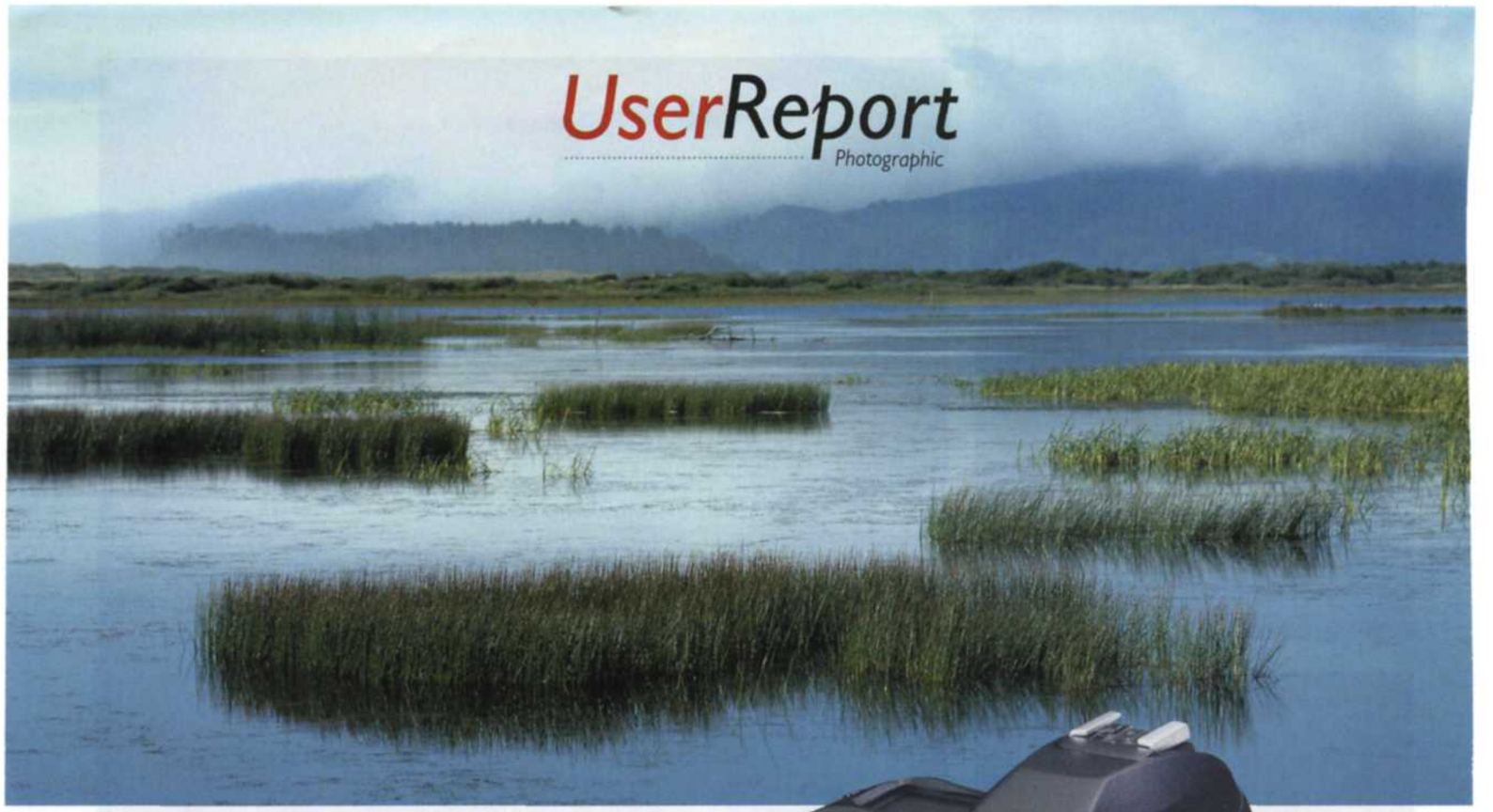


Fujifilm FinePix S2 Pro

"Economy" Pro Digital SLR with Big Performance

Text and photos by Jack and Sue Drafahl

When Fujifilm's FinePix S1 Pro first appeared on the market, we were so impressed with our field tests, that we rushed right out and purchased one for our lab. It worked so well that we had an Ikelite underwater housing designed so that we could take digital SLR pictures underwater. Then at the following PMA, we had our first glimpse of its eagerly awaited successor, the FinePix S2 Pro. We couldn't wait to get our hands on one and run it though the paces.

