

Pentax K-3

With a new 24MP sensor, improved autofocus system, faster frame rate, and a host of other improvements, the K-3 looks like a winner for Pentax. Daniel Bridge finds out if it lives up to expectations

Guide price £1,099 (body only)
Contact ricoh-imaging.co.uk



Pentax has a reputation, at least among those familiar with the brand, of producing solid, dependable cameras that offer features rarely found in those at the same price point. The K-3 is a magnesium-alloy bodied APS-C DSLR, with full weather sealing, 8.3fps shooting for up to 25 Raw images, two SD card slots, an ISO range of 100 to 51200, and a 100% viewfinder. Superficially similar to the older K-5 series cameras, the K-3 has major upgrades internally, with a new AF module, sensor, metering, shutter and mirror assemblies, processing engine and



Live view was used to ensure focus was exactly where I wanted it, and the screen's excellent display was very useful here.
Pentax K-3 with DA 100mm macro lens, ISO 100, 2sec at f/8, -0.5EV, tripod

video capabilities.

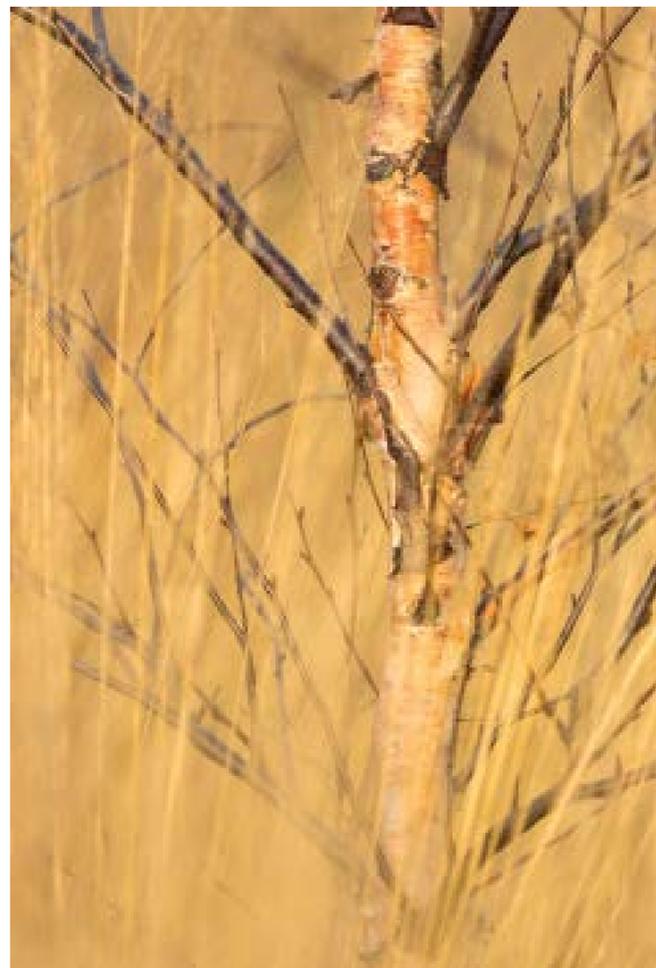
Over the last three years, Pentax has released several DSLRs that use the excellent 16MP Sony sensor, so the K-3 is a notable departure in that it contains a 24MP sensor, again from Sony. Like many recent cameras, and Pentax's own K-5IIs, this has no anti-aliasing (AA) filter, so has the ability to show finer detail in images, without the softening effect of the AA filter. An AA filter reduces the risk of moiré patterns, however, and Pentax is unique in offering a hardware solution to this, by using the sensor-based anti-shake system to move the sensor microscopically to simulate the blurring of the AA filter. Clever stuff, but in practice I found no evidence of moiré anyway, although this would depend on the subjects shot.

After a decade of using variations on its 11-point autofocus system, the K-3's SAFOX 11 module is a big step up, offering 27 focus points – 25 of which are cross-type – sensitive down to -3EV. We also see the new 86,000-pixel RGB metering system being employed to assist with subject tracking. This works in much the same way as Nikon's 3D tracking, and compared to the K-5 series there are a few new options to choose from when it comes to AF mode. These now include tracking groups of nine, 25 or all 27 points and, as long as the subject is distinctive enough, this allows accurate tracking over small or large areas. I found it to be mostly accurate, swift and snappy, but there's still room for improvement. It's a huge step in the right direction though, and one that's been a long time coming.

