



Shipping Digital

Epson P2000 Multi-media Storage Viewer \$999

If you're a keen digital photographer, you will have run into the issue of memory card capacity, photo storage and the best way to share your latest masterpieces with friends and family. These issues are compounded if you use a multi-megapixel digital SLR: you'll capture more images, which are likely to be far larger in size and demanding on storage.

Store galore

If this sounds familiar, have I got a toy for you: the Epson P2000 is quite possibly the slickest, most devastatingly viewable, hard drive storage and display device I've seen. It's a great way to free up your memory card as it has slots for SD/MMC and CF storage cards, it's a display device, and it's an external hard drive you can hook up to your PC. It's based on

a 2.5-inch 40GB hard drive formatted for FAT32 and runs off mains or an internal Li-Ion battery.

Navigate through the P2000's software via a mouse-like OK button surrounded by four directional keys that scroll through folders and file menus. There are separate buttons for Menu, Display, Home and Print. With a compatible Epson printer you can select images and print without a PC via the USB cable.

Portable hard drive storage devices are not new. Products like Apple's iPod Photo are familiar options for photographers seeking a way to download, carry and display digital images.

What separates the P2000 from competitors is its 3.8-inch, 640 x 480, high-resolution liquid crystal display. It's twice the size of most digital camera LCD panels and more than twice their resolution at 212 pixels per inch. Epson calls this screen technology Photo Fine and it's now cropping up in a host of Epson devices including printer displays, and in other manufacturer's cameras.

The 3.8-inch LCD unit found on the P2000 is the daddy of them all and represents the state-of-the-art in small screen technology. It displays images with incredible clarity and fluid

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motion in the case of moving pictures. It can also display meta-tag data and histograms for the images, and project automated slide shows.

Format dexterous

The P2000 supports digital still images in Jpeg or Tiff format. It also supports RAW files from Canon, Epson, Konica, Minolta, Nikon and Pentax cameras. If you're an Olympus owner, the P2000 only displays your RAW images as thumbnails.

Read and write speeds will vary depending on the media being used, but my results were encouraging. Fifty large fine Jpegs (4256 x 2848 pixels each) from my Fujifilm S3 Pro digital SLR took two minutes and 18 seconds to transfer from a 1GB IBM Microdrive to the P2000's hard drive. Hardly shabby for that amount of data.

With the right CF card adapters, I successfully downloaded images from Sony Memory Stick, Memory Stick Pro and xD cards - and there could well be more.

If that's not enough, the P2000 has a few other tricks up its sleeve. It plays multi-media clips with moving pictures and audio soundtracks providing these are in a compatible format. For video that means AVI (Mpeg 4 with a minimum resolution of 160 x 112 pixels and a maximum of 640 x 480), or audio (MP3 or AAC) with a maximum bit rate of 320kbps. AAC is unusual and is seldom found outside of Apple devices.

A short video imported from a Canon Ixus 700 digital camera in MPEG 4 played smoothly on the P2000. A friend successfully reformatted DVD movies for playback on the P2000, but is far more technically savvy than I with audio and video CODECs. Clever people will be able to do amazing things here.

Sounds like...

Audio quality is excellent, although the P2000's internal speaker is feeble. Plug in your quality audio headphones and things improve dramatically. However, the P2000 truncates file names and does not support playlists.

The P2000 connects to a video display or projector via 3.5 mini-pin AV cable (hardly an expensive item, but annoyingly not supplied) and is both NTSC and PAL compatible. Testing with a mini AV to composite video cable, excellent image quality was displayed on a 34-inch TV.

While these and other features round out an excellent package, I would buy the P2000 on the strength of its display alone. Detail, sharpness, colour and contrast are stunning. It's a great way to share images and far easier to carry than even my smallest notebook PC.

As a way to shuttle images between camera and computer it allows me to download my 1GB memory card 38 times, each time swallowing 220 large digital SLR images for safe keeping. That's 8360 high-resolution Jpeg files.

Conclusion

The P2000 is a modern day Tardis: small on the outside but enormous and hugely capable on the inside. The build quality far exceeds Tardis standards, the Epson feels hewn from a block of metal and might even repel determined Dalek fire. Dr Who would be proud to own one and what better way to display his rogue's gallery of intergalactic enemies.

By Tim Steele



ABOVE An obelisk-like sign left by an alien race or a slot for extra memory? You be the judge.



+ Screen quality, size and build quality

- No MPEG 1, 2 or 3GPP cell phone image support

= Worth \$999 for the eye candy factor alone

Key features

- 40GB storage
- AVI-MPEG 4 support
- MP3 and AAC support
- Jpeg, Tiff and major RAW file support
- USB 2.0 connection (cable included)
- Rechargeable Li-Ion battery
- Strap, case and stand provided
- Mac and PC software

CONTACT
www.epson.co.nz



Also consider....

Apple iPod Photo
www.apple.co.nz
30 GB \$579
60 GB \$759

If you like the concept, but have fewer dollars to throw at it, or need a slightly more compact solution, then consider an iPod Photo.

These are available in 30 and 60GB models and are similar to the Epson P2000 in that they are both rechargeable, hard drive-based and offer a colour screen to view thumbnails and select or view individual photos. Of course both sizes feature music playback (that's what the iPod is famous for after all) and come with all the good stuff, including control of play lists.

Where the iPod Photo models differ from Epson is they have a much smaller, lower resolution colour screen: 220 x 176 pixels and 65,000 colours - that's around a third of the P2000's resolution and only a quarter the number of colours displayed.

The iPod also lacks built-in memory card readers, so you have to buy an external adapter, such as the Belkin Media Reader/Writer, which connects through the dock connector. This will set you back around \$200 and supports CompactFlash (Type 1 and 2), SmartMedia, Secure Digital (SD), Memory Stick, and MultiMediaCard (MMC).

This vital accessory takes the 30GB Photo to just under \$800 and the 60GB model to just under the price of the P2000, but of course, offers an extra 20GB of storage over the Epson.

Optional AV cables allow similar external display abilities through a TV or projector - with the correct connections. If you can live with the smaller screen, the iPod Photo models warrant your consideration and make an interesting comparison.

Bear in mind, however, that not all stores will carry both products.