

PREVIEW: NIKON D2X & F6

by Ellis Vener

The unveiling of the new Nikon D2X (right) is one of the most anticipated camera releases in recent history. Built around a 12.8 (12.4 effective) megapixel CMOS DX size sensor, the D2X can shoot full resolution NEF images at a rate of five frames per second (FPS)—or in a 6.8mp High Speed Cropped (HSC) mode, up to eight FPS. Since it is the Nikon DX format, using a 20mm lens produces an image that has the angle of view of a 30mm lens on a 24x36mm format camera but with the depth of field for a 20mm. Use the H.S.C. option and the multiplication factor goes up to 2x. (Translation: a 20mm lens will produce the angle of coverage of a 40mm lens but with the depth of field of the 20mm.) The area of the sensor used in the H.S.C. is indicated by illuminated crop marks in the viewfinder. Clearly HSC is meant for sports type applications. It presents an interesting match up in the Nikon DSLR line up for sports and event photographers. Do you choose the D2H or the D2X?

The camera instantly powers up from off or standby mode and the shutter lag is a very short 37ms. The D2X uses the same lithium-ion battery as the D2H, but much more efficiently: Nikon claims up to 2000 shots per charge under ideal circumstances. Battery charge status is displayed in real-time.

New in the D2X is an improved Multi-CAM2000 AF sensor. There are now 11 AF sensors in the D2X, nine in a 3x3 grid corresponding to the “rule of thirds” and additional sensors located nearer the sides of the frame. These sensors are divided into five groups and a “group dynamic AF mode” is employed where a specific sensor can be designated as the lead sensor in that group to accurately track subject motion.

Also new: a high-resolution image-processing engine that Nikon claims produces exceptionally accurate color rendition and smoother tonal gradations with consistently smooth transitions. There are also two new Ado-



Front, side view of the new Nikon D2X.



Rear view of D2X showing new, handy layout.

be RGB (1998) color modes and support for the sYCC color space when shooting JPEGs, which should allow full exploitation of the output capabilities of the latest generation of color printers. The sYCC is a larger gamut color space than sRGB or Adobe RGB (1998), sYCC may also be more accurate than the sRGB monitor color space. sYCC isn't a new color space, Kodak used it with their PhotoCD technology back in the 1990s, but it is something you are going to hear a lot more about in the coming years as other manufacturers are getting on the bandwagon.

Nikon's legendary Matrix Metering system evolves to a new level in the D2X with the premiere of 3D Color Matrix Metering II. The 1,005-pixel RGB Exposure/Color Matrix Metering Sensor now does a more refined analysis of the size and position of shadow and highlight areas “to achieve optimum exposure for each shot.” The iTTL metering system can now control an “unlimited number” of Nikon SB-600 or SB-800 Speedlights used as slaves (with an SB-800 attached to the camera as a master). Also new is the ability to group these slaves into three

zones, with the ability to control the output of each individual zone from the camera. More precise auto white balance is achieved through the use of three separate sensors. Full manual white balance controls include the option to directly set Kelvin color temperature.

The internal buffer is large enough to hold 15 full-resolution NEFs or 25 of the 6.8mp NEF images. Internally the camera handles data faster, moving it to either the CompactFlash card, out of the USB 2.0 bus, or wirelessly to your computer via the new WT-2 Wireless Transmitter, which utilizes a secure IEEE 802.11 b/g protocol. The WT-2 also allows wireless Capture Control from a computer using Nikon Capture 4.2.

A new, brighter, larger (2.5 inches, measured diagonally), higher resolution LCD is the heart of the photog-

rapher's interface with the D2X. There is plenty of space for going through the Shooting and Custom menus and information about your image can be viewed as the improved luminance histogram, or in the form of a three channel RGB Histogram. The larger control buttons, improved viewfinder, and Nikon's continued attention to ergonomics made it a pleasure for this writer to handle, even if it was just for a short time.

Remember the scene in *Monty Python and The Holy Grail* where a guy with a cart is going through a plague ravaged village yelling, "Bring out your dead, bring out your dead!" and one of the villagers keeps complaining, as he is being dumped on the cart by his family that he's not dead yet? Well, Nikon obviously thinks film still has some life left in it too. There really is a need for film cameras: digital doesn't handle long exposures as well as film does; the entire world is not as digitally oriented as the USA is; and there are those who just flat out prefer film.

What is the F6 (right, top to bottom) like? For one thing, the basic body is significantly smaller and lighter than the F5 but a bit larger and feels a slightly more solid than the F100 (if desired, you can add an external battery pack). It just fits into your hands comfortably. It is also significantly quieter than the F5. The viewfinder in the F6 seems improved over the F5—it is still a 100% WYSIWYG view of the image with a better arrangement of data. I didn't feel like I have to hunt around the viewfinder to see everything, yet at the same time, I was not distracted from the image by the data displays. Overall design of the viewfinder display and control button layout, metering, and AF are akin to the D2X and D2H. A rear panel LCD can display a full customizable array of shooting data and the various menus. It is also where you access a reference table of virtually every non-AF Nikkor lens ever made so you can use any of these lenses with full metering functionality. Both iTTL and D-TTL flash technology are thoroughly supported.

Improved battery life, weight and sound reduction, reliability, and improved weather and moisture proofing result from Nikon applying a 3D movement analysis to the camera's mechanics. A new shutter features blades made from DuPont KEVLAR® and an aluminum alloy. In continuous high speed mode film moves through the camera at five and a half FPS (or up to eight FPS with the Multi Power Battery Pack MB-40 option). The camera is built on a die cast aluminum alloy chassis with magnesium alloy front body plates and top and bottom covers make for greater strength. Better sealing around the control buttons improves reliability in rainy and dusty conditions. In a first for a Nikon flagship camera, there is no interchangeable pentaprism, however, a manual film rewind crank is still a feature.

The AF and metering systems are essentially the same as in the D2X. As we go to press, a suggested list price had not yet been set. Nikon expects the F6 to become available in stores this fall. ■



Front, side view of the new Nikon F6.



Top view of the F6 showing the LCD panel and larger controls.



Rear view of the F6 shows easy-to-use layout.

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