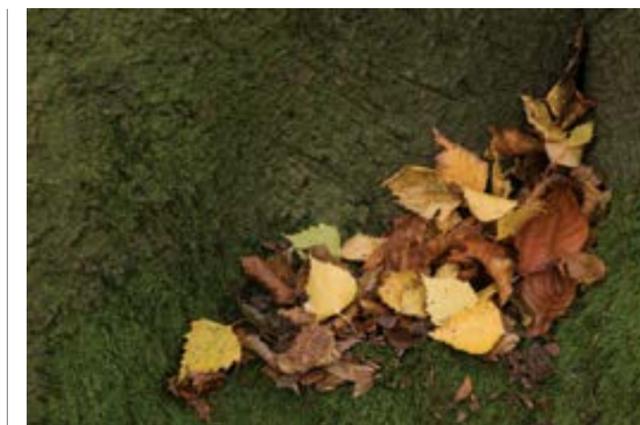
One area where Pentax has always

below Plenty of focus points allowed accurate focus even with a distracting foreground.
Pentax K-3 with DA*300mm lens, ISO 200, 1/350sec at f/4,+0.5EV, tripod

excelled for me is ergonomics, with comfortable grips, well-placed controls and plenty of customisation available. The layout has changed slightly from the K-5, most notably with the AF controls now being a combination of a button press and command dial turn, but still everything falls to hand, and just takes a little getting used to. Control customisations include assigning ISO or exposure compensation to either



The new 20-40mm lens was a pleasure to use; lovely build quality, lightweight, weather-sealed, and with nice rendition.
Pentax K-3 with DA 20-40mm Limited lens at 20mm, ISO 200, 1/30sec at f/4, handheld



The K-3 sensor combined with a prime macro lens has produced impressive detail in the leaves, with excellent sharpness and good tonal range.
Pentax K-3 with DA 100mm macro lens, ISO 100, 1/2sec at f/9.5, tripod

TECH SPEC

Effective pixels 24 million
Sensor APS-C CMOS (23.5mmx15.6mm)
Lenses used in review Pentax-DA 20-40mm f/2.8-4 Limited, D-FA 100mm f/2.8 Macro WR, DA*300mm f/4, DA* 16-50mm f/2.8
Viewfinder Pentaprism, approximately 100% view at 0.95x magnification
LCD monitor 3.2in 1,037k dots
File types Raw (PEF or DNG), JPEG, Raw+JPEG, MPEG4 (Movie), Motion JPEG (AVI) for Interval Movie Record
Movie recording 1920x1080, 60i/50i/30p/25p/24p; 1280x720, 60p/50p/30p/25p/24p
Storage Dual SD card slots supporting SD, SDHC and SDXC Memory Cards (Conforming to UHS-1 standards)
AF system Phase Detection SAFOX 11, 27 point (25 cross type), EV-3 to 18
Shutter speeds 30-1/8000sec, Bulb
Metering system 86K pixel RGB sensor, multi-segment, centre-weighted and spot, EV-3 to 20
Exposure compensation +/-5 in 1/3 or 1/2-stop increments
ISO speed 100-51200
White balance Auto, Multi Auto WB, Daylight, Shade, Cloudy, Fluorescent Light (four settings), Tungsten Light, Flash, CTE, Manual WB (up to three settings), Colour Temperature Configuration (up to three settings)
Built-in flash GN approximately 13 (ISO 100/m)
Software supplied Pentax Digital Camera Utility 5
Power source Rechargeable lithium-ion battery D-LI90
Dimensions (wxhxd) 131.5x100x77.5mm
Weight 715g (without battery and memory card)

FLUCARD PRO

Although Wi-Fi isn't built in to the K-3, there is the option of using an SD card called the Flucard Pro, which allows transfer of images over Wi-Fi, and also remote control of the camera's functions via a smartphone or tablet, with live view on the device. You can find out more about it and purchase it via flu-card.com.

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command dial in P, Av and Tv modes, and this makes changes to settings a breeze.

When it comes to reviewing the images you've taken, there are some nice improvements over the K-5 series. Most obviously, the screen is bigger, at 3.2in, and at a 3:2 ratio it will show the full image using the whole screen. Its 'Air-gapless glass' design also ensures a bright, clear image. Another nice touch is the option to view images at 100%, and the further option to set this as the default magnification, allowing fast checking of critical sharpness.

One disappointment, bearing in mind the minimal change in body design, is that the K-5's battery grip is not compatible with the K-3, which means an additional outlay if a gripped body is your preference. The battery, however, is the same D-LI90 as for the K-5, but while that might seem an advantage, in practice the higher power requirements of the K-3 result in a poorer battery life.

There's little to disappoint as far as image quality is concerned, though. Exceptionally fine detail was evident, and noise was negligible at lower ISOs and well restrained as values increased. Colours are very pleasing up to ISO 1600, starting to look a little muted after that, and image quality really suffers at ISO 12800 and above. Recovery of highlights and shadows is excellent from a Raw file, and overall I had no complaints with the quality of shot the K-3 could produce. n

LIKES

- ✓ Excellent image quality
- ✓ Improved autofocus
- ✓ Ergonomics
- ✓ Frame rate and large buffer
- ✓ Rear screen
- ✓ Very quiet shutter

DISLIKES

- ✗ Battery life
- ✗ Price currently a little high
- ✗ Autofocus could still be better

VERDICT

The K-3 is a joy to use; it's a confident camera, sure in its capabilities. The new autofocus system is a great improvement, and with some tweaks to its tracking abilities, it can only get better. Image quality is excellent, and the feature-set easily competes with the likes of the Canon 70D and Nikon D7100, especially if you're mainly a stills shooter. I'm going to be very sorry to see this camera leave.

RATINGS

Handling	97%
Performance	96%
Specification	96%
Value	91%

OVERALL
95%