

WHAT IS A ‘GOOD CAMERA’?

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The first thing to note is that what really matters are the photos - not what cameras, lenses or techniques you used to take the photo. It’s an old saying, but true, that ‘*cameras don’t take photos, photographers take photos*’.

One thing about this is that having the latest, greatest camera will not mean that you get great shots, that bit is up to *you*. A good photographer can make far better photos with a box brownie than a mediocre photographer (*like yours truly... ;-)*) could ever make with the latest digital SLR, such as the \$LATEST_FANCY_CAMERA¹.

Sadly, that makes things much harder. It’s easy to say what is or isn’t a good camera, and one can easily asses things such as autofocus speed, viewfinder size and brightness, pixel count, etc. Hence these tend to be what obsess people the most. It isn’t as easy to say what is or isn’t a good photo - that’s a question of taste to a large extent. It’s something which isn’t as easy to quantify, and there are certainly no easy steps or rules to follow to becoming a good photographer. Unlike with a new camera, you can’t just walk into a shop and buy one².

Nonetheless, it’s my feeling that, all else being equal, it helps to have a ‘good’ camera. The aforementioned good photographer could probably take better photos on his/her preferred camera than on that box brownie I mentioned.

First, though, I must define what I mean by a ‘good camera’ I’ve thought about this a bit, as I’ve seen so many rather pointless arguments about why \$CAMERA_X is a far better camera than \$CAMERA_Y, and how anyone who disagrees is patently stupid (*well, I am that one, certainly*). After a while, I began to think, *actually, neither is*. In reality, the answer is ‘it depends...’. What are you going to use the camera for? What do you feel comfortable using?

In my view, at least, a ‘good camera’ is one which

- works in a way with which the photographer feels comfortable
- does not unnecessarily restrict the photographer in doing what he/she wants to
- produces an image of good enough quality for the intended final application

So what is a good camera, say, for one landscape photographer wouldn’t necessarily be a good camera for a sports photographer, or a portrait photographer. Or even for another landscape photographer!

I currently do most of my work with two 35mm film cameras: a Nikon F80, and a Yashica T5 compact. They suit the work I do mostly pretty well, and I find

Date: September 2005.

¹This is given in the form of a pseudo-Un*x shell environmental variable. If you don’t know what this is, you probably don’t need to ;-). Basically, you can just assign any appropriate value to it. At the time of writing, “Canon EOS 5D” would be a good suggestion ;-)

²Of course, if you’re broke like me, you can’t even manage walking into a camera store and buying a new camera... ;-)

I tend to use them for different styles of photography. The Yashica seems to lend itself towards more casual, unplanned 'off-the-cuff' photography than the Nikon. At the moment, I'd quite like to switch over to the Canon EOS 5D, which looks like it would also quite suit my style of photography³ (if not my budget)⁴.

But of course, for another photographer a box brownie might actually be a better camera for them and the work they do than a 5D. The point is, you should find a camera which you like working with, and works well for the sort of photography you do, then learn to use it well so you can forget about it. And hey, there's no point in arguing over which camera is the best because that's also quite a personal and subjective thing. Spend the time instead maybe practicing your photography, trying to become the best photographer you can be.

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³All my lenses at the moment are Nikon mount. This isn't a problem, though, as in the dream world where I can afford an EOS 5D, I can also afford some nice new Canon lenses, such as the 24-105mm f/4L IS USM...

⁴Donations, please, to... ;-)