

CES Shows Trends to Future

PHOTOS COPYRIGHT © JOHN RETTIE EXCEPT WHERE NOTED



LG, along with fellow Korean competitor, had two of the most impressive displays of new ultra-slim TV sets at CES.

It has been amazing to see the changes in the types of products unveiled at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas over the past couple of decades since I first visited the giant show. Back then it was mostly about TVs, car radios, radar detectors and other household items. Camera equipment was virtually nonexistent, and you would not have expected to see Kodak in attendance.

This year, however, Kodak had a big booth near the entrance to one of the four halls. I am writing this before this year's upcoming PMA show, which has moved to Anaheim, CA, but I would not be surprised if Kodak's booth at the premier U.S. photographic trade show is smaller than it was at CES.

Canon had an even bigger booth than Kodak at CES and it has elected to skip attending PMA this year. Nikon, Olympus and Pentax did not have booths at CES but did have a presence in meeting rooms where they showed new products to the media and key trade partners. I would not be surprised if they have booths at CES in the future.

It's sure beginning to look like CES is a show to attend for those in the photography business as much as PMA. The same is also true in the Macintosh world. Apple did not have a booth at CES this year and has skipped displaying at Macworld, which has traditionally been the premier show for those in the Mac environment. In the past Macworld has always clashed with CES, but the organizers sensibly moved the show to a later date this year. However, judging by the large number of exhibitors showing items for the Mac and iPhone, it was almost as good as attending Macworld for those in the Mac accessory business.

If you have any interest in keeping up with the latest in electronic gadgets you will likely have read about the convergence of the

auto industry at CES. Ford gained major kudos at CES when it showed off the next generation of its Sync system that provides onboard WiFi so you can access the Internet while on the move. The voice-activated system called MyFord Touch allows for hands-free control of many functions in a car. It's pretty easy to see how this could benefit photographers as it would be easy to transform a car or van into a mobile office with capabilities as good as you enjoy in a building. Indeed, Ford already provides such features in an edition of its Ford F-150 pickup truck, aimed at workers on the move, who need a mobile office.

eBook readers were a hot topic at CES with many companies unveiling their take on the Amazon Kindle. The one that attracted the most buzz was the Skiff. As you can see it is very thin yet gives clear image, albeit only in black and white at present, in a form factor that is like a sheet of paper and is flexible so it won't break.

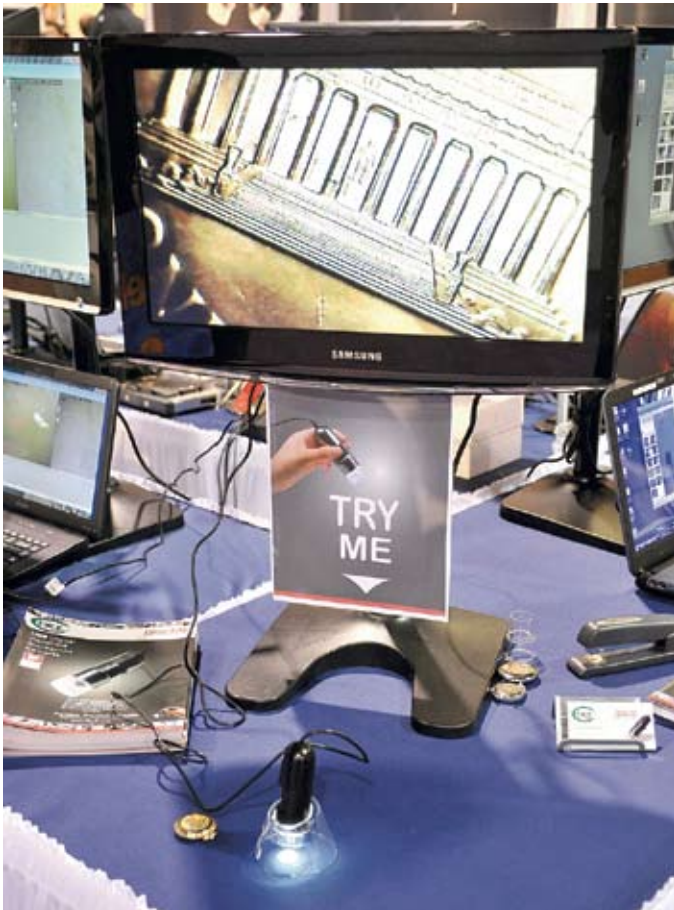
Television consoles continued to be the big thing at this year's CES. Every major TV manufacturer showed off ultra thin TVs that can display 3D movies. Sony announced that next year it would begin broadcasting in 3D. While most TVs require special glasses, there were one or two startups showing prototypes of displays that do not require glasses.

