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D-60 Review

by Aaron LEUNG

Category: Camera



Gulls fight.

I had been thinking of upgrading my camera body for a while. After seeing some relatively 'affordable' digital SLR cameras launched, I said okay, that's it, it's time to go digital. So I bought the Canon EOS D60. Now I would like to share with you my experience of using this D-SLR. You will find that I often compare features between the EOS 50 and the D60. This is because I am an EOS 50 user and I am familiar with its features. In fact, most of the EOS 50 features can be found in the D60. It is almost like a digital version of EOS 50!

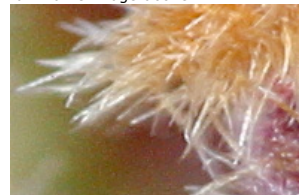
Like the EOS 50, the D60 has three superimposed Auto Focusing (AF) points at the viewfinder and three AF modes. For taking serious nature photography, especially tracking moving objects with the AI Servo mode, three AF points are really insufficient. The D60's AF working range is EV 0.5-18—a vast improvement on its predecessor the D30's EV 2-20 and EOS 50's EV 1-20. Even so, AF is still unavailable when it is used with the 100-400mm IS L lens together with even just a 1.4x extender!

Shutter release time lag, a typical problem found in most digital cameras, is almost non-existent in D60. It is documented as 100ms-240ms but in practice it is unnoticeable. However, the 2.2 seconds start up time after the power goes off automatically has caused me to miss some good photographic opportunities, although it is much shorter than that of D30.

Another similarity to the EOS 50 and other prosumer and consumer class SLRs is the D60's built-in flash. I wonder why most of the professional SLRs do not have this feature. This tiny little marvel has saved my life in a couple of occasions!



Beautiful details captured by D60 with its 6.3 mega-pixels resolution. See below an enlarged portion of the full-frame image above.



high ISO ratings and long exposure in the D60 has been reduced substantially in comparison to the D30. I have taken some photos in 1/13 second at ISO 1000 and the image quality is reasonably good. In short, the image quality is fabulous and professional. As a side

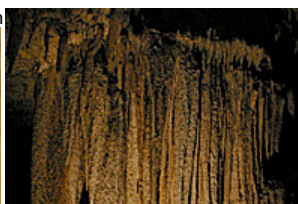


Taking in-flight shots with only three AF points is a fun challenge. You will be rewarded by practising more. You don't need to worry about film wastage with digital!

There must be a reason for the camera designer to put the depth-of-field (DOF) preview button right under the lens release button, but I find it very inconvenient. The left thumb can only reach it when I'm handholding the camera with my left hand supporting the lens and the right hand holding the camera and fiddling with the controls. Using a short lens is fine. However when using a long lens, it is hard to stretch the left thumb to reach the DOF preview button when the left hand is supporting the lens at the front part of the barrel. I have already abandoned using the DOF preview when I'm handholding the camera with the 180mm macro lens.

The flagship feature of the D60 is its 6.3 mega-pixels resolution, which is the highest in Canon's D-SLRs at the time of writing. This makes its full-frame image at the highest resolution (3072 x 2048 pixels) capable of printing, at desktop publishing's standard 300dpi, an impressive 26 x 17.3 cm. If the resolution is scaled down to 250dpi, or lower for personal use, or more absorbent printing paper is used, the minimum printing size is 31.2 x 20.8 cm—essentially an A4 size.

The image noise in

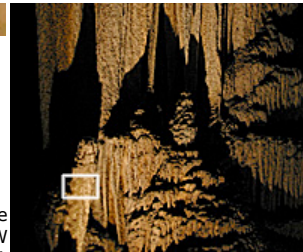


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note, the ISO ratings on those files are shown as ISO 1000 on the camera but ISO 800 after transferring to my computer! This bug worries me about the accuracy of the image information shown.

We only knew that tripods were not allowed as we arrived at the gate of the Mammoth Cave. With the advantage of increasing ISO rating, I managed to take quite a number of decent shots hand-held. This one was shot in 1/25 sec at ISO 1000 and the noise is insignificant.



The automatic white balance in the D60 is truly 'what-you-see-is-what-you-get'. There is no need at all to change the white balance setting from 'automatic', especially if you are shooting in the RAW format. Parameters like 'white balance', 'contrast', 'sharpness', 'saturation' and 'color tone' actually do not apply to RAW images. You can always apply these parameters in the software provided or with an image editing software for greater control.

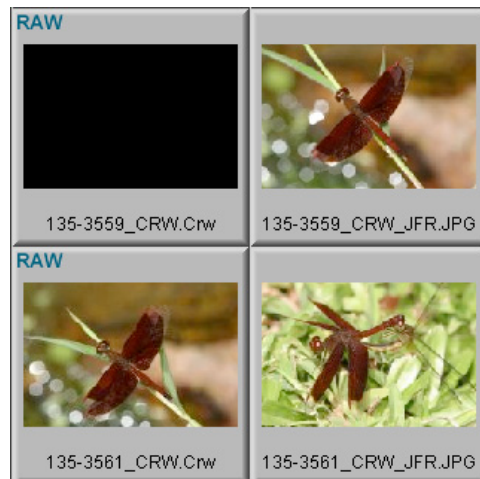
There has been some comment that D-SLRs are deliberately made to underexpose by default. It is probably true because the details in over-exposed white areas cannot be recovered. However the extent that the D60 underexposes is rather excessive and appears to be beyond the need to preserve potentially over-exposed areas. This is evident especially when taking photographs in fully automatic mode or Program AE without compensation. Adding one stop compensation would bring the exposure to a more comfortable level under most circumstances. When using flash, adding about 1/3 of a stop on the flash and about 2/3 on the camera results in a more accurate exposure.

