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EIGENE Z-PUNKTE

Titel des Z-Punktes

1. After the launch of the 12 megapixel D3 in 2007 the question wasn't if but when Nikon would present a high resolution counterpart. It took the japanese manufacturer a little while but in December of last year the D3X eventually saw the light of day.



When we reviewed the Nikon D3 in April last year we said that it was 'possibly the most compelling, capable and well-rounded professional digital SLR ever made' and that an (at the time non-existent) D3X¹⁾ 'would have quite a job to do to better the D3'. The D3X eventually became reality in December. We've had one for just over a month now and after thousands of sample shots both in the studio and out in the wild you would think we should be able to confidently answer the question if the 'X' variant is capable of bettering the original D3.

However, it will be clear to anyone with some knowledge of camera technology that it's impossible to come up with a definitive answer to this question. A large proportion of the D3X design is shared with the D3, so it does not come as a surprise that in many areas the two cameras perform identically. Nevertheless whilst in some areas the new model is undoubtedly better than the D3, in some areas it's worse.

The superb 51-point AF system and the 1005 pixel metering sensor have been carried over directly and work as well on the D3X as they do on the D3. The build quality and ergonomics are equally excellent too, but where the D3X really excels and beats the D3 by a mile (or two) is image detail at low sensitivities. The image output at base ISO (and with high quality glass in front of the sensor) can only be described as stunning. The D3X's high resolution sensor, combined with a relatively weak AA filter and a superb JPEG engine delivers a level of sharp detail that beats even the strongest competitors including the previous number one in this area, the Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III. It's simply amazing how you can keep zooming into the huge image files and discover more and more detail. There is no doubt, if image detail is on top of your priority list (as it would be for many high-end studio photographers) the D3X has to be your number one option.

The class-leading image detail comes at a price though. A 14-bit RAW+JPEG image occupies 30MB + on your memory card and this inevitably has an impact on in-camera processing, buffering and continuous shooting. Having said that the D3X's five frames per second (12-bit RAW and JPEG) in continuous shooting will still suffice for most applications, and if they don't you can always switch to DX mode to speed things up and shoot 10.5 megapixel images at seven frames per second. It's not quite D3 speed but still impressively fast.

The other area in which the D3X, mainly because of its pixel-denser sensor, can't quite keep up with the D3 is the high ISO performance (and that's not really a surprise). The D3X is designed for 'high resolution' applications such as studio or landscape photography' and low light is not really its natural environment; nevertheless it still offers a maximum sensitivity of ISO 6400 and, despite its pixel-packed sensor, delivers surprisingly good results at higher sensitivities. Images up to ISO 1600 are

perfectly usable for very large output sizes, and even the maximum sensitivity setting will produce output that's at least good enough for publication on the web. Most importantly, while the D3X is not quite on the same level as the 12 megapixel D3 in terms of high ISO performance, it clearly beats its competitors in the 20+ megapixels bracket such as the EOS-1Ds Mark III and the Sony DSLR-A900.

So all in all the penalty you pay for industry-leading image detail and resolution is a fairly small one. For those who really need the D3's blistering continuous shooting speed and night-vision high ISO capabilities the D3's twelve megapixels will probably do the job, and the D3X is not the optimal tool for their trade. For those photographers whose work genuinely benefits from the D3X's staggering resolution, the slower frame rate and reduced high ISO performance compared to the D3 are a compromise they will easily be able to live with.

We can't conclude this review without speaking about the D3X's (to many users) most obvious disadvantage, its hefty price tag of \$8000. This is not only a lot of money in absolute terms, it's also approximately \$1500 more than the current street price of the D3X's most obvious direct competitor, the Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III (plus it would almost buy you two D3s). Can a camera be worth this much money? It's a rather philosophical question. It certainly will be to the professional who requires massive file sizes to sell his pictures, it could be to the serious (and wealthy) amateur who spends hours marveling at the D3X images' fantastic detail, and it's almost certainly not for everyone else. You also need to keep in mind that the camera itself is not where it stops. You can only really make use of the D3X's capabilities with high quality (and therefore costly) lenses and, depending on when you last updated your computer equipment, some investment might be required in this area as well. Our well specified office PCs certainly took their time when processing the D3X's sizeable RAW files in Capture NX.

However, if you can afford the D3X, you will buy yourself the best image detail that's currently on the market and a very versatile photographic tools. We've used it in the studio and on location, for portraits and for sports, in daylight and in dim clubs and on every occasion we were amazed how easy it was to achieve good results with the camera. Therefore, despite its eye-watering price tag, the Nikon D3X without a shadow of doubt earns itself our highest award.

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