

Epson P-5000



The Epson P-5000 is a new generation of the P-for-portable, P-for-photo storage device, launched originally as a P-2000. It's a hard disk with media card slots for transferring your image files, and a new extremely fine resolution 4ins display. **David Kilpatrick** put it through its paces

The Epson P-5000's Photo Fine Ultra display is bright enough to use in shaded outdoor conditions, though it is a conventional LCD screen and does not operate using reflected light. It depends on a backlight with two brightness levels, one full power which is always active when you are working on or viewing images, and a dimmed state which kicks in after a few seconds of inactivity to extend battery life.

Battery

The battery is one of the best parts of the P-5000 (the 80Gb version). It is a removable lith-ion unit, not fully embedded as in the Jobo Gigavue Pro which I use normally, and the capacity is exceptional. We tested the P-5000 for a week in Provence with a total of over 2000 images to store in both Raw and Jpeg formats, and only needed to recharge once midweek.

Transfer speeds

Transfer speeds are also very good, with a 2Gb SanDisk Extreme III (our standard card) taking just 4.5 minutes to copy a crammed card -just 3.5Mb spare space - cre-

ated for the purpose of testing. We also filled this card with as many different Raw file types as could be found on the Mac's storage HD from previous camera tests.

Raw format support

The P-5000 supports Raw formats - a good range of them, including most of the popular flavours - for full screen display. Unlike the Jobo Gigavue, it does not allow the time-consuming process of interpreting Raw and zooming in by increments; instead it gives a very fast display of the Raw file at screen size and a choice of one, two or three other magnifications depending on the format. This leads me to suspect it is finding embedded Jpeg data.

For example, Fuji .RAF files from S3 and S5 are supported at screen view and 100% view only. Nikon .NEF files from D2X, D200 and D80 are supported at 25%, 50% and 100%. Canon .CRW and Pentax .PEF files seem to be viewable at 50% and 100% only.

To my disappointment, the P-5000 could not view any of the .DNG files we tried - whether created by the Ricoh GR

Digital, Pentax K10D or conversion through Adobe's DNG Converter. Nor could it display anything at all, not even a thumbnail or a screen view, from any Sigma .X3F file or Sony .SR2 (from the DSC R-1). And while it would display Minolta .MRW and Sony .ARW Raw files full screen, it could not zoom in on either, which the Jobo was able to do last year.

Jpeg zooming

What it does do very quickly is to zoom in on Jpegs, going not just to 100%, which is a true pixel for pixel rendering, but right up to 400%. This, like the 200% setting and even the 100%, appears to be powerfully anti-aliased for display purposes. Larger details are very clearly defined, but textures and small details which can be seen clearly using Adobe Camera Raw conversion and a similar magnification on a computer screen are not visible on the P-5000.

The 400% view of the P-5000 screen compares well with viewing an Alamy-size upscaled image on a regular computer screen - it is a little larger physically, while the 200% view is smaller. This is because of the fine



Top right: Epson P-5000 storage device, rear aspect, showing its large 4ins LCD screen.

Above left: Out of the box: The P-5000 comes with the necessary USB cable, power supply, software CD with full manual, brief printed quick start guide, and a neoprene-foam fabric pouch.

Above right: Close up of P-5000's controls.

Right: One of Shirley's views in Roussillon, an attractively ochre-washed village in the Luberon, which now has an Ochre Trail walk through its old red-rock pigment extraction workings.



“The overall design and interface of the P-5000 are **hard to fault**”



Above: P-5000 being held in front of an iMac 24ins screen displaying the same image – as a Jpeg on the P-5000, and an ACR conversion from the Raw file on the Mac. The image has more sharpness and detail than the Epson device reveals even at 100%, but it is still possible to make a judgment that this shot is suitable for agency filing.

pixel pitch of the P-5000 screen, which is one of the best around in this respect. It is possible to check images for picture library quality control purposes using the Jpegs and the magnification function. If the picture looks remotely sharp on the screen at 400%, it will be dead crisp exported from Adobe Camera Raw to 17.5MP.

