

**1st
LOOK!**

Nikon D3

Nikon's latest flagship camera the D3 is due out in November, but professional photographer Uzair Kharawala had been given privileged access to an evaluation model. Here's what he thought...

PICTURES Uzair Kharawala WORDS Terry Hope

Very much aimed at the professional market but with plenty to interest the average DSLR enthusiast all the same, Nikon's new D3 is one of the most eagerly-anticipated new cameras to arrive for some time. Its announcement ended years of speculation regarding whether Nikon would enter the full frame market, but interestingly enough it's the speed of the camera and its incredible ISO speed and low noise performance which has really turned heads.

In case you've been living on Mars for the past few months, the key points of the D3 are the fact that it comes with what is essentially a full frame sensor while it can deliver a shooting speed of 11 frames a second without auto focus tracking and 9 frames a second if this is activated. Just listen to its ISO performance however: it offers a range between ISO 200-6400 and it's even possible to boost the rating to a remarkable 25,6000 if required: that's a full 7 stops more exposure over a setting of ISO 100, and it would virtually be enough to



"I can see occasions where I will be able to hold the camera over the heads of guests and then line my picture up through the LCD Monitor"

shoot in the pitch dark.

It's one thing to offer these speeds and another totally for the results to be usable, but the big pitch for the D3 is that the noise levels are so low that even ISO 6400 will give a result that would still look good.

The camera, which will retail for around £3500, is obviously aimed at the professional market, but its audience will vary from the sports photographer, who will love

the chance to shoot at hitherto unheard-of shutter speeds and frame rates during events through to news photographers who often work in less than ideal conditions and who will now be able to dispense with their flashguns for many situations. However it's the full range of professionals who should be happy: Uzair Kharawala, for example, is a wedding and event photographer and yet he still is convinced that a camera with



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the benefits of the D3 can do a really good job for him, opening the door to him working totally with available light inside and out.

He knows what he's talking about as well, because Uzair was one of the fortunate few in this country to have the opportunity to try out an evaluation model of the D3 prior to its launch, and what you see here are some of the first pictures taken by this camera ever to be published. Some of the results that Uzair achieved really suggest that this camera is going to be something special, and the photographer himself was certainly convinced, to the point where he's already put his order in for one.

Uzair covered a wedding with the D3 tucked into his gadget bag as a backup, and once he was sure that it wasn't going to let him down he started to use it more and more. Eventually the camera started to come into its own as the light began to drop towards late afternoon.

"I was determined to try out some of the higher ISO speeds that the D3 offered to really see if it could perform as well as Nikon was suggesting that it could," says Kharawala, one of whose specialities is the use of Nikon SB800 flashguns on location to create dramatic lighting effects. "One of the main pictures I took with the D3 was of the bride and groom standing outside the venue where their reception was being held, and this was shot at nearly 7pm in early October and so you can imagine that the light had virtually gone by this point.

"I placed one SB800 head to act as an off-camera flash from the side, set the camera's ISO speed to 5000 and that was essentially it. I was able to shoot at 1/100sec at f/2.8 hand held and I shot JPEG files with no post-processing to enhance the final result. I thought the image I achieved was incredible, not just because the noise was so well

controlled but because the higher ISO speed I had been able to use had allowed so much of the detail in the house behind the couple to be recorded. Had I been working with the D2xs I would have lost most of this because I would have been working with a much slower ISO speed."

Another point which impressed Kharawala was the speed and accuracy of the camera's AF system, even under the darkened conditions. "I could just about make out the bride through my viewfinder," he says, "but the bridegroom, who was wearing a dark jacket, had effectively disappeared into the gloom. The camera latched onto him very quickly nonetheless, and that was a big help."

The camera arrived without a manual, but as a seasoned Nikon user Kharawala found it relatively straightforward to pick the D3 up and to understand its functions.

"This was important to me during the wedding when I was moving between this camera and the D2xs, and it was all fairly seamless. For me the big difference between the two cameras concerned the viewfinder, and the one on the D3 is much bigger and brighter thanks to the size of the sensor. I also found that its 14-24mm was quite a heavy lens, but it felt well balanced and overall the D3 was a nice camera to handle."

As a result of his experience Kharawala is looking forward to incorporating the D3 into his kit and he is confident that it will bring plenty of benefits. "This is a camera that is going to change the way that I can work," says the photographer, who fully intends to make the investment in the D3 at the first opportunity. "I'll be able to shoot so much more now, and there really shouldn't be any conditions that the camera can't handle." ❀