

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Does two million pixels mean you get bigger, better, brighter pictures? We test two such cameras and give one our coveted Best Buy award

WORDS & PICTURES RAY ALLEN



Features *What do the cameras offer?*

Toshiba PDR-M5

A 2.1 million pixel camera offering a 1600x1200 pixel image. The 3x zoom lens has a focal length of 4-22mm which equates to 40-110mm on 35mm. Aperture range is f/3.5-5 on wide angle, f/7.6-11 on telephoto. It can also take movies, useful for adding 30-120 seconds of video on your Web site, but there's no sound recorded. The flash is manually activated so you have to pop it up if needed. Pictures can be reviewed on the 1.8in high-resolution TFT screen. The LCD on the back shows the time when the camera is powered down, but in use it is backlit with a green glow. A lithium-ion battery pack powers the camera.



Detail is good from the Toshiba, this ranks it high in the megapixels market.

Ricoh RDC-5300

Features a 2.3 million pixel CCD giving a 1792x1200 pixel array. The 3x optical zoom's focal length is 8-24mm, equivalent to 38-114mm on 35mm, with an f/3.2-3.7 aperture. The lens focuses down to 4cm and there's a manual exposure override giving +/- two stops in half-stop increments. It uses 64Mb SmartMedia cards holding 79 pictures, stored on highest quality setting, or 1331 on lowest setting. There's a flash-sync socket for use with an external unit and a time-lapse mode offering 30 seconds to three hours in 30sec steps. The rear screen is a 1.8in high-resolution TFT type with a wide viewing angle. There's an optional remote control unit and the camera has a video-in option.



Ricoh's quality lens shows how good digital shots can look.

Handling *How easy are they to use?*

Toshiba PDR-M5

This camera feels very balanced and natural to hold; body size and shape make it solid to use. Button layout is well-planned and executed. It even has a diopter for glasses wearers. Powering up is around four seconds. The time to save a single shot image to memory card is clocked at three seconds. The Ricoh does buffer the image, but if you want to play it back straight away you need to wait six seconds for it to save the image first. Focusing is fairly quick and the optical zoom is smooth to control, but is accompanied by a very noisy motor.



Still up with the best, but edges are slightly harsh.

Ricoh RDC-5300

The Ricoh is much more weighty than the Toshiba, due to the half plastic/aluminium construction which can aid in steady shots. It's quick to focus at under one second and operation is almost silent with some very smooth motors inside doing all the work.

The lens is protected by a retractable cover, as is the rear LCD monitor. For a two million pixels camera the image-save time is long – around six seconds. The 4cm macro setting is invaluable but Ricoh should have added a dedicated macro toggle button on the top to the row of buttons already in place. This camera has 8Mb of storage built-in which you can utilise if your main card fills up. Pictures can also be copied from memory to card or vice versa. When USB is used it sees the internal memory as another disk.



Beautifully accurate colour with superb detail.

Test pictures *What is picture quality like?*

Ricoh RDC-5300 £500



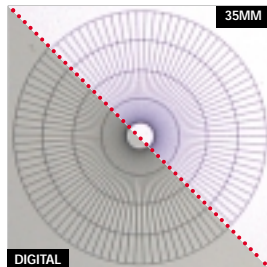
This shot of a house shows how rich the RDC-5300 is in the colour department. Detail is the name of the game with this model – close-ups on the window and tiles show the capturing power over the Toshiba.



PRINT AT A4



PRINT AT A3



DIGITAL

Our test card ultimately shows how more detail is captured over the Toshiba. This will let you print bigger if needed. Colour and contrast are excellent which makes for a more natural image.

Exposure is very good with even the most difficult scene having trouble catching this camera out. The level of picture detail is also first-rate, thanks to the 2.3 megapixels.

Colour rendition is good and gives a natural result. Barrel distortion is about the same as the Toshiba so no problems here, either. Having one of the best macro modes in the market makes it great if close-up work is your thing.

Toshiba PDR-M5 £550



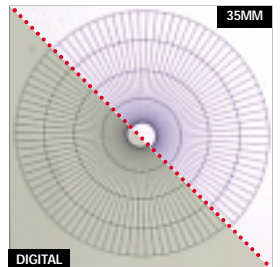
The warmth of the sun in this late-in-the-day shot is not as convincing as the Ricoh. Detail is still high, even in dark shadow areas, but the final image looks slightly harsh when viewed against the Ricoh.



PRINT AT A4



PRINT AT A3



DIGITAL

Image detail is very high with this camera, but not as good as the Ricoh, as seen on the test chart picture. Colour is on the cooler side and most shots are marginally under-exposed.

Pictures on this camera have a very good level of detail with good contrast, but can be slightly softer when compared to the Ricoh.

Exposure in general is not as good as the RDC-5300, but in most cases this would not be a major concern as small errors can be corrected in the computer. Colour rendition is good and is slightly cooler than the Ricoh. Barrel distortion is low, too. The movie recording capabilities of this model are good, should you require that function.

WHAT'S INSIDE THE BOX?

Ricoh RDC-5300

The nice people at Ricoh give you lots of goodies for your money, which includes a multi-voltage AC adaptor, NiMH batteries with five hour fast charge, soft case, wrist strap, serial cable for Mac and PC, video cable (PAL & NTSC output), Ricoh software CD and not forgetting the all-important USB cable. But no SmartMedia card. The instruction book is well-laid out with good info and tips.



Toshiba PDR-M5

Inside the box there's an AC adaptor, Lithium-ion battery pack that should give you at least 160 pictures, lens cap, cables for Mac and PC, video cable (output is PAL-only), USB cable, 8Mb SmartMedia card, Toshiba CD software and neck strap. The operational guide needs some work; it looks confusing after reading Ricoh's manual. A 52mm adaptor ring is an optional extra, but very useful if you want to attach optical filters.



★ OVERALL VERDICT ★

Toshiba have made a very nice and speedy camera to use with its traditional 35mm camera feel. On the other hand the Ricoh does produce better images with a superb macro and stronger build quality. Both have USB and can use 64Mb cards, but the Ricoh offers more value considering all the extras it comes with. Providing you can cope with six second save times the RDC-5300 is our recommendation, but Toshiba's PDR-M5 is only just behind.



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