



EPSON STYLUS PHOTO R3000 A3+ INKJET PRINTER

Ashley Kramer explore printer nirvana

After reviewing a plethora of multifunction inkjet printers over the past year or so, it's a real pleasure to be presented with something as focused as Epson's new Stylus Photo R3000 A3+ inkjet printer.

This imposing machine (you can't really get away with calling it a gadget or a device) is intended to do one thing and one thing only, to print large photos at quality levels that would please even professional photographers.

To this end, all the superfluous bits have been left in the factory and everything from the ink system to the paper feed mechanism has been optimised to place minute drops of ink in perfect proportions on a sheet of photo paper.

Printers capable of printing A3+ photographs tend to be big beasts and the R3000 is no exception. No one is taking this thing home with them on the bus, nor are they popping it on a magazine-sized section of their desk.

You'll need to assign a substantial piece of real estate to the R3000, especially when the front and rear paper trays are open. Given that this unit will likely see service in a dedicated office or studio environment, that's unlikely to be a huge stumbling block.

The R3000 uses nine ink cartridges including four different blacks (matte, photo, light and light light black), cyan and light cyan, vivid magenta and light vivid magenta, along with yellow. The R3000 is smart enough to auto-switch the main black inks depending on the selected media; this obviously ensures the best results on either matte or glossy photo papers but it also means that both inks can be loaded simultaneously, reducing downtime and hassle.

It does slurp up a tiny bit of ink every time you switch though, so it's best to do your printing in batches. The new oversize high-capacity cartridges are claimed to contain more than twice the ink of previous Epson models. The inkset is Epson's well respected UltraChrome K3, dispensed by a micro-piezo printhead capable of producing variable sized ink droplets down to a minuscule two picolitres.

The R3000 supports paper up to 1.3mm thick at all sizes from 3.5x5-inch right up to full borderless 13x19-inch A3+, which opens up a number of options for both photographers and artists. Up to 30 sheets of photo paper can be fed from the rear paper tray, while heavyweight fine art media or boards are fed individually from the front tray.

DVD/CD printing is also offered and, as an added bonus for busy photographers or those who are into wide panoramic prints, the

R3000 can handle roll paper.

Connectivity options are extensive, covering traditional USB 2.0 as well as ethernet and wireless; PictBridge is also supported, but not too many users at this level will print directly from a camera.

The R3000 looks good, although that's not a major factor with what is basically a workplace printer. Operationally there isn't much to complain about excepting the fixed 2.5-inch LCD, which is hard to see with the printer on a desk. It really should tilt along with the control panel so it's orientated at a better angle.

That said, I hardly looked at it, preferring to drive the R3000 from the computer. In any event, the LCD isn't going to be used for scanning or printing from memory cards.

Getting up and running is pretty straightforward, especially if you're planning to connect to the R3000 using a USB cable.



The wireless setup process appears to be more complicated than it is, but read carefully through the somewhat confusing startup guide and you should find yourself online without much delay.

Epson's setup software identified my hidden wireless network, fed the settings to the printer via USB and hey presto, I was quickly printing without a cable in sight.

Considering the headaches I've had with the wireless setup on a number of other printers, this exercise was pain free and almost pleasurable.

Epson supplies an extensive software suite on CD with the R3000, but the printer driver itself is fully featured and offers extensive customisation and colour-management options.

Getting down to the real meat of the review, I started off with some A4 prints. The image quality on an initial run of prints on a variety of high-end photo papers was superb, even though the printer was just left on its default settings.

Epson claims that the technologies implemented in the R3000 will reduce grain while offering a wide, accurate colour gamut and it seems that this is very much the case.

I've been very pleased with the results I've had

recently from photo multifunction printers but, as expected from a semi-professional printer, the R3000's output was at a different level.

Detail levels were staggeringly good, expanses of uniform printed areas were seamlessly smooth, while the vibrant colours were very close to what was on screen (and what was in the photographer's memory).

With three black inks on tap, the R3000 can generate beautiful, high-contrast monochrome prints, featuring gradients that range subtly from solid black to pure white with absolutely no untoward colour tinges.

The best prints of the review were on Epson's own Premium Semigloss Photo Paper and Velvet Fine Art Paper. Looking closely at these prints, I found it difficult to imagine getting better results without taking it to a professional printer.

The final trial was a magnified inspection of a high-resolution printer test chart, which showed

some of the cleanest straight edges I've yet encountered, with exceptionally uniform and well saturated colour bands.

In short, it's tough to fault the print quality of the R3000 and try as I might to unearth a weakness, I failed. In use, the big Epson proved trouble free, with no paper-handling glitches, no print head issues and only a moderate thirst for ink despite the large paper sizes I was dealing with.

The R3000 isn't exactly a speed demon (especially at its maximum quality setting) but then again, nothing is when printing at these resolutions across large expanses of paper. Epson doesn't quote a rated duty cycle, so there's no way of knowing if your printing requirements are going to wear out your unit in a few months, but most users won't be churning out hundreds of A3+ prints per month, so this isn't really an issue in the real world.

There is an ink-resistant coating on the printhead to keep maintenance to a minimum, which should help keep the R3000 ticking along, as will the bigger ink cartridges, which need to be replaced less frequently.

In conclusion then, Epson's Stylus Photo R3000 is a supremely competent professional-grade product, capable of printing photos that wouldn't look out of place in a gallery.

The image quality really is breathtaking and any limitations this printer displays in terms of speed, size or running costs aren't unique, rather they apply to all the equivalent competitors, which makes it hard to find a negative here. For serious amateurs or professional photographers who don't need the extra capability of an A2 printer, the R3000 should be right at the top of the wish list. **D**

EPSON
STYLUS PHOTO R3000
A3+ INKJET PRINTER
RRP: \$1899

SPECS

Maximum resolution: 5760 (horizontal) x 1440 (vertical) dpi
Ink droplet size: 2pl
Max print area: 13" x 44"
Ink tanks: 9
Photo print speed (8" x 10"): Approx 1 min 33 sec.
Photo print speed (13" x 19"): Approx 2 min 30 sec.
Connectivity: Ethernet, Wi-Fi (IEEE802.11b/g/n), USB 2.0
Display: 2.5 inch TFT color LCD
Supported operating systems: Windows: XP/Vista/7, Mac: OS X 10.5 or later
Dimensions (WxHxD): 616 x 369 x 228 mm
Weight: 15kg

CONTACT

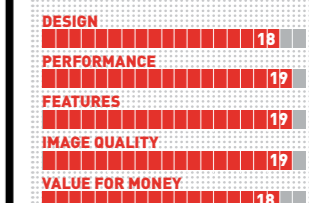
www.epson.co.nz

PROS

- Professional grade output
- Reliable in use
- Simple setup (even wi-fi)

CONS

- None



TOTAL 93/100