Field back-up

With an internationally compatible power adaptor using shaver-cord connection, and a fast USB 2.0 link to any computer supporting a mass storage device, the P-5000 with 80Gb hard disk makes a fast and versatile field back-up device. We felt confident erasing our memory cards after transferring files to it, and viewing them. No further back-up was taken. All files were present and correct on return to base. This is a risk - for mission-critical shoots taking two back-ups is desirable - but for this trip we preferred not to lug a laptop.

USB host

The P-5000 can act as a USB host. This means it will accept downloads from cameras directly, if you have a format other than the SD/MMC and CF card slots, and no suitable adaptor. More useful by far is the ability to transfer your backups to a portable hard disk, or to any other type of memory card using a USB card reader. The Host USB connector (full size) is used for this. For direct printing to PictBridge printers, the mini USB slave connector is used.

The memory card back-up loses the file-folder structure present on the cards only when viewed on the P-5000 - it sees all folders from a single card in one browser session. However, it retains the folder structure when transferring to your PC. One of the peculiarities of using date format folder naming with two similar cameras and multiple cards each day is that two folders may end up with the same numeric naming. There is no risk of overwriting on the P-5000, as each card read is a separate back-up directory. Care is needed when copying from the P-5000, to ensure you do not overwrite one card's content with that of another.

You can create new folders on the P-5000 and copy selected files to these reasonably easily. There is no possibility to do multiple selections at random from the displayed list for a multiple file copy, so each image must be copied one at a time. Folders or files can also be protected, allowing you to make a folder for final PC transfer while still on the road, and to prevent accidental deletion. When you make a new folder, files are copied not moved, so you end up with an internal back-up. You can also use a one to five star rating on photos, matching programs like Microsoft Expression Media.

Display functions

The display functions of the P-5000 are fast and clear, and reasonably comprehensive. It can do slide shows, selecting a folder and connecting to a TV or monitor via the video output; the

images move across the screen into position with a fading dissolve, an odd overall effect but less hackneyed than Powerpoint-style gritty cross fades. Unless the camera has auto-rotate functions, non-rotated images will display sideways.

Histogram

A histogram (mono only) can be displayed accompanied by comprehensive EXIF data presented very clearly with a graphic style for some functions like +/- exposure, with an alternate choice of shadow/highlight warning on the normal image display, but not both together.

Multimedia

The P-5000 is also a multimedia player, able to store and show transferred and converted DVDs or video, and play mp3 tracks to surprisingly high quality (320kbps). It has a good built-in speaker compared to most portable devices, as well as a stereo earphone socket. We did not want to waste valuable HD space, but we only used half the 80Gb capacity in one week of shooting. It would have been safe to have taken a film or two, and left the iPod behind, as it is simple to erase such superfluous stuff as and when you need the storage space.

Interface

The overall design and interface of the P-5000 are hard to fault, using a familiar joypad navigation, and buttons which resemble those of most DSLRs or multimedia players. It turns itself off reliably to save battery life, warns when AC connection is needed, does not dim during a slideshow, and so on. It will hold your programmed date and time for 24 hours if you remove the battery entirely for any reason.

What is missing, relative to its major competitor the Gigavue Pro, is the data entry aspect with metadata auto embedding, touch screen keyboard, Wi-Fi image transmission and similar advanced functions.

My experience is that you have to be a masochist with hours to spare to attempt to keyword photos on a handheld storage device, so I hardly missed this aspect. The very fast card reading, extended battery life and effectively instant display/magnification of the P-5000 more than make up for its relatively simple feature set. It could do with a fuller range of Raw format support, along with better zooming in choices for specific Raw formats.

Canon and Nikon users - the majority by far - will have no complaints, but Sigma SD14 buyers will not find the Epson P-5000 a friendly companion. They are just as well off buying a dumb CF-to-HD data tank with no more than an alphanumeric display to take on the road. **f2**