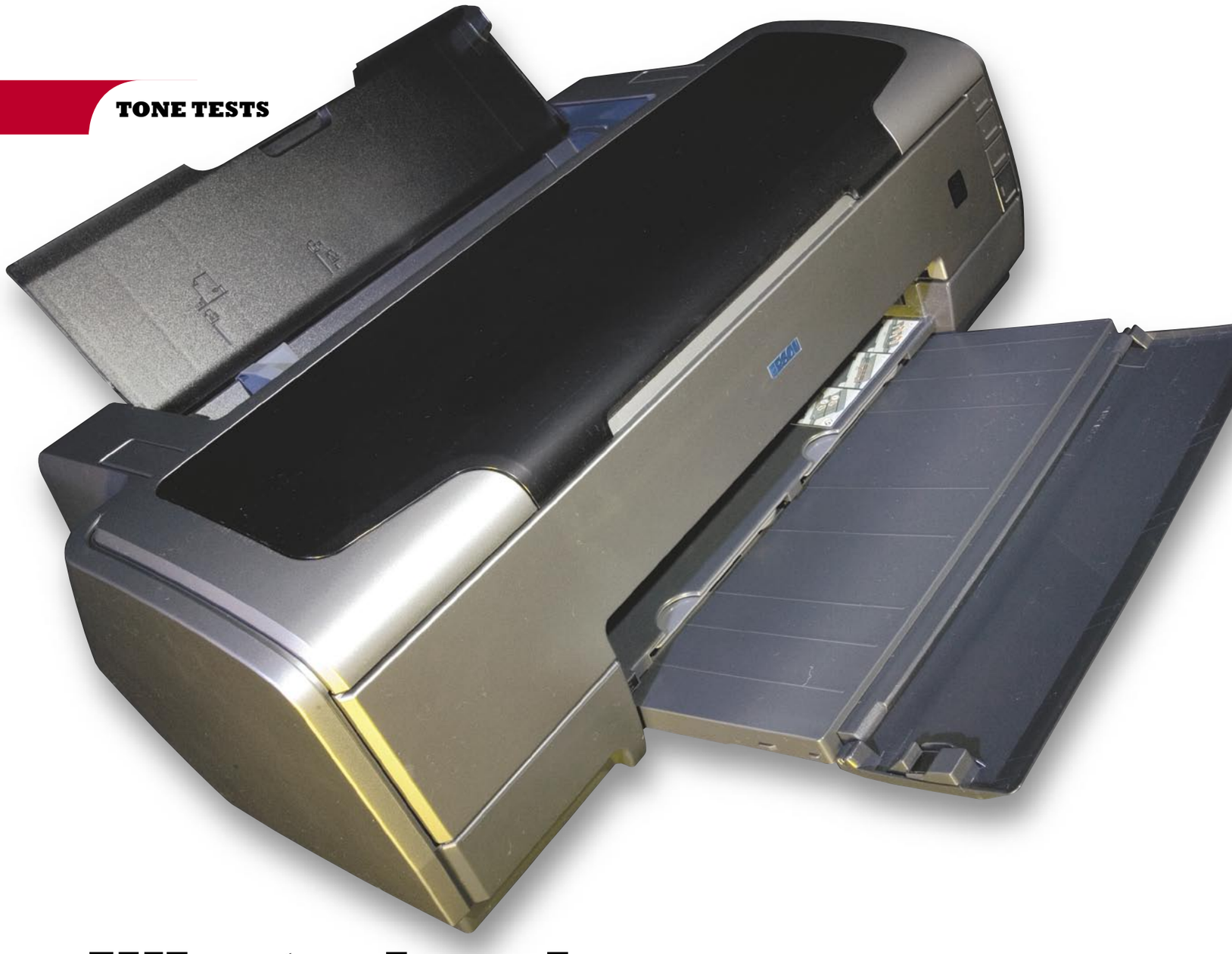

What a hunk

Epson Stylus Photo R1800 Inkjet Printer $1399

Epson's new R1800 comes in quite a large box, but then it is quite a large printer. If you're a mad keen photographer with some experience of Epson's Photo range, you won't be disappointed – this printer is living proof that good things do indeed come in hefty packages.

The R1800 makes impressive pictures; up to a smidgen larger than A3, and smaller pictures all the way down to 10x15cm (that's 4x6 inches for you imperialists). The R1800 can also print on printable CD media and handle roll paper for bulk or panoramic printing. It is also surprisingly quiet.

It joins Epson's smaller (A4) R800 model that uses the same new Epson eight-colour UltraChrome, Hi-Gloss ink set. Both models will find loving homes with professional and enthusiast photographers, particularly those using digital SLR cameras in the Adobe RGB colour space (the printer colour gamut can be optimised for this, taking advantage of the wide colour space captured by these cameras).

