

DIGITAL CAMERAS

Digital is different

Fuji MX-2900 Zoom

BY RON GIDDINGS

SINCE THIS IS THE TIME FOR MAKING UP MILLENNIUM LISTS (AND that includes the GRAPHIC EXCHANGE *Millenium Poll* at www.gxo.com), let us not forget Louis Ducos du Hauron,

he who developed the subtractive color theory and gave us the first color slide in 1870. I couldn't resist using a portion of his historic photo for the background graphic of this article.

But as we enter the new millennium, is it finally time to leave film behind? Fuji presents a very strong argument for doing just that. The MX-2900 is a powerful, compact digital camera complete with a 3x optical zoom, macro focusing, fill-flash and long lasting rechargeable lithium ion battery.

If that weren't enough, it also has a hot-shoe! Finally we can use an external lighting system, just like the pros. With a choice of either f4 or f8, the manual recommends setting your automatic flash as though you were using 200ASA film. But I found a setting of 800ASA to be closer to the real sensitivity of this camera. Fortunately, in the case of a digital camera, you get instantaneous feedback as to what your lights are doing. This is, after all, the real point of having a digital camera, isn't it? With the proliferation of digital cameras which utilize SmartMedia cards, I can begin to imagine carrying a pocketful of inexpensive 32MB cards instead of a bag full of film.



At left, image shot on Agfa Portrait film with 90mm Tamron lens on a Nikon and scanned to Photo CD; at right, Fuji MX-2900 with identical flash setup. Even disgruntled knights would agree that having a hot-shoe on a digital camera is a great idea. Do yourself a favour and buy a hot-shoe attachment for your MX-2900 that lets you use a sync cord. The pictures you get using a studio flash with umbrella are outstanding. A big, soft light source really shows what this camera can do. I was extremely impressed by its beautiful, smooth tonal range. However I, too, have seen the ads where 2.3 megapixels can supposedly fill a magazine cover but my math tells me I get a 4x6" picture at 300 dpi. So what's the qualitative difference between the MX-2900's digital images and 35mm film taken to a one-hour photo-finisher for prints and scanned at 300 dpi? At a size of 4x6", both are sharp and rich. But enlarge them and the digital version will start showing its artifacts.

AN ALL-IN-ONE STUDIO

In the short time I have been using the MX-2900, I've found a wealth of exciting possibilities. The depth of field of macro shots is really quite impressive, now that we have a camera with this much resolution. But my biggest surprise came when I used a studio flash setup. No blown-out highlights, and no Stygian shadows (although LCD view screens are still hard to get used to). I was pleased to see the reflex viewfinder zooms along with the lens. However I wouldn't recommend using this viewfinder for macro work due to parallax error.

I made a conscious decision not to modify the pictures on these pages in *Photoshop*. But you know what? Comparing the film versions with the MX-2900 versions, I found myself wanting to adjust the contrast of the 35mm originals to match the lush tones of the Fuji images. I think that says something about how far this technology has advanced in a short time.

If you have a computer with a USB port, the optional SM-R1 Image Memory Card Reader sounds like a great idea — you can be downloading the contents of one card while you're shooting another one. Imagine instant soft proofing on your laptop! I'm not entirely

sure that this camera will replace Polaroids in most studios but with a little testing it could easily be a contender for checking your lighting.

A small but annoying procedure with this device is re-attaching its lens cap, which takes a lot of fiddling to seat it properly (but then again, the 700 series doesn't even *have* a lens cap).

Having made my rather unscientific comparison of 35mm cameras and digital cameras, I've decided to stop waiting for digital photographs that have all the same qualities as traditional film. Instead I've started to recognize that in many ways, digital cameras are taking different images than what I've been accustomed to. At the speed at which this technology is evolving, you may soon see me walking around with a pocketful of SmartMedia cards. *

We do macro. When you have a 7.4 to 22mm zoom lens, you have a lot of depth of field. The photo on the bottom was shot with a 35mm macro lens and the background is completely out of focus. The MX-2900 image on top is sharp right back to the thorns. Once again, the tones from the Fuji are so smooth, they make the traditional print look harsh by comparison.



FUJI MX-2900 DIGITAL CAMERA

System Requirements — Power Macintosh or Windows

Resolution — 1800 x 1200 pixels (2.3 megapixels)

Lens — 3x optical zoom

Image compression — Fine, normal or basic

Options: 43mm filter and 28mm wide angle attachment; SmartMedia card reader (USB connection, 12 MB/sec transfer rate)

Suggested retail price \$1,499

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