There is still enormous debate as to whether 3D will catch on with the public in a big way. After all it's been tried many



PHOTO COURTESY SKIFF

The Skiff eReader was one of the new products at CES creating plenty of buzz.



Top left: CES was not all about consumer products as LG displayed a new high-end graphics monitor. **Middle left:** Audi and Ford displayed new dashboards that will appear in upcoming models that will include Internet access. The Audi steering wheel featured here is not yet legal for highway use! **Bottom left:** This under-\$300 microscope can magnify up to 200X—and that is detail on a penny you're seeing here. **Above:** Hyundai is better known for its cars but it displayed an upcoming compact camera carrying the same nameplate.

times in the past and has never caught on. It's probably far too early for professional still photographers to worry about this new trend, but we should be aware of how it progresses. If it catches on, leading-edge wedding photographers will be able to offer a new service to differentiate themselves from more tradition-bound photographers.

Anyway, enough of the non-photo world. What was new in the photography and related fields? Honestly not much unless you're into entry-level point-and-shoot cameras. There were more than three dozen new compact cameras introduced at CES and most of them sport 14-megapixel sensors!

From a professional point of view the most interesting is the Samsung NX10. It is a compact camera with a 14.3-megapixel APS-C sensor and interchangeable lenses. Obviously its closest competitors are the Olympus PEN and Panasonic GF1. I am hoping to try the camera fairly soon as it has the potential to be a practical compact camera for carrying at all times for those who want more quality than offered by lower priced compacts with their minute sensors.

The most significant trend in my opinion is the move towards a touch screen interface on several cameras. As I discussed in my column last month, this is something that has proven its worth with the iPhone, so it is only natural for it to migrate to real cameras. One new name in the compact camera market is Hyundai who showed a camera in a showcase. I did not get any details but it might be the first camera to carry the name of a company better known for its cars.

Although they were not shown publicly at CES, both Olympus and Nikon gave the media a sneak peek at some new cameras that will be announced just about the time you're reading this column.

Nikon's new super-zoom sports a 26X (26–678mm equivalent) optical zoom with ED glass elements in the lens. It has a 10.3-megapixel back-lit CMOS sensor, first announced by Sony last year, that promises to provide better dynamic range. It will also be the first Nikon camera to include full 1080p HD video recording.

Olympus is also unveiling a similar camera that goes a step further as it has a 30X zoom for 28–840mm equivalency. Olympus is unveiling a lower cost version of the PEN camera that has a slightly less stylish body but features a built-in flash

and the same sensor. In my opinion, I felt it was more comfortable to handle as it has a grip.

Backup systems and new storage devices were everywhere at CES. As consumers, let alone professionals, who rely on digitizing everything in their lives, reliable long-term storage and backup systems are becoming more and more important. As far as storage cards go, the SD format is definitely becoming the de facto standard. Panasonic showed off a 64GB SDXC card that sets a new benchmark for size and speed. The new SDXC format allows up to 2TB of storage. And as this is the format that is being used for most camcorders, it all but eliminates the current limited length of video clips.

There was plenty of fun stuff on display at the show. One photographic item that caught my eye was a microscope that can magnify up to 200X. Although it might have limited practical use for a wedding photographer, it sure is fun to look at minute detail that cannot be seen with the naked eye.



Bruce Dorn has designed this Run & Gun kit that makes manual focusing in video mode much easier on a hybrid DSLR.

