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Caplio GX100



RICOH Caplio R8

BUSINESS MACHINE

Ricoh continues to deliver digital compacts that are a cut above the mainstream in terms of features and performance. Report by Barrie Smith.

BLACK AND BUSINESS-LIKE, THE RICOH

Caplio R8 looks like a digital compact camera with a purpose. It's just 22.6 mm in thickness (at its thinnest point), and the control points are all picked out in matte chrome which looks very professional.

There's no optical viewfinder – more common than not now – but the large 6.86 cm LCD screen serves double duty for live viewing and image replay. Its higher resolution of 460,000 pixels makes quite a difference to the clarity of what's displayed and allows for more meaningful image evaluation. The ten megapixels (effective) sensor is matched with a 7.1x zoom which has an effective focal range of 28-200mm. Yes, that's 28-200mm in a camera that's under 23 mm in thickness! Image stabilisation is provided via sensor shifting and it's a godsend when you're shooting at the longer focal lengths. When you're carrying a camera this small, you don't want to be lugging a tripod around as well, do you?

The maximum image size is 3648x2736 pixels which will generate a print size of 41x31 cm at 300 dpi. A novel capture resolution of 2736x2736 pixels is provided (i.e. a 1:1 aspect ratio) which is useful for later resizing images into either portrait or landscape format prints... reminiscent of the 6x6cm rollfilm format.

In movies, the R8 hasn't quite caught up with the pack as it offers only a 640x480 pixels capture mode and no 16:9 widescreen option.

Most digital compacts have a menu button that reveals the LCD-based menu options such as image size and quality, white balance settings and ISO settings. Virtually all cameras have a rocker-type control that moves in any of four directions for navigation. The Ricoh R8 goes further and provides an 'ADJ.' (Adjust) button to which you can assign any of four functions such as exposure compensation, white balance, ISO setting. This saves a lot of hunting and pecking around the menu, and allows for quick access when you're busy shooting.

Taking photos with a digital camera is lots of fun and the cost of experimenting is nil. Here the R8 delivers another neat trick – you can shoot three consecutive shots, subsequently rendered as B&W, colour and sepia versions.



Seen less and less in digital compacts is an intervalometer or interval timer for shooting time-lapse sequences. However, the R8 has one which will take shots at preset intervals varying from five seconds up to three hours.

The only exposure control is fully auto, but the subject/scene modes will rapidly set the camera to its optimum aperture/speed combo and this menu also includes the B&W and sepia capture modes. Found here as well is Ricoh's unique 'Skew' mode for automatic straightening buildings or documents. You can also set the lens to its minimum aperture (i.e. biggest f-number) to achieve maximum depth-of-field.

Start-up was fairly quick and the camera was able to capture its first shot after just two seconds.

The zoom lens is quite a performer with no obvious distortion at any point in the focal range which is impressive on a digital compact camera.

The Verdict

There's noticeable 'punch' in the R8's images which exhibit good contrast and above average sharpness. The colour reproduction is good too, and you get the distinct feeling this is a camera that's been designed more with the enthusiast use in mind than the snapshotter.

So many compacts appear to be built to a price with features and functionality sacrificed to reach this budget level, but the Ricoh R8 looks, feels and performs like it had had a lot more care lavished on it.

VITAL STATISTICS RICOH CAPLIO R8 \$499

Type: Fully automatic, fixed lens digital compact camera.
Lens: 4.95-35.4mm f3.3-5.2 (equivalent to 28-200mm), 4.8x digital zoom.
Focusing Range: 30 cm to infinity, macro focusing down to 1.0 cm.
Shutter Speeds: 8-1/2000 second.
Metering: Multi-zone (256 segments), centre-weighted average and spot.
Exposure Control: Program plus 12 subject/scene modes. Auto bracketing and +/-2.0 EV compensation.
Sensitivity: ISO 64, 100, 200, 400, 800 and 1600.
Sensor: 11 mm CCD, 10.0 million pixels (effective).
Image Size: 3648x2736, 2592x1944, 2048x1536, 1280x960 and 640x480 pixels.
Continuous Shooting: Up to 2.0 fps. 16 images shot in two seconds and

saved as a single image at 3648x2736 pixels. Movie clips captured at 640x480 or 320x240 pixels and 15 or 30 fps.
Formats: JPEG, Motion JPEG, PictBridge and DPOF compatible.
Flash: Built-in with auto, red-eye reduction, fill-in and slow sync. Flash range = 20 cm to 3.0 metres.
Viewfinder: 6.86 cm LCD monitor (460,000 pixels).
Storage: SD/SDHC memory cards plus 24 MB internal memory.
Interface: USB 2.0, PAL/NTSC AV output.
Power: Rechargeable lithium-ion battery.
Dimensions (WxHxD): 102x58.3x26.1 mm.
Weight: 166 grams (without battery or memory card).
Price: \$499.
Distributor: Tasco Sales Australia, telephone (02) 9938 3244 or visit www.tasco.com.au