Canon D10

by Rob Spray

This is one camera which pictures don't do justice. As soon as you pick it up the bulbous curves fit into your hands the way a cuboid just can't. It's Canon's first waterproof digital camera, back last century they had APS snorkelling models but it's been a long dry spell. Interestingly they haven't toyed with more conservative ratings, the D10 is rated to a market leading 10m (i.e. Olympus matching). It sits at the top of a range of one! Price and size wise it's top of the market too. The name is odd, fitting the scheme Canon uses for SLRs but there's absolutely no chance of confusion in the flesh!

Appearance dominates a first encounter with the D10. There's plenty of shiny bits, exposed stainless fasteners and all those curves to play in the light. It takes a while to spot that while there is metal, the vast majority of the body is painted plastic, so the beautiful finish may suffer from bumps and scrapes. The internal frame is metal allowing the most extrovert flourish on the D10, lanyard fixing points at each corner. Real statement pieces of machining these allow the camera to be attached to an amazing cast, locking 'nipple' in three ways more than necessary.

The rating puts it head to head with the third 10m Olympus model, the TOUGH 8000. It seems quite clear that Canon have taken note of their experience and the D10 seals look very impressive. The waterproofing of the D10 takes a slightly different tack from the Olympus. Both have two hatches and on both the smaller has just a lipped gasket but the larger is fitted with a real 'o'ring on the D10 where Olympus stick with a larger lipped rubber gasket. Both work fine, we can confirm that both are effective to double their rated depth. The 'o' ring will be more fiddly to clean and should be lightly greased, which makes debris stick to it...

The two companies have chosen different basis of their designs with the D10 quite conventional within its Faberge egg casing and Olympus using folded optics, lots more exterior metal and more of a Rolex motif. The use of a conventional lens has both strengths and weaknesses. The Canon lens is brighter, at f2.8, than any competitor but has more limited range and less effective macro. Close up the protruding lens casts flash shadows on small subjects, this vignetting is increased by a stout aluminium ring which secures the front port and could so easily have been threaded for filters and extra lenses. As the case must rigidly cover the lens in all positions



it cannot retract so the D10 isn't a true pocket camera, unless you want to enjoy some Carry On humour of course :-) The 3x zoom starting at the equivalent of 35mm is the least flexible lens in this part of the market with many competitors starting at 28mm.

Putting what seems to be a Powershot chassis into a case instantly benefits from the development of that very successful line and the D10 is fast and logical to use. Like the Olympi it assumes you will probably use Auto or Program and keeps its welter of scene modes accessible but compact. Shooting video is given top level status rather than hidden which is a good choice given the likely use of the D10 for family holidays.

The control layout of the D10 will be familiar to anyone who has tried a Canon Powershot, bar the use of buttons for zoom control and mode switching - instead of hard to seal dials and sliders. The ergonomics are easy to figure out and the two button for the two level – picture and system

– menu is a treat after digging through some others. Its a shame that macro is always its second focus choice after landscape as I'm a fiend for small stuff and I'm not sure I've ever been so surprised by a mountain that I needed that option first under my trigger finger.

Unlike a lot of compacts these days the D10 has no internal memory for pictures. Surprisingly there's no small card in the box either, bear this in mind if you plan to present one as a gift.

As we went on we had to keep lowering our expectations on battery life, days underwater really do drain it when you use flash and have the screen on for long periods. In use which included quite a lot of menu hopping and flash use we managed 140-160 shots per charge, not very impressive. As usual with a small camera a spare battery is part of the kit you'll want for a day out.

There's no case supplied, which is a shame as that groovy paint job deserves protection. Given the price a neoprene slip case would have been a great addition to the package – and help the camera float if it falls out of reach, it sinks on its own! I assume other colours will become available as the current splash of blue is a separate panel.

In water it's strange to handle a 'naked' camera, much easier to see the control markings than one which is housed. With bare hands the cluster of small buttons isn't a problem but in colder water any gloves make it hard to feel those which are recessed beside the screen. The soap-like shape is also predictably slippery in gloved hands. The lanyard 'nipple' can be moved to suit your grip but can't be said to make a vast difference.

I'm pleased to say the D10 returned some good looking results from its first dive. The default program setting allowed it to use a fast enough shutter and strong enough flash so that the vivid underwater world of the Dutch oyster beds lit up in all their surprising glory. What was more surprising was that the D10 didn't struggle to focus in the cloudy, albeit bright shallow waters. Even at macro distances it was quite straightforward to get sharp results. The one fly in the ointment is that with the projecting lens surround and flash set well back, subjects less than 15cm away are masked from the flash. However as the working distance stays at 30cm throughout the zoom range (the minimum 3cm minimum distance is available only at fully wide) it is still practical to photograph quite small animals, although focus is more ponderous at telephoto. The easy access to video shooting makes it simple to capture clips to show friends. The clips are



Dawn really took to the D10, though it's tricky to use in gloves

fine but with many cameras offering HD capture its a shame that the D10 only offers VGA. Still camera video is still a bit of a novelty but this is fine for YouTube to show the lobster that went for you! Each 1 minute of video takes the place of about 40 full size photos, so even with just a 1 GB card you have room for about 12 minutes of video (or 340 pictures).

I suspect for many people using exactly the same camera underwater, with no housing, might get them past the mental block some have about submerged photography and ease them into this hobby. The 10m depth limit is going to cramp your style for a lot of diving but a tropical snorkeller could get great use out of. The screen is bright and contrasty making use in the shallows quite practical and sharp enough that the option to enlarge the screen centre as focus confirmation was genuinely useful.

At low ISO pictures are very good but noise reduction creeps in fast as film speed increases. Image stabilisation means the D10 can hold



Some of the reef residents are quite feisty



It was good going for a compact to catch these arguing fish



This crops shows the excellent low ISO detail

low ISO longer and controls what noise there is well. Shots at ISO50-160 are really very sharp, beyond ISO200 you won't enjoy all your 12 Megapixels as detail is reduced. This is done well and for most uses high ISO turns out attractive results. On the surface the D10 seemed slightly too liberal in handling highlights, quite willing to burnout even central detail to keep the overall exposure on track. For the most part that produced punchy photos but occasionally faces would get the treatment and spoil a picture. My girlfriend, who abhors all things technical, found the menus easy but was annoyed that every power cycle dropped her settings for macro and zoom.

The lanyard nipple system offers plenty of choice, which is marvellous of course, but why make it like a bar of soap to start with? A few bumps or some rubber on the right hand side would have worked wonders and also protected the case. In common with a lot of cameras it would have been sensible to raise or dimple the shutter button to make it easier to find with cold and/or gloved hands.

It's very easy to be seduced by the looks of the D10 and assume it's just a good time Charlie, a toy. Underneath the sexy skin is a nice, amenable camera of the kind you would have been very happy to use a year or so ago before everything had to be complicated. That's not to say it isn't capable, the 12 Megapixel sensor produces clean, sharp pictures on and under water which you could make into posters. The user interface is the best kind of simple which means you can take advantage of those moments you bought a waterproof camera to capture.

Pros: Great looks, good results straight away underwater, easy menu ergonomics and flexible modes

Cons: Protruding lens bulky and masks macro flash, no case, easily scraped, extrovert nipple! Below average battery life. Auto power off short.

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