Sun-Sniper Camera Strap

And now for something with absolutely no electronics in it! While reviewing the Canon EOS 7D, which you can read online, I did not use the regular camera strap that comes with the camera. Instead, I used a sniper strap from Sun-Sniper (www.sun-sniper.com).

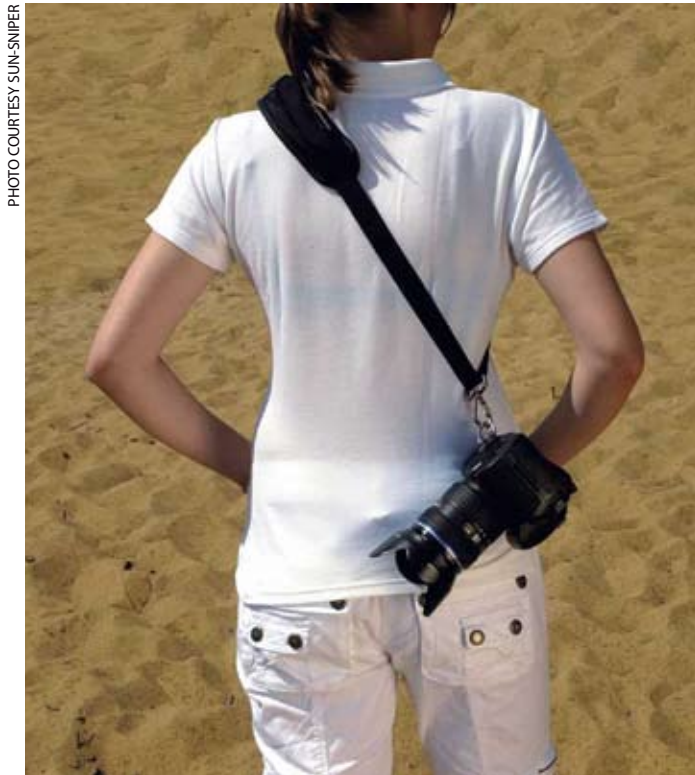


PHOTO COURTESY SUN-SNIPEr

The Sun-Sniper strap is an alternative to a regular camera strap.

com) for a couple of shoots. I found the strap quite convenient as the weight of the camera is better distributed across one's body. It also has a built-in shock absorber, which helps lessen the impact on your shoulder. Thanks to the sliding carabiner, the camera can quickly be brought up to eye level for shooting.

iDC Run & Gun Kit

For much of the time I was reviewing the Canon EOS 7D I used the iDC Run & Gun kit on the camera (www.idcphotovideo.com). This is a valuable aid for shooting video as it helps overcome some of the shortcomings of a DSLR that is doubling up as a video camera. The kit was designed and is made by Bruce Dorn and it features a sturdy base plate that is screwed into the tripod hole in the camera's base. A modified Hoodman HoodLoupe is then fixed onto the back covering the LCD screen to provide a light-tight viewing screen when shooting video. A second aluminum plate screws into the baseplate and it holds a follow-focus wheel that butts up against the focus ring on the lens.

With this setup you can hold the camera up at eye level and manually focus the lens easily with your left thumb and forefinger. I found it worked well, making the camera much more usable as a video camera. The problem arises when you're shooting still at the same time, as it is impossible to use the regular viewfinder without detaching the HoodLoupe. Fortunately, one only needs to unscrew the two thumbnuts on the base to remove it. The baseplate and focus wheel can remain in place and in fact I found it was a useful grip for holding the camera with your left hand when shooting stills.

iDC has to custom make each plate to fit a particular camera body and lens combination and it will not work with all lenses. Nor will it work with the 7D if a battery pack is mounted on the base. The kit costs around \$488.



John Rettie is a photojournalist who has been covering digital photography since its earliest days. He resides in Santa Barbara, CA and readers are welcome to contact him directly by e-mail at john@johnrettie.com.

Further Information

Sun-Sniper
www.sun-sniper.com

iDC Run & Gun
www.idcphotovideo.com