

COMPACT DIGICAMS

Sharp-shooter showdown

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE B11

A good sidekick for the pro

CAMERA REVIEW

PANASONIC DMC-LX3

DON WONG

don@mediacorp.com.sg

WHILE other camera brands may engage in a war of escalating pixel count for every new model, Panasonic has adopted a sensible approach by capping the megapixel count of its latest DMC-LX3 (\$799) at 10.1.

With its newly-developed 1/1.63-inch multi-aspect CCD, this pairing promises to increase the light sensitivity for clearer pictures while producing less image noise.

Available in a silver or black metal shell and slightly bigger than a pack of cards, the camera instantly transforms from a deceptively unexciting kit into a sophisticated machine when fitted with an external viewfinder and leather case.

First-time users of Panasonic cameras may need time to familiarise themselves with the tricky arrangement of manual controls on the back. However, the LX3's handy joystick enables quick access to crucial settings, and it won't be long before you're switching between shooting modes with finesse.

Photo pundits on online forums are also relishing the results seen from the Leica DC-Vario-Summicron 24mm lens (equivalent of 35mm) that is mounted on the LX3.

It is possibly the fastest lens amongst compact cameras, and has a 24-60mm range supported by image stabilisation. At its widest focal length of 24mm and aperture of f/2.0, focusing is quick and accurate, rendering a pleasing depth-of-field blur.

Though some photographers might gripe at the lack of telephoto range, the camera can still deliver a maximum aperture of f/2.8 when set at 60mm zoom. This is an added advantage for those who want a higher shutter speed to prevent blurry portraits under minimum light.

As for its picture quality, a quick playback on its 3-inch display will pacify the photographer's constant



HOW THEY MATCH UP

| | Nikon Coolpix S60 | Sony Cyber-shot T77 | Fujifilm Finepix F60fd | Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX3 |
|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Sensor | 10-megapixel | 10.1-megapixel | 12-megapixel | 10.1-megapixel |
| Optical Zoom | 5x (33mm-165mm) | 4x (35mm-140mm) | 3x (35mm-105mm) | 2.5x (24mm-60mm) |
| LCD Size | 3.5-inch | 3-inch | 3-inch | 3-inch |
| ISO Range | 64-3,200 | 80-3,200 | 100-6,400 | 80-3,200 |
| Price | \$599 | \$549 | \$499 | \$799 |

chagrin with digital noise in compact cameras. At ISO 400, grain yield is almost negligible in day shots. And in low-light situations, such as an evening street scene, a subdued pixel buildup appears only in darker areas of the image.

Shooting at ISO 800 will step up the distribution of noise across the image. However, a quick switchover to the camera's black-and-white film mode produces rustic monotonous evocative of those seen only on film.

Other features include a 2.5-frame-per-second rate, full control over aperture and shutter speed, high-definition recording for motion images and a dependable iA (intelligent auto) mode that enables precision metering to areas of the image that might have been "burnt" or washed out during spontaneous photo opportunities.

As for irritants, which thankfully are few, the plastic lens cap that dangles on a thread gets in the way, especially when you're shooting on the fly. Plus, it tends to knock on the LCD with an annoying "clackety clack" sound. A quick fix would be to chuck the cap for an adaptor that allows the use of a scratch-resistant filter.

However, this could mar the aesthetics and portability of the LX3. In addition, the external 24mm viewfinder becomes redundant if you decide to shoot with the optional 21mm wide-angle lens adaptor.

While the LX3 might not have achieved the cult prestige of Ricoh's GR digital series or Sigma's DP1 compact, it is certain that Panasonic has delivered a camera that will generate interest among DSLR owners shopping for a sidekick shooter.



MICROSOFT

Gambit their way to a global game win

HEDIRMAN SUPIAN

hedirman@mediacorp.com.sg

A LOCAL team of students has earned a place in gaming history by winning Dream-Build-Play 2008, Microsoft's global game development competition.

Team Gambit's winning title, *CarryVale: Showtime* (picture), beat 350 games submitted from 100 countries to win the top prize of US\$40,000 (\$58,800) in this annual event.

The team is made up of seven students from National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Polytechnic and Nanyang Technological University, and is part of the Singapore-MIT Gambit (Gamers, Aesthetics, Mechanics, Business, Innovation, Technology) game lab.

The lab is jointly run by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the Interactive Digital Media Research and Development Programme Office hosted by the Media Development Authority.

We wanted to make a game that was easy to pick up, but with depth as well.

Mr Bruce Chia, lead programmer of Team Gambit

Mr Bruce Chia, an NUS computer science undergraduate and lead programmer of Team Gambit, said: "We wanted to make a game that was easy to pick up, but with depth as well. It gets pretty hardcore at the later levels."

In the acrobatic puzzle game, gamers play a clown that has to complete various circus stunts. The team developed the high-definition game using Microsoft's game development tools and included an easy-to-use game editor that allows players to create their own levels. It took the team four months to develop the game.

Apart from the Xbox 360 console, the game can possibly be ported to the Windows operating system and the Zune portable multimedia player, thanks to Microsoft's cross-platform gaming development tool dubbed XNA Game Studio.

According to the judges, Team Gambit's entry received the highest scores in three criteria — fun factor, innovation and production quality. The second- and third-place teams are from Venezuela and the United States.

Microsoft Singapore marketing communications manager Ian Tan told TODAY: "The game gives Singapore and the winning team great international exposure and there is an opportunity to commercialise the game for Xbox Live."

Microsoft's Xbox Live online gaming platform has garnered 14 million users and generated US\$2 billion in revenue from downloaded games and content.

IT DOESN'T GET ANY BIGGER THAN THIS

150"

The World's Largest Plasma Display Panel
Powered by NEO PDP Technology

Key specifications:
Screen size: 133cm x 75cm
Equivalent to 9 panels of 50-inch size
Resolution: 4,096 x 2,160
Equivalent to 4K HD

Panasonic will be displaying the world's biggest plasma screen at its Display Solutions Trade Show held at the Suntec Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre till Saturday. The 150-inch screen boasts a size equivalent to nine 50-inch displays and has a resolution of 8.84 million pixels.

WEE TECK HIAN