A Digital Camera - The Bottom Line

When digital cameras first hit the news, I thought, “Wow! Never to have to buy film again!” This much has remained true, but it took ten years for digital cameras to come up to the quality performed by film cameras. At first, the pixels were too few to enlarge to 3 by 5 much less an 8 by 10 with any quality. Today, pixels are not a problem and every feature adorning the film camera is now available on a digital camera.

I spent many months researching the available models and weighing the cost versus the features until I came up with a digital camera that pleased me. The camera is the Konica Minolta Dimage A200. While some functions are not as sophisticated as their film cousins, the advantages far outweigh its short comings.

In 2004 a decent SLR costs from $900 to $1500. I use an SLR as a comparison because they are the only type camera that shows exactly what the lens sees. The K/M A200 sells for about $600. Its 8 megapixels allows enlargements up to 13 by 19 inches with a sharpness equal to a fine 35mm photo from an SLR. The features I like best are the manual zoom ring (motorized zoom controls are slow and cumbersome), the stabilization chip (which produces sharp images even with slow shutter speeds) and the control over white balance (even custom balances). Another terrific advancement is the flip out rotating LCD viewer. Never again will I be held to an eye level view. With computer enhanced perspective control, all angles are possible.

To be fair, there are a couple of areas that can be improved, but can be lived with. One is the delay after pressing the button to take the picture while the camera focuses and sets aperture and speed. It’s only a tenth of a second, but you’d better get used to it or you will miss your shot. A remedy is to take a series of pictures and pick the best one. Another is inherent in all digital cameras and that is the artifacts that appear in the image at higher ISO settings. Artifacts are like the grain in fast film that appears l

ike little dots in the picture. If you use the slower ISO settings like 50 or 100 ISO, then the artifacts are practically invisible. If ISO 200, 400, or 800 are needed to get the picture, then additional processing through PureImage or similar software will solve the problem nicely.

A word about the lens is in order. A zoom range of 28mm to 200mm (35mm equivalent) covers just about any focal length an advanced amateur could need. No other 8MP EVF (electronic view finder) has this wide an angle. The lens is custom made for a digital camera and is very sharp edge to edge. Only a very slight barrel distortion (1%) is visible at the 28mm focal length. Some software can correct this if perfection is demanded. You never have to worry about dust getting on the CCD sensor since the lens is not detachable. If wider or more telephoto effects are needed, there are accessory lenses that will make the wide end 50% wider and the telephoto twice as long. The A200 also has a 4x digital zoom but I

recommend that this only be used as a last resort since the number of pixels are halved when you double the zoom. The auto focus works very quickly except in extreme low light. A manual focus is available with a nice auto 4x enlargement of the center for critical focusing.

No Compact Flash card is included in the package, so I bought a 512 80x CF card for $69.00. The 80x refers to the fact that it unloads to your computer in a jiffy and the 512 Megabytes allows 81 pictures of the extra fine quality JPEG that I always use. The pop up flash lights up subjects at 12 feet away at 100 ISO. For more versatility I bought the Vivitar DF 200 slave flash ($69.00) that works to 50 feet at night.

This camera is a joy to use and has everything I could ever want in the way of features. In the six months I have owned it, I have created dozens of 13 by 19 images for the two Digital Art Shows I have had. Viva la digital generation!

I have been a professional photographer for 36 years and retired for three.