A timesaving feature of the D60 is that it embeds a JPEG image in 2048 x 1360 pixels when writing an image in RAW format. This embedded image can be extracted in almost no time with the provided software. Since RAW images cannot be viewed in bigger than thumbnail size, you have to convert them to TIFF or JPEG for viewing purposes. On my computer, converting RAW to TIFF takes about 35 seconds and RAW to JPEG takes about 45 seconds. Simple arithmetic tells you how much time is saved by extracting the embedded JPEG images for viewing purposes in just a snap of time!



Transferring large images using the provided USB cable is however a slow process. The D60 uses USB version 1.1 with a maximum transfer rate of 12 megabits per second. It takes about 30 seconds to transfer one 5.5MB RAW image to the computer; which means it takes about 50 minutes to transfer 100 RAW images! Furthermore while the files are being transferred, you can't do much with the computer.

The speed of recording images is not too impressive either. Here are the figures based on writing RAW format images onto an IBM 1GB Microdrive. After pressing the shutter release, the image shows up on the monitor in less than 2 seconds but the camera goes on writing the file for another 6 seconds. Although the camera is ready to be used again right after the shutter button is released, the limited memory buffer allows only 8 continuous shots to be taken. After all 8 shots are taken; you need to wait about 4 seconds to fire another shot. It takes about 45 seconds to have all 8 images written onto the Microdrive. As a reference, a 1GB Microdrive can store up to 135 RAW images.



A file-related problem that the D60 has is showing wrong thumbnail images. Some of the thumbnail images actually belong to some previously deleted images. The more you delete selected images on the camera before a delete-all operation, the more likely that there would be more incorrect thumbnails. The incorrect thumbnails will also be transferred to your computer. So don't delete images by just looking at the thumbnail either on the camera or the computer! However I'm not sure whether the media that I'm using, i.e. Microdrive, causes this problem because I've never used a compact flash card with the camera.

The thumbnails on the right are from the embedded JPEG images, which show what actually the images are. Whereas the thumbnails of the RAW images generated by the camera show something rather different. It may show that the battery is full one moment and nearly flat soon after. I.e. there isn't an intermediate warning. So having a spare battery is always advisable.

Checking camera settings, image information and custom functions is easy. Although the monitor does not show all the camera settings that I would like to see, you won't miss a thing even in the dark when using it in conjunction with the illuminated LCD panel. Furthermore, you no longer need to remember or guess which custom function is for what—all of them have descriptions. Viewing recorded images at 3x enlargement is, however, insufficient for checking the finest details of the images.

Fortunately, the recorded images can be displayed on a television set that has a video-in port simply by using the provided video cable. You may use it to check the sharpness and detail of the images especially when you don't have a computer handy, e.g. when you are traveling. You can easily present

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a 'slide' show at friends' home!

There are some potentially useful features that I don't have an immediate use for, as yet. These include remote controlling the camera from a PC, EXIF 2.2 and DPOF compatible for easy printing, changing displaying language, etc.



In general I enjoy using my D60. More importantly, it takes great photos!

Despite all the bells and whistles, I do have a couple more complaints. I don't understand why the D60's self-timer is fixed at 10 seconds unless the separate timer remote controller is used. I also don't understand why the battery charger is designed in such a way that either the charger *or* the DC coupler works. Perhaps it's a technical problem but I would like to recharge the battery while I'm using the coupler for transferring files onto my computer. Don't forget that it takes an hour to transfer a 1GB Microdrive full of images onto the computer!

Whether the D60 is a good D-SLR for you depends largely on what you need and what are you expecting from a D-SLR. Since I'm not using it to earn a living, I can live with all of the shortcomings it has as a prosumer D-SLR camera while enjoying all the benefits it also offers. The D60 will serve me very well for many years to come. Just the time that I have saved by using it makes my decision to change to digital photography a wise move despite the vacuum in my wallet.

#### **About the Author**

After working in the area of graphic design for years, now Aaron is an IT manager that has virtually nothing to do with graphic design. He had started using computer for graphic design, also known as desktop publishing (DTP), since 1991. His more recognised works include being the co-designer of the cover of the debut issue of a high profile DTP magazine in Hong Kong. He had also written articles for magazines especially on using Photoshop.

Aaron has started the interest of photographing bugs and birds since joined NPS(S) in 2001. He has helped revamped this web site and now, together with other committee members, administrating both the site and the forums.

Ironically Aaron does not have his own web site. You may contact him via [email](#).

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