

GIVE US A Q

Casio has long been a key player in the digital camera game. Does its latest release, the £500 QV-700, score a touchdown - or an own goal?

The QV-700 is the latest offering from Casio's QV digital still camera range. The futuristic silver design mirrors the styling of its older brothers; its sculptured form is comfortable in the hand, and the rubber grip points give the unit a very satisfying, tactile feel.

The 2.5in TFT screen is sharp and colourful, giving an accurate representation of your pictures. Another great feature is the camera's ability to zoom into pictures while the user is reviewing them. There's also a host of image editing functions included with the camera - so you can add titles or sepia effects to your pictures while you are on the move.

The lens can be rotated through 270°, so

you can take pictures at weird angles. Or you could just use this function to take pictures of yourself, if you can't find anyone else to help!

There are three picture quality modes: economy, standard and fine. On the 2MB memory card provided you can store 47 pictures in economy mode, 26 standard pictures or 14 fine images, at a top resolution of 320 x 240 pixels in 24-bit colour. Taking pictures with this camera is a breeze. Just aim at your subject and press the shutter button - the picture is then stored on the 2MB CompactFlash memory card which is included with the unit. The onboard Automatic Exposure function performs well, and its pictures are bright and vibrant. There were a few jagged edges in our

test shots, but the majority of them were clear and uniform.

The on-board flash also performed well.

Sometimes using the flash can leave your subject looking washed-out and, in the case of portrait shots, result in pictures of people who don't look at all like themselves! The QV-700 didn't suffer from this problem though, and even up-close the flash didn't bleach out the test pictures.

To its credit, the camera can convert pictures taken in fine or standard mode to a lower resolution if you really need to save memory space. The difference in quality between the three picture modes is negligible, with the economy mode producing surprisingly clear pictures.

Whereas most digital still cameras leave you waiting an age between shots while pictures are stored on the memory card, the Casio QV-700 displays an hourglass icon for less than a second

before you can take your next digital masterpiece. This earned the camera extra brownie points, as it can be quite infuriating to miss that never-to-be-repeated magic moment while your digital still camera chugs away storing your last picture.

Pictures are transferred to your PC using Casio's QV-Link software/RS232 package. Downloading pictures from the camera is pretty quick using the QV-Link software. The Spin Panorama software that is also included in the bundle transforms your holidays snaps into clever (if disorientating) 3-D panoramas.

Overall, the picture quality of this camera is very good and there are enough features and functions to keep the busiest of button-pressing techno-philes happy. Tie that up with the impressive QV-Link package and you have a system that will bring a smile to any digital still camera enthusiast.



SPECIFICATIONS

Make/Model Casio QV-700 Digital Still Camera

Guide Price £500

Features Three mode flash, 2.5in TFT low glare LCD screen, 2MB CompactFlash memory card, fixed lens, shutter speed 1/8 to 1/4000 second, automatic white balance, 10 second self-timer, software and cables for PC/Windows or Apple Mac, instruction manuals, strap, soft case, four batteries (AA-size alkaline)

Resolution Fine mode (640x480 pixels), standard and economy

System requirements IBM-compatible PC 486 or higher with Windows 3.1 or higher, 16MB RAM, 10MB hard disk space, RS-232 port. Mac version of QV-700 also available

Dimensions 147 (W) x 69 (H) x 50 (D) mm

Weight 0.29kg excluding batteries

Distributor Casio Electronics Ltd, Unit 6, 1000 North Circular Road, London NW2 7JD. Tel: 0181 450 9131

VIDEO camera ratings



Impressive camera which almost hits the spot



RECALLING THE SHOTS

Bulky photo albums and traditional prints could become a thing of the past, thanks to G&A Imaging's £47 PhotoRecall software package

PhotoRecall (neat name, eh?) is an image management database which helps you organise all the pictures you've taken with your digital still camera or even your scanner. In fact, you don't even need an image source to use this software package, as it will search and organise images on your hard drive - which is ideal for cataloguing all that clip art you've collected!

No matter how you generate your graphic files, PhotoRecall organises everything into virtual albums, where most of the work is done. You can name and date your pictures and, when you are happy with them, you simply 'drag' them into your own personal portfolio.

But that's not all you get with this software. You can also go to the 'Darkroom', where you can modify your images by adjusting the contrast or sharpness using one of the five special effects, and

adjust an image's brightness and colour balance, as well as cropping or resizing images. The neat thing here is that the modifications are made by example: the software presents you with several versions of your picture, each one altered slightly, and you just have to choose the example

image you like the look of best.

The most entertaining (and probably most useful) function creates a stand-alone slideshow. A range of pictures or an album can be transferred to an executable file which, when run, shows your pictures in sequence. This is clever if you want to e-mail a whole album of pictures to someone on the other side of the world and are not sure if his or her system can read your pictures.

While we are on the subject of e-mail and the Internet, PhotoRecall also allows you to search for pictures on the World Wide Web. Just type in a couple of keywords and the software does the rest. This is really useful when you are searching for the picture of a Wild Mountain Leopard and don't know where to look!

The only problem with this function is that, like most searches of the World Wide Web, you spend a lot of your time wading through unrelated rubbish. But G&A still gains a few brownie points for coming up with this idea!

At £47 PhotoRecall is a bit expensive, but if you are looking for an application that will bring all those images on your hard drive into order then you can't go far wrong. However, don't expect this software to solve all your imaging problems, as it is a little lacking when it comes to photo manipulation. Compared to such programs as MGI's Photosuite, PhotoRecall falls several yards short of the mark, whether it has a snazzy (but ineffective) Internet search function or not.

Also remember that if you want to touch up your digital pictures, it might just be worth your while investigating some of the shareware software that is available for download via the Internet. Every image manipulator's friend, PaintShop Pro is always worth a try as it is packed with special effects that are missing from PhotoRecall.



SPECIFICATIONS

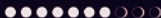
Make/model PhotoRecall
Guide Price £47

Features Portfolio and library modes (to create virtual photo albums), darkroom mode (for photo manipulation) and image searching mode (for scanning the Internet)

System Requirements PC with 486 or Pentium processor, Windows 95 or Windows NT, 8MB RAM, 20MB free disk space

Distributor Channel Market Makers, 12 Mortimer's Farm, Paultons Park, Ramsey, Hants SO51 6ZZ. Tel: 01703 814142

VIDEO camera ratings



Neat software, but falls a bit short of the mark

