Digital SLRs as camcorders

How five SLRs (plus a camera that shoots SLR-quality pics) stack up as camcorders

by Gavin Stoker, Macworld UK  Oct 22, 2009 6:14 am
Single-Lens Reflex Cameras Do Double Duty

While almost all digital compact cameras have offered standard definition (640 by 480 pixels) video recording since they became a consumer-friendly option years ago, technological boffins long protested that it wasn’t possible to include the same feature on a more advanced digital single-lens reflex (SLR) camera—at least not an SLR in the conventional sense.

When Nikon introduced 1280 by 720 high definition (HD) video on its D90 SLR last year, it was the herald for the start of a new era. Once one manufacturer had found a way, it was only a matter of months before others were jumping on the video SLR bandwagon. Nikon’s age-old rival, Canon, followed suit with its higher-end EOS 5D Mark II SLR, which offered 1920 by 1080 resolution—the fabled full HD resolution.

The video recording capability seemed at first like a gimmick (do serious photography enthusiasts—the traditional audience for such cameras—really want to shoot movie clips, too?), but the feature now makes sense with the the growing popularity of HDTV. Also, video on an SLR provides photojournalists and news gatherers with another arrow for their bow. In the age of the Internet, video is fast becoming king.

Of the major camera manufacturers, it’s surprising that Sony, with its rich heritage in camcorders, is the only one without a SLR that records HD video. Sony also doesn’t have the heritage of lenses that manufacturers such as Canon, Nikon, and Pentax do. That’s undoubtedly another advantage of shooting video on a SLR or interchangeable lens camera—the ability to choose from potentially hundreds of lenses with which to get creative. What dedicated HD camcorder, professional or otherwise, can offer such scope?
I tested six different cameras to see how well they perform as HD video cameras. I tested Canon’s EOS Digital Rebel T1i and EOS 5D Mark II, Nikon’s D5000, Olympus’ E-P1, Panasonic’s Lumix DMC-GH1, and Pentax’s K-7. Let’s take a look at what each camera has to offer and how they match up.

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