Kodak DCS 1992 PRESS

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CAMERA; Electronic Imaging Takes a Step Forward
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ON July 15, 11 minutes after Gov. Bill Clinton appeared on the podium as the Democratic nominee for President, an Associated Press picture of that moment was being laid out for the front pages of the next day's newspapers across the country. This speed was possible because there was no film to develop: the photographer had made his picture with the Kodak DCS 100 digital camera and transmitted it via a computer modem, saving as much as 20 minutes in processing and transmission.

Tom Stathis, the A.P.'s senior photo editor for North America, called this effort the most successful use of digital still photography since the agency began using it. Twelve DCS 100 cameras are being used by news organizations at the Olympics in Barcelona.

This week, Eastman Kodak will introduce the next generation of digital still-imaging cameras, at the Mac World Expo in Boston. The new cameras, which will cost $8,500 to $10,000 (less than half the cost of DCS 100 models), produce electronic still images instantly without film or standard chemical processing. Moreover, the results are some of the best color pictures yet from the new technology.

There are four models in the new line: the DCS 200 ci (for color, 50-image storage capacity), $9,995; the DCS 200 mi (for black and white, 50-image storage), $9,495; the DCS 200 c (color, single-image storage), $8,995, and the DCS 200 m (black and white, single-image storage), $8,495. The line is a breakthrough toward creating lower-priced cameras for use with computers, though the models are obviously still too expensive for most amateurs. And many professionals may still opt for the DCS 100 because of its built-in editing screen and ability to store up to 600 images.

The DCS 200 system is mounted in a modified Nikon 8008s 35-millimeter camera. Kodak bought cameras from Nikon and redesigned the backs. When the new back is removed from the Nikon, the regular back can be used with standard films.

Unlike several other electronic still-imaging systems, the Kodak cameras do not plug into home television sets; rather, they are used with computers like the Macintosh IIfx and accessories like special software and an accelerator (total cost of $15,000 to $20,000) and use thermal printers like the Kodak XL7700 ($19,995). An 11-by-11-inch sheet of Kodak color thermal printing paper costs about $5.

Both Sony and Canon produce electronic still-picture systems that display pictures on home television sets. But their sensors use far fewer pixels, the basic unit of a video image, than do those of the DCS 200, and the more pixels the better the image. The best of Sony and Canon use only 400,000 pixels, compared with 1.2 million and 1.54 million pixels used by the DCS 100 and 200, respectively.

In image quality and detail, standard film still has no peer, but Kodak electronic still pictures are making inroads. And during field testing, the DCS 200 was no more complicated than a standard 35-millimeter camera. It has has auto focus, motorized film advance and auto exposure. It produced acceptable color quality at 800 ISO, although it is rated to shoot color at 200 ISO.

The camera can be linked directly to the Apple Macintosh or I.B.M. personal computers and compatibles. With the image on a computer screen, detail in shadow areas that would have been lost with standard photography can be quickly and easily enhanced. Shadows around eye sockets can be eliminated to reveal the eyes without resorting to artificial retouching, for example.

For photojournalists, the new DCS 200 cameras can be adapted for deadline assignments using a laptop computer and a modem. On the DCS 200, there is a two- or three-second wait between exposures. The DCS 100 produces two and a half images a second.

The new camera looks as if it had been stretched downward, doubling the length. Without flash or lens, it weighs 3.75 pounds; the DCS 100 with editing-screen backpack is 14 pounds.

The new cameras can be ordered at Mac World Expo begining Tuesday; for information about the Expo, call (617) 361-3941. For information from Kodak, call (800) 242-2424.

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