

## Gift Guide: A focus on HD video, at many prices

December 1 2009, By RON HARRIS , Associated Press Writer

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In this photo made Monday, Nov. 9, 2009, the Kodak Zi8 is shown in Decatur, Ga. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

It's easier than ever to shoot high-definition video. You can do it with traditional-style camcorders, of course, but also with cameras that also are designed to take still photos - from high-end "digital SLRs" to cameras that slip into your shirt pocket.

I've got recommendations in all three categories - listed here from least to most expensive. All of these record HD video and have "HDMI" output connections that let you view your masterpieces on an HD

display.

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Kodak Zi8 (\$180)

Full HD in your pocket for under \$200? What's not to like?

Kodak delivers this bargain by asking you to supply the memory card it needs to store footage. But you can buy an 8-gigabyte card (enough for two hours of HD video) for less than \$50, which means you could still come out ahead with this model over other inexpensive HD cameras from Flip or Creative.

The Zi8 performed well, although its focus is fixed and it doesn't have good depth-of-field for close-ups. It's a little bigger than rival units, but still is comfortable to take on the go.

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Creative VADO (\$230)

The Creative VADO also fits in your pocket, but keeping it there is a waste. It's just too much fun. The VADO has 8 gigabytes of built-in memory and has a quality lens that performed well in low light. It comes with polished, easy-to-use software that allows for quick uploading of your video to [YouTube](#) and a few other hosting services.

It has a nice recessed control button that was intuitive to use. The footage it produced was great. I got jitter-free pans from left to right and good sound quality. It also comes with a proper rugged case to protect against accidental drops and bumps. The VADO is the best shoot-and-share out there.

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### Flip MinoHD (\$230)

Flip has pretty much dominated its category with its easy-to-use video cameras. What sets them apart is their FlipShare software that is all about social networking. It allows for pain-free uploading to [Facebook](#), [MySpace](#) and YouTube.

The latest model has backlit buttons that are flush with the shiny controls surface. This is cool in low light because you can't really feel the buttons - although in low light the MinoHD's video quality wasn't great.

I also had difficulty keeping a steady grip on the Flip on a warm day. Its sleek design is nice to look at, but I prefer a few ridges or rubbery edges to hold on to. Buy it for the sleek software, but not because you think it will out-shoot others in this category.

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### Nikon S70 (\$350)

This is primarily a still camera, but for a medium-sized budget, the Nikon S70 may be the way to go. It's compact and slickly designed. The LCD display on the back spans the width of the camera and gives you touch-screen access to the menus and settings. It proved a little too touchy for me - I inadvertently stopped and started my video recordings a few times. I learned there's really only one way to hold this camera while shooting video - with two fingers on the right edge of the camera and the pinky extended for high tea. Otherwise I was likely to obscure the lens or trip the shutter button.

The image quality is passable for the price. It's not the best performer in

low light, but the colors held true in transitions from indoors to outside. It also stabilizes the image well while recording. That's a big plus when trying to avoid that nausea-inducing shakiness that can render even HD footage unviewable. Once you find a comfortable way to hold the Nikon S70, there's a lot of performance for the dollar.

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#### Canon Vixia HF S11 (\$1,400)

This is a traditional style of [video camera](#) - a category I'm tempted to write off as a dinosaur. But I love the Vixia. There's not a button, dial or contour out of place. It has a useful "hot-shoe" connection for external lights, microphones and other accessories. It zooms smoothly, with "image stabilization" that keeps you in focus. Its menu screens are so easy you can leave the manual in the box. For my money, this is the gold standard for the category.

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#### Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH1 (\$1,500 with 14mm-140mm lens)

Among digital SLRs I tested, this was the strongest, most versatile performer. The Panasonic Lumix GH1, a 12.1 megapixel camera, delivered true hues and sharp images. It uses a design known as "Micro Four Thirds" in which the lens mount is positioned closer to the image sensor, without a flip-up mirror box in between. The result in this case is crisp HD video.

The GH1 has a flip-out LCD panel, which is easier for shooting video than fixed LCD panels, which can force you to strain or tilt your head as you shoot. From daylight scenes in a sun-drenched park to the glow of the fading evening light, the GH1 handled contrasts nicely. It has stereo

sound and is a joy to use.

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