refer only to machine-gunning frames faster than 5 frames per second (fps). If you know while photographing that you will need a tighter angle of view than the lens will produce, HSC becomes a real timesaver when editing. With the D2X, the crop area for the HSC mode is a set of blinking red corner brackets. In the D2Xs, the area outside the crop is covered with a neutral density overlay created with liquid crystal polymer network technology. It's a pretty neat way to solve the problem. The darkened overlay was less useful when photographing a subject against a dark or dimly lit background, making the frame edges less discernable. When HSC is turned off, the overlay is completely transparent.

With the new 2,500 milliamp-hour (mAh) capacity EN-EL4a battery—and I presume improved power management—the D2Xs can give you up to 3,800 shots, a 50 percent improvement over the original. Better news: the new battery can also be used with the older D2X and D2H cameras.

Major overhaul also comes in color management and metering. Nikon's already formidable metering system has been optimized for use in HSC mode, and users can upload up to three custom tone curves into the camera.

In shooting in available light, photographers complained about the marked color noise the D2X displays at high ISO settings. You can treat it with such software as Noise Ninja, but doing so slows the workflow. Nikon's solution with the D2Xs is to chop up the 1-EV leap from ISO 800 to 1600 (Hi-1) into 1/3-EV steps (or a single 1/2 EV step when using custom function B2). This change in firmware image processing helps, as do the NEF processing improvements in Capture NX software, but the noise is still there at ISO settings above 800. As digital photography progressively changes the way we work with available light and flash gear, Nikon will have to figure out a solution.

For those who want to unleash the full power of the D2Xs, Nikon replaced Nikon Capture with Capture NX. As with all powerful new software, there are some teething problems, but there's also a major problem: professional photographers are not anxious to add another large, complex piece of software to their workflow. (See Capture NX review, p. 62).

Capture NX is somewhat forward-looking in using metadata to store processing commands, including localized tone and color adjustments and directly converting NEFs for a wide range of printer profiles and workspaces. With the v 3.5 release of Adobe Camera Raw and the DNG update in September, we can now make use of such productivity and archiving software as iView Media Pro and Extensis Portfolio. What would be even more forward-looking is for an update of Capture NX to allow saving the NX edits in a DNG envelope instead of restricting the save modes to NEF, TIFF and JPEG. ■