

New digital cameras add to zoom and toughen up

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Most point-and-shoot cameras have a midsize LCD preview screen and short zoom lens that brings you slightly closer to the action. That's about to change.

This year, the hottest compact cameras will have much larger zooms and preview screens and will be able to withstand abuse and shoot in low-light situations with better quality. They'll cost more, but at an average of \$350 to \$450, you'll pay a lot less than for an entry-level digital SLR, which starts at around \$700.

The photo industry, hoping to reverse two years of declining sales, met in Anaheim, Calif., this week for the Photo Marketing Association convention, where new cameras for the spring get introduced. Here's a peek at what to look for:

- Samsung's \$449 TL500 has a much wider lens opening than normally found on compacts. The f/1.8 lens opening means that this camera can capture better images at sporting events and school plays, for instance, without having to use a flash. Most digital cameras have a slower, f/3.5 lens.
- Olympus' new cameras have a built-in manual. The entire manual is stored in memory and can be accessed through the menu.
- Big zooms in small bodies are very popular. Nikon's \$350 Coolpix P100 has a 26x zoom; Fuji's \$249 FinePix S2550HD has an 18x zoom,

and Sony's new \$250 Cyber-shot H55 has a smaller 10x zoom in a tinier body. The more powerful zoom is good for both a wider view (think group shots) and getting closer to the action. These cameras also have 720p high-definition video recording. (The cameras will all be out in March.)

- Many cameras have a feature called "face detection" that instructs the camera to expose and focus correctly for faces. Fuji's new \$299 FinePix F80EXR, out in April, adds a "pet-detection" feature along with a 10x zoom.
- Olympus pioneered the rugged compact category with its Tough line of waterproof, shockproof and freeze-proof cameras. Now there are rugged compacts from Panasonic, Canon and Casio. Sony calls its new Cyber-shot TX5 the world's "smallest and thinnest" tough-cam.

"What we brought to the category was slimness and design," says Kelly Davis, director of Sony's [digital camera](#) division. "Normally the waterproof category is chunkier and a little more rugged looking." Olympus is fine-tuning its tough-cams. The new \$399 Stylus Tough-8010 and \$299 Stylus Tough-6020 have added high-def 720p video recording.

"So if you happen to fall or slip while you're rock climbing, and plummeting down to the water below, you can film the whole thing in high-def on the way down, and continue to film as you go into the deep," says Sally Smith Clemens, an Olympus product manager.

And if big zooms and cameras you can sit on don't do the trick, how about a camera that taps into Hollywood's latest craze: the third dimension? Jim Calverley, a Fuji product manager, thinks 3-D could get consumers interested in adding another camera to their arsenal. "In the world of consumer electronics, new things sell," he says. "People want to

have the latest and greatest." Fuji's \$599 FinePix Real 3-D W1 camera will begin showing up in stores in the spring, but it's been available online since late 2009.

The camera has two lenses and two image sensors. While you don't need special glasses to view the pictures, you also don't get the same dramatic 3-D look of the movies. It's more of a subtle look akin to the stereo viewers of yesteryear.

For more enhanced 3-D, Fuji sells a \$500 digital viewer, with an 8-inch LCD, to view pictures. Viewed with 3-D glasses, the images are more traditionally third-dimensional.

Chris Chute, an analyst at researcher IDC, doesn't see camera sales improving. There are just too many homes with cameras. IDC projects industry revenue of \$6.6 billion this year, down from \$7.1 billion in 2009.

But he does think the new features will get buyers to part with some cash.

"People are tired of being told they can't have fun," he says. "We'll see a lot more people on vacation and going to social events. Cameras haven't gone away at all. There's a camera for everyone."

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