

SIZE DOESN'T MATTER: The Stylus Pro 3800 is as small as a desktop printer, yet produces images of a quality you would expect from larger production printers.



Epson Stylus Pro 3800

A2 inkjet printer

As a general rule, the market for A3 printers and smaller tends to be home and office, while the market for A1 printers and above tends to be bureaux and other professional users. A2 printers have mostly been viewed as a niche market that falls somewhere between the two.

Mostly, but not by Epson, which has now decided that the A2 market can also be segmented between home and professional users and has launched the Stylus Pro 3800, an A2-sized printer that perfectly fills a gap before anyone even noticed there was one.

The Stylus Pro 3800 looks very much like a scaled-up version of the R2400, having the same boxy black and silver looks. For an A2 printer it's reasonably small – measuring just 68cm across – making it a feasible replacement for an A3 printer. It's also light enough for one person to set it up without danger of getting a hernia.

It has a single Epson MicroPiezo print head, which delivers a variable drop size, with the smallest dot being 3.5 picolitres. The printer's maximum resolution is 2,880 x 1,440dpi.

It uses the same pigment-based K3 Ultrachrome inkset as the 4800 and R2400 printers. These inks

have been around for a while and are generally accepted to have a fairly wide colour gamut and a life expectancy that can run to several hundred years under museum archival conditions.

The 3800 holds nine colours: cyan, magenta and yellow, plus light cyan and light magenta, as well as light black, light light black, matte black and photo black. This inkset actually uses eight colours, swapping between the photo black and matte black depending on the media in use. The photo black is mostly used for glossy photo paper, while the matte black is best for matte, fine art and watercolour papers. You don't have to physically swap the inks over, but the printer will use up a small amount of ink as you change from one to the other, so it's best to avoid doing this too often.

Epson is clearly aware that in the past customers have complained that they are not able to use all the ink that is in the cartridges. Consequently, these ink cartridges are rated for 80ml, and, although the cartridges hold more than that, Epson says that customers will get the full 80ml that it says on the packet. Each ink cartridge costs around \$124 so overall the 3800 is affordable to run.

There is no separate media tray – instead all of the holders for feeding paper in and out of the

machine fold away into the printer when not in use. We couldn't help marvelling at the neatness of this design, particularly for the output paper path, (basically the front panel of the printer), which folds down, and rises as it is pulled out.

It only takes cut-sheet media, up to 430 x 560mm, but it can produce borderless prints. The main sheet feeder on top of the printer will hold up to 60 sheets of photo paper. There's also a second sheet feeder behind it, which will take only one sheet at a time and is designed for heavyweight papers. You can also load quite thick media – up to 1.5mm. This has to be fed in through the front of the machine. Be warned, though, that you will need to leave space behind the printer, as this media is pulled through the printer, before being printed on and spat out the front of the machine.

The print results are breathtakingly good all the way from deep reds and greens up to light pastel tints, with no hint of banding and no problems reproducing fine lines and text. We ran a number of colour test charts and general photographic images and couldn't find any fault in the colour reproduction whatsoever.

Black and white images were just as impressive, hardly surprising, given that it is using three black inks at any one time. It produced very deep blacks with good detail in shadow areas, and no sign of the bronzing that has bedevilled earlier Epson inksets.

For connectivity it includes both a USB 2.0 and an Ethernet port, though there is no FireWire.

The 3800 comes with a fairly comprehensive print driver, which allows you to fine-tune the settings.

It takes you through ten stages and then presents you with a summary of all the settings. You can set a cover page before or after printing a sheet. There's even a print scheduler that allows you to print the sheet immediately or at a set time, and to set the priority of the image.

Colour management options let you alter the colour profile, the gamma and to tweak the cyan, magenta and yellow, as well as the brightness, contrast and saturation. There's an advanced black and white, with an extra Colour Toning menu that lets you set the tone for Neutral, Cool, Warm or Sepia.

You can save the settings, and even include your own comments. Better still, you can import and export saved settings, complete with colour profiles.

Epson also sells an optional RIP, which costs \$675, and is similar to that sold for the Stylus Pro 4800.

The Stylus Pro 3800 overcomes the main limitation of the 4800 in so far as you don't have to keep swapping ink cartridges around. It's also slightly smaller and quite a lot cheaper. The only real fault is the lack of a roll-feeder option, which is mainly because Epson has tried to position it as a lower-end alternative to the 4800. Despite this, it produces stunning images, making it not only the cheapest, but also one of the best A2 printers around.

Nessan Cleary

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