



Review: Nikon D70/D70s

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Introduction

The Nikon D70 has brought high quality, affordable DSLR cameras into the hands of the masses. Everyone from first time SRL/DSLR users to experienced commercial photographers use them.

*Note: Throughout this review the name D70 is used to define both the D70 and the D70s unless otherwise noted.

Camera history

D70 Announced Jan 28 2004

D70s Announced Apr 20 2005

The Nikon D70 was announced almost two years ago and instantly topped camera review lists in every magazine also being named 2004 camera of the year by several.

The D70s was announced to disappointment as users were hoping for a much better upgrade in mega pixels and other features however this proven package still sells well and has individually put Nikon in the green where other manufacturers are seeing red.

The only major differences between the D70 and the D70s are the D70s' slightly larger view screen and its ability to take a remote cord. Other than that the same hardware is in both cameras and the D70 was upgraded to the same firmware the D70s uses.

Major features and specs

6MP CCD sensor

3fps (for 12 frames and then 140 frames at 2

ISO sensitivity: 200-1600

Shutter speed: 1/8000s to 30s including Bulb

1.5 crop factor

Flash sync to 1/500s

Exposure compensation of +5 to -5

Metering: 3D Matrix, Center Weighted, Spot

Storage: CF/CFII

Rating

Features: 8.5

Ease of use: 9

Build quality: 9

Photo quality: 8.5

Value: 9

Overall: 88%

Handling -- balance and usability

The D70 has a good feel and is a good weight although slightly heavier than some of its competitors. The weight will feel more like a metal-bodied film camera to some.

The camera is intelligently built with all its controls and dials in similar places to its film brethren such as the F80. So users with other Nikon cameras including P&S' will find the use of this camera intuitive and quick.

It also incorporates several commonly used tasks by way of double button presses such as the drive and LCD light buttons together will format the CF card.

Build quality, fit, and finish

The handgrip on the camera is one of the nicest feeling and most comfortable that I've ever used. The size is perfect for my hands and it balances nicely with a standard double handhold.

The plastic body feels comfortable and is very solid and very seldom develops scratches or other blemishes.

Accessories & Lenses

The D70 uses the DX line of lenses made for their DSLR cameras by Nikon and can use any of the Nikon CPU lenses as well as older lenses although with manual focus.

Accessories are widely available for the D70 including eyecups, neck straps, PC Sync modules and anything else you need to customize your D70 to your needs.

The D70 has a distinct advantage over most of its competition with the Nikon CLS (Creative Lighting System), which allows the D70 to control 9 flashes in 3 groups with the SB800. This is extremely helpful in the studio and to create dynamic lighting.

The D70 has become very popular to do infrared photography with. The Hoya R72 filter is the most popular filter to use in addition to a custom white balance this allows users to achieve stunning IR images.

One major issue with the D70 is that it wasn't equipped to take a vertical grip. Third party companies such as www.Harbortronics.com have come to the table with grips of their own for the D70 but none of them are fully functional without an upgrade to the camera's internal hardware. Without the upgrade the grip doesn't focus with a half press of its shutter button and depends on the infrared sensor for a release. However the grip will help people who use bigger lenses to balance the camera and does include a perfectly functional second battery compartment, which allows for double the possible pictures to be taken without changing the batteries.

Upgradeability

A major issue for some DSLR buyers is where they go when they have outlived or need to upgrade their camera.

Sadly at present time (Aug 20, 2005) the camera one step up from the D70 is the D2X and at around \$8000 it's not a logical step up for most D70 users.

Nikon also has the D2Hs which is a 4MP camera with much faster focus aimed at press photographers.

There are rumors of a D200 being in the 10-12MP range to be coming soon for around \$2000-\$2500 but we'll have to wait for the official announcement from Nikon. This however will be the perfect upgrade when it does come about.

Known problems

From experience as well as reading several forums there are a couple of well-known common problems with the D70, which have been seen less commonly on the D70s.

1) Back focus: With certain lenses and even with the kit lens some cameras have a back focus/forward focus problem. You need to send the camera in to Nikon for the fix.

2) Compact Flash stops working: Several users have reported that their CF slots have stopped working and have had to send their cameras in for servicing. This happens most often with Kingston and Viking 1G high-speed cards.

