

# Epson Rd1s

*First look at the recently announced modified version of the world's first fully fledged digital rangefinder camera.*



By  
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Believe it or not, almost a whole decade has slid under the table since Olympus first placed its famous obituary advertisement for film in the late 1990s. In this time, photographers have devoted an inordinate amount of it arguing the toss about digital and film quality and trying to get their heads around the numbers at the expense of creatively practicing the craft - exceptions accepted.

Leica are still manufacturing sophisticated derivatives of the original Barnack camera, but both demand for the modern rangefinder film camera (and a host of reflexes) and an appreciation for the genre of street photography and classical reportage at which the late Henri Cartier Bresson excelled appears to have faded.

Or has it?



*RD1s - Zeiss Biogon 21mm f/2.8 equates to a 32mm with the 1.53X magnification factor of the sensor but it manifests a less classical look to a slightly longer 35mm on a full frame camera and needs to be used with much more care than this to avoid leaning verticals. The special Zeiss viewfinder however, is brilliant. Adobe RGB setting at ISO 200 produces an exceptionally clean image. No corrections to image file.*

Perhaps what the advent of digital capture really did was simply take a whole way of looking at the world off the printed page and into cyberspace. Which is great if you own a computer and know where to go, but useless for the millions who don't have or don't want access to it.

Fortunately, the last bastion of great photographic print publishing, Thames & Hudson, recognised this. Their recently published new tome, *Fotolog.book - A global Snapshot for the Digital Age*, by Andrew Long and Nick Currie culls its images from the site [www.fotolog.com](http://www.fotolog.com) where, according to statistics issued by its owners, one billion pages of images are viewed each month. Yes, *one billion!*

What the publication of *Fotolog.book* happily helps to reinforce, is the notion that people everywhere are still fascinated by the things that make us what we are; warts and all. Camera phones and cheap digital compacts have significantly helped to make photography more cyberitically democratic but if mediocre image quality is all anyone wants, what use then, for a digital rangefinder camera that costs the best part of a couple of grand for the body only?

It's a misconception that proper cameras no longer feature in the end game. There are thousands of web sites where the dedicated enthusiasts of street photography show their stuff. Their tools are often conventional but many have switched to a digital camera Leica once said would be impossible to make.

The 2004 Mk 1 version of the Epson RD1 was bedevilled with a few problems, not least of which was the viewfinder issue with its three manually switchable bright line projected focal length frames. What you saw in the frame was not always what you got in the image. This issue still remains to be addressed in the new Mk II model; it is work in progress according to my Japanese contacts but I was told by Epson Europe's Michaela Beckers, the problem of rangefinder instability has been corrected in the new RD1s, announced in the middle of March.

Other than this, there are no hardware changes. The camera has the same 6.1mp Sony CCD APS-C type sensor producing a high quality near 18mb image file which is quite capable, because of the quality of image data obtained by each of its 7.8micron sized pixels, to be resized for A3 reproduction.

Another issue with the first RD1 noted by its critics was severe vignetting evident in frames obtained with focal

lengths shorter than 35mm. In particular, images obtained with the diminutive Voigtlander 15mm Heliar (approx 23mm equivalent on the RD1/RD1s) were vulnerable. But this lens is well known for its capacity to darken the corners of 35mm film; use it unwisely and pay the penalty. Post processing can reduce more unsightly effects, but a remedy might lay in the direction of the new Zeiss M fit 15mm f/2.8 Distagon. It's considerably more expensive (£2200 inc VAT) than the Heliar, but hey, what's a few more grand compared with life in a coal hole?

All of the new features for this model are additions to the camera firmware, bundled with Epson's latest print orientated manipulation software to enable users of its products to conveniently obtain the fine ink-jet outputs the company is noted for. Indeed, the whole *raison d'être* behind this product is geared to Epson's wider ambition to be recognised as *the* global photo imaging company.

The firmware additions include the following,

- new: Quick view after shot
- new: RAW+JPEG
- new: Adobe RGB colour space
- new: long exposure noise reduction
- new: playback magnification up to 16X

The quick view after shot can be menu set to 3 or 10 seconds, or OFF. RAW+JPEG now features in addition to the original RAW setting and standard Adobe RGB has been added to Epson's own version of sRGB, the info as to which colour space used for each frame now also displayed on the monitor with a flick of the control wheel. Some users may prefer the standard colour map and wider gamut of RGB, but I have come to like the look of Epson's modified sRGB colour space; punchier yellows, less intense but no less saturated greens, brighter reds.