These eight-ink cartridges are pigment based for long life and fade resistance (see sidebar article for independent research analysis) and combine with the printer's ability to deliver a micro-droplet of only 1.5 picolitres. Translation? Smaller droplets enable more precise ink placement and a greater ability to render fine detail.

The colour inks produce a laminate effect to areas such as highlights, where ink density is low, or to areas where no ink is used. This makes prints appear smooth and even across the paper with no obvious ink layering effects.

So what's the thing like? Well for a start, it's easy to set-up; from sealed box to printing pictures it took less than 10 minutes. Driver and software installation was fuss-free.

The Epson Creativity Suite software provided with the R1800 will make anyone productive quickly. I printed some images directly out of Adobe Photoshop and others through the Epson software. This simplified the whole process enormously as it allowed me to browse folders, select and print images singly or in groups, and offered functions like index

ABOVE The Epson R1800 packs an arsenal of eight inks, but only has half as many buttons – spooky!

"Living proof that good things do indeed come in hefty packages"

sheet printing and composite prints of several images.

The index print function is highly customisable, even down to controlling the degree of magnification of each image and allowing you to pull images from different locations for inclusion on the same index sheet.

Another part of the suite, Darkroom Print, provides an interface that offers a test strip function to gauge different print densities before making the final print.

The prints are every bit as good as I expected. I used a variety of Epson papers in A4 and A3 size, including Premium Glossy Photo paper (my old faithful standby), Heavyweight Matt paper, and lighter weight, less expensive Epson stocks.

All materials provided superb prints. High contrast and high saturation images were delivered as such, delicate black and white images full of subtlety and nuance were just that. For people pictures, skin tones were well rendered with the R1800 always delivering precisely what was expected.

Hugely controllable, the printer can also be configured in five modes (including the previously mentioned Adobe RGB) and the software makes for easy and logical workflow.

The only exception to wonderful prints was the occasional user error when I forgot to inform the printer I'd changed the material being printed on. Naturally, it is critical to check settings each time if you're swapping back and forth between paper types, layouts and sizes.

As is so often the case with technology products, we human operators are usually the weakest link.

By Tim Steele

+ Superb long-life prints, fast and quiet operation

− No printer cables

= Just buy one. Don't need A3? Get the R800

Key features

- 5760 x 1440 optimised dpi output
- Maximum A3+ paper handling
- Roll paper handling
- Straight-through paper path
- 8 inks (including 2 blacks and gloss)
- CD and DVD printing
- Windows and Mac drivers
- USB 2.0 and Firewire connections

CONTACT
www.epson.co.nz

How long will it last?

The Epson R1800 shows just how far inkjet printer technology has come in a short time. Photo lab quality on your desktop is now a reality. Henry Wilhelm is founder of Wilhelm Imaging Research, a leading research facility into the stability and preservation of motion pictures and traditional and digital colour photographs. Wilhelm has made it his life's work to determine just how long consumers can expect photographs to last.

WIR is non-partisan, authoritative and not afraid to tell it like it is, invoking that mix of respect, admiration, fear and loathing that such honesty invariably brings. Its work is scientific and calls into question many of the claims and counter claims manufacturers make over how long that print you've laboured over will be around.

With no ISO or ANSI standards for measuring print longevity, manufacturers have been able to determine their own test procedures with more than a little self-interest, resulting in a quagmire of misinformation. Not that most consumers even ask; their first question usually relates to the cost of the printer or the individual cost of each print. Many assume that all prints are created equal and never question how long they will last on the refrigerator door, where around 40 per cent of US prints end up.

Attitudes are changing and in the US, the drive for identifying and promoting longer-lasting prints is coming from professional photographers, print providers (such as photo-labs) and the scrap booking community.

WIR's website should be a regular port of call for anyone interested in determining what technologies, devices and materials will offer the longest lasting prints. The results are astonishing and many visitors will wail and gnash their teeth over their previous decisions.

Traditional photographic prints, long held to be the most enduring of paper images, are pretty damned good, with Fujifilm Crystal Archive paper the leader of the pack clocking up a display life of around 60 years. Kodak's current photographic paper delivers around 25 years.

The most surprising data relates to the progress made by the inkjet manufacturers, with Epson in particular a standout performer. WIR's research predicts a display life of over 100 years for the prints produced by the Epson R1800 reviewed here, and even its baby PictureMate printers used in homes around the world to produce 4x6-inch prints is not too far behind.

Caveats? Well, to achieve this you need to be careful to stay within the system by using the correct Epson inks and choosing the paper accordingly. Deviating in the direction of third party ink and paper suppliers can reduce the projected life of that print to less than six of our earth months – astonishing, right? To get the low-down on just how good your own printer or print choices have been, visit the WIR website (www.wilhelm-research.com). You heard it here first.