3) Shutter stick: This issue is not as widely seen as the back focus issue however it is a major issue. While taking a picture the shutter will stick in the up position with the sensor exposed. The shutter release button has to be pressed to lower the shutter but the picture will not be recorded. This needs to be fixed by Nikon by replacing the shutter mechanism.

4) SB800 solorizaiton: The D70 along with the SB800 flash unit has been known very seldom to create a photo that looks like it has been solorized or overexposed by several stops. This issue is very uncommon however.

5) The D70 has an issue with tonal range where it doesn't produce the best range of tone in some images. It also has a double shutter issue where it has an electronic shutter and a physical shutter, one of which only kicks in over somewhere around 1/400s, Nikon has not released this information. This sometimes causes a problem when shooting in (P) with the sun in the frame you will see banding/flare with the sun.

6) In some cases when taking photos the D70 will cause a large greenish band to appear over a photo. Some D70's develop this problem more often than others.

Service - Warranty

For any major issues you can bring your camera to any official Nikon dealer and have them send it away to Ontario for servicing at Nikon Canada.

I sent my D70 for a shutter-stick problem and had the camera returned within 10 days. All the issues where resolved and it didn't cost me anything thanks to the warranty.

Performance – sharpness, resolution and noise

With a minimum ISO rating of 200 several people question the noise levels of the D70 however these issues are all moot as the D70's noise levels at ISO 200 are the same as the Canon Digital Rebel's ISO100 and much less noisy than even the Canon A95's ISO50. ISO is just a rating mostly for film photographers to know where they should be with their exposures.

Sharpness is dependant on the lens used however the D70, even with it's in camera sharpening on, tends to need some sharpening in post production.

The D70's 6MP sensor produces a native file of 3008x2000px or 10.027x6.667" photo at 300 DPI. This allows for a flawless 8x10 photo and great 16x20 photos with resolutions of 20x30 at 200dpi not being out of reach depending on the photo itself

Performance – speed and focusing

The D70 recently received a firmware upgrade with the release of the D70s. This upgrade vastly improved focus speeds and lens seeking and also improved the look of the menus. In daylight conditions the D70 performs optimally, catching even fast moving subjects almost instantly. In darker or indoor conditions the D70 like all other cameras takes a little longer to focus on it's subject but performs normally for these conditions. The built in focus light helps in low light conditions but sometimes is not the best thing next to manually focusing. This can be turned on and off in one of the custom menus.

Performance – White balance

The D70 gives excellent results and exposures in P (Program Auto) in daylight conditions. Occasionally the D70 will choose a slightly off white balance and cause a slightly unnatural cast on photos. This happens only 1 in 1000 shots and only in very difficult lighting conditions. Also, with the SB800

Competition

The D70's major competition is both the Canon Digital Rebel/Rebel XT and the Canon 20D.

The D70 is considered to be in the middle of these two cameras with a slightly better image quality than the Rebels and with a much better quality of kit lens.

The D70 however is behind in the times as the Digital Rebel XT although not as fast as the D70 has an 8MP sensor as opposed to the D70's 6MP sensor.

Users comparing the ISO200 of the D70 to the ISO100 of the Rebel's need not worry as the quality of the image and the noise levels are almost exactly the same.

Conclusion

The D70 and D70s are incredible cameras that will make any user happy they bought them. Especially when buying the camera with the kit lens (18-70mm DX) users get a very high quality camera and lens combination that has no match in it's field.

Unless you need to have more MP, the D70 is your best choice.

Usage - Intro

The D70, although not as fast as higher end DSLRs still delivers a punch when you need it and can shoot in the most diverse conditions including +35c to -40c weather and be used anywhere from your basement to gala events.

The large number of lenses and accessories help accommodate the range of this camera as everything from fisheyes to macros and flashes to sync cables are widely available.

Usage - Product

With the Nikon CLS the D70 can produce studio quality images quickly and simply.









Usage - Portrait & Model

Quick and easy to connect to strobes or use with the Nikon CLS the D70 is your best friend in the studio. (Be sure to use a protected sync if you're connecting it to older strobes)













Usage - Landscape

With or without using a custom curve you can produce stunning landscapes that can easily find a place in any book or calendar.







Usage - Event

With extremely fast focus speeds and the Nikon flash system it's easy to shoot any event from weddings and gala events to the fast paced action of hockey.





Usage - Architecture and Spaces

With the kit lens or a wider-angle lens you can easily produce stunning images either inside or out.