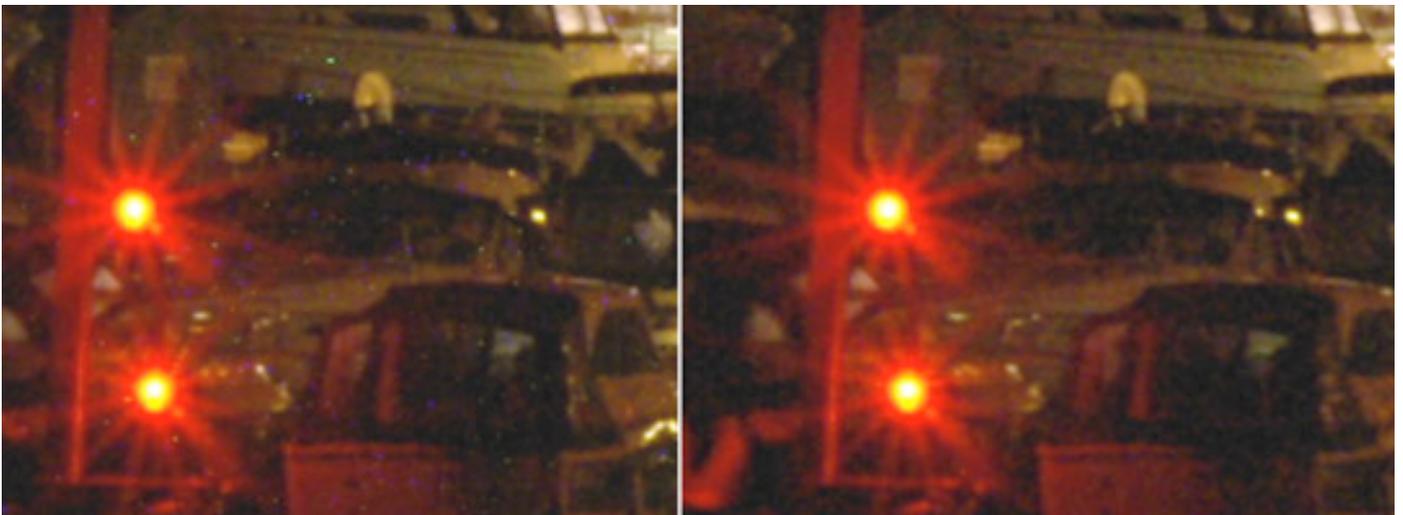


*RD1s - colour space; (l-r) sRGB, sRGB indexed, AdobeRGB indexed, Adobe RGB. one aspect of sRGB colour space appears to show more red in the yellows, but as can be seen from the indexed AdobeRGB panel, it contains less green. Adobe RGB has less cyan in the lavender jug. Overall Epson sRGB has a tad more vibrancy through the range, to like or not as the case may be. Still think they should offer a Kodachrome space.*



*RD1s - Noise. The full frame with the detail area shown boxed. At its highest sensitivity setting (1600 ISO), with noise elimination off, dead pixels and electronic 'snow' tends to accumulate with an increase in exposure time.*

A hefty heat sink for the CCD sensor already helps to keep electronic noise to a minimum, but the addition of a menu option facility to make further reductions to images affected by long time exposures at high sensor speeds will also prove useful for low light and night time shooters. The corrective software is algorithmic based and does not, as some digital cameras do, use a comparative second exposure of dark areas to eliminate image noise.



*(l-r)RD1s, ISO 1600, 50mm f/1.4 Leica Summilux @ f/16, 8 second exposure, noise elimination off, noise elimination on. It's apparent from these two examples cropped at 200% from the whole frame that the new feature works quite well, brightened here by 20% for the sake of print clarity. File writing time to card is approximately double the time taken for the exposure. It's also apparent that this lens resolving power for micro objects considerably exceeds the CCD sensor resolution.*

Playback magnification has been raised to 16X levels from the original 14X, but there is small penalty to pay for this gain with a short delay while the on-board CPU informs the user 'processing' is under way.

With Zeiss coming on board now with a whole armoury of new M mount objectives (which incidentally, will be available directly through their e-commerce website from April 5th), and an already vast range of new and used Leica M and L fit lenses as well as those produced by Voigtlander/Cosina, the RD1s promises exciting returns for those who wish to experiment or express their wildest interpretation of life in the raw.

## Specifications R-D1s

CCD: 23.7x15.6 mm CCD

Pixels: 6,1 megapixels effective

Image sizes: CCD-RAW (12bit):3008x2000 pixels; JPEG: 3008x2000 pixels / 2240x1488 pixels

File format: Exif 2.21 conform, DCF 2.0 conform, DPOF 1.1 conform; PRINT Image Matching III

Media: Secure Digital (SD)

Display: 2 inch colour display, 235,000 pixels, brightness adjustment

Focus: manual

Shutter: 1/2000 - 1 s; Synch 1/125 s

Exposure: Aperture priority, manual

Exposure compensation: -2.0 +2.0 EV (1/3 EV steps)

ISO settings: ISO 200 / 400 / 800 / 1600

White balance: auto, shadow, cloudy, fluorescent, daylight, tungsten

Colour: B/W, colour

RAW settings: RAW, RAW+JPEG

Colour space: sRGB, Adobe RGB

Battery: Li-Ion battery pack; approximately 900 shots

System requirements software: Windows 98SE / Me / 2000 / XP Home Edition / XP Professional; Mac OS X Version 10.2.x and later

Dimensions: 142 x 39.5 x 88.5 mm (W x D x H)

Weight: 560 grams (without battery and memory card)

Epson Japan does not mention any prices for the R-D1s but since its predecessor R-D1 costs about £1980 inc VAT one might assume the R-D1s will cost about the same.

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