

Words & images: Ron Macdonald

Having looked at a few of the pitfalls to watch out for last month, now is the time to have a closer look at the three main options for digital photography.

Smartphones

The best way to take a really good photo with your smart phone is to grasp the phone firmly in your right hand, then in one smooth and swift movement throw it over your left shoulder and go and buy a camera!



All joking aside, smart phones are good for making phone calls, but many of the other features are a compromise. Phone cameras suffer from one inherent fault: size. Small sensor, small lens = crap photo (remember the light thing?).

While the photo might look OK on your phone, when you view it on your computer it will be severely degraded and if you try to use the file at full size or God forbid attempt to print it, the quality can be compared to what is usually found on the ground in a cow paddock (yes, I mean grass).

These devices do have a use however, if you are caught out without your camera and want to record something (better than nothing), or you are 15 years old and want to take one of those flattering (not) arm's-length "selfies", but that is about their limitation. Smart phones can be a handy addition to your photographic arsenal but definitely do not replace a decent camera.

Now I know some will now be screaming but I have an iPhone 5 and you only have a Samsung GII ... sorry, but EVERY brand suffers the same problems. In fact the iPhone 5 and GII have the exact same sensor in them which, interestingly, is manufactured by SONY!

Point and shoot (compact) cameras



If you purchase a reputable brand of "point and shoot" (the pocket-size cameras) you will get reasonable results; although they do still suffer from the same problems as the camera phones it is to a far lesser degree.

The sensor in a "point and shoot" is around the size of your little

finger nail – still not ideal but much better. This can be a good compromise in both price and portability compared with a DSLR; not exactly a replacement but it will do a pretty good job. Some of the compacts at the top end of the price range even allow you manually to set the exposure and shutter speed but they do not accept interchangeable lenses so you will be stuck with what is fitted to the camera.

When buying this type of camera you need to watch out for the "digital zoom" garbage which, as I said last month, is completely useless! Make sure any compact camera you buy has a good OPTICAL zoom lens.

DSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflex)



Digital SLR cameras come in two basic types – full format and 3/4 format (often called digital format). The full format cameras are usually in the manufacturers professional range and start at around the \$7,000 mark (with no lens) so we will concentrate on the more common 3/4 format cameras. "3/4 format" refers to the size of the sensor which is 3/4 the size of a piece of 35mm film and gigantic compared to the two former categories.

Personally I prefer Nikon cameras; I have been using them for more than 35 years and have never had an issue. In fairness however, the Canon EOS is also a nice camera, as are the offerings from many of the other major manufacturers.

I would however be very careful about buying an obscure brand of either camera body or lens from the internet. For example, one seller on eBay advertises a 500mm lens for only \$150, but on closer inspection you find this lens has three elements (probably plastic), in comparison the Nikon Digital format 18-105mm lens on my D7000 DSLR has 15 elements in 11 groups (and this is only a mid-price range lens!).

Unfortunately quality costs. If you wanted to save even more on a lens of this type, just use the bottom of a milk bottle; you would get a similar result to the eBay lens. One quick (though not by any means conclusive) way to gauge the quality of a lens is by its weight; if it is as light as a feather you can be assured it is either filled with plastic or has only a handful of elements.

A good entry-level camera for those new to the world of the DSLR is the Nikon D3200. This camera is small, light weight (compared to many other DSLRs) and has all the advantages of a "point and shoot" camera on its auto setting but with a better quality result. The big difference however is you are not stuck with what the camera thinks is the correct exposure as you can manually set the camera to produce the image you want.

Having decided on a camera model, the next thing to consider is the glass on the front. My suggestion for a good general purpose lens would be the Nikkor AFS 18-105mm VR – this will have you covered for most of your general photography. The salesman may offer you a kit which includes Nikon's 24-55mm lens; while this is not a bad lens (although bottom-of-the-range in quality) you will find the top end (55mm) too short for many general photographic needs. They also have a kit with a 24-55mm and 55-200mm lenses; again this would not be my choice as you will find yourself constantly swapping lenses as you jump back and forth across that 55mm barrier. I think it's better to go with the 105 and later, if you find you need a longer lens, add the Nikkor AFS 70-300mm VR.

The last thing to consider, now you have your camera, is the media your camera will write the files to. In digital terms this is your "film". When buying an SD card don't go for the cheap and obscure brand cards or for that matter even the basic offerings from the major manufacturers.

What you need is a quality high write-speed card. Remember you are likely to be dropping a 7-10 MB file to the card each time you hit that shutter button, so the last thing you want is to have to stand there waiting for the camera to write to the card so you can take your next shot. The SanDisk extreme III would be a good choice, but remember to buy a good size card; the latest versions of these cards write at 30 megabytes/second (m/s) which should have you well covered.

Be careful buying cards from the internet as there are many earlier (slower) model cards floating around and certain Chinese manufacturers have no regard for patents and will happily supply you with a cheap and nasty SD card with a SanDisk sticker on it!

Caveat Emptor ... Buyer Beware. What you see is not always what you get. ●

Next month: How to get that great calendar shot

25th anniversary

2015 Club calendar

So far we've received about 80 shots from 17 photographers, and there's some great work!

However, many of the shots received just arrive in the inbbox with no label and no description at all ... just (for example) "DSC_1234" ... which tells us nothing!

Please remember the original request:

All images will be credited, so please include as much detail as you can with your submission: your name, Chapter, when and where the photo was taken, including (if applicable) the name of the run or event. Please re-name your image something that identifies you as the photographer (eg, fred-nerk-1.jpg).

There are just three pre-requisites:

- » the car must belong to a Club member
- » the format must be "landscape" (ie, wider than high) to suit the layout, and
- » your image should be the highest resolution you can make it. The higher the resolution, the better for printing. As the calendar will be A4 size, a picture size of 3600 pixels wide x 2600 pixels deep would be ideal (about 8 to 10MB)

Please e-mail your entry to editor@mx5vic.org.au, with "2015 Calendar" as the subject. The deadline for submissions is 30 September, 2014. ●

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