When finally received our test unit, we quickly tried a few test shots to get our initial digital excitement out of the way. The resulting 36-megabyte files were quite impressive, but we controlled our excitement and started evaluating the camera's new improvements.

Normally, when we review a camera, we make a grand tour of every control on the camera, and how each works. Unfortunately, we don't have enough space to mention them all, so we will just feature some of the most popular ones.

The S2 Pro body is based on the compact and lightweight Nikon N80 body. It incorporates a standard Nikon lens mount, so you can use any of the Nikon-compatible lenses and dedicated strobes. Probably the biggest improvement is inside the camera, where you will

find its third-generation Super CCD technology chip that records 6.17 million effective pixels.

The FinePix S2 Pro can record images at four resolutions: 4256x2848, 3024x2016, 2304x1536 and 1440x960 pixels. It can save them in three file formats: TIFF-RGB, CCD-Raw and JPEG, which contains fine and normal compression modes.

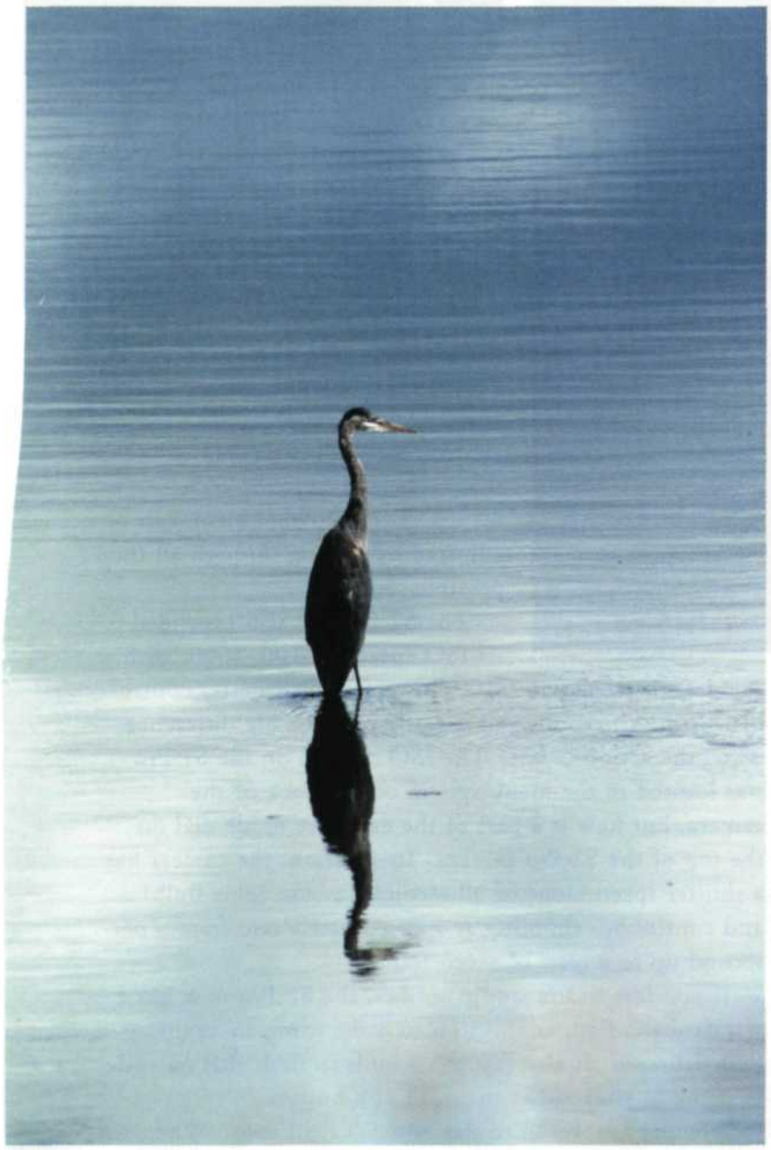
The actual chip size is 23.0x15.5 mm, which is less than half the size of a 35mm film frame. Since the chip is smaller than film, the focal length of your Nikon lenses will be approximately 1.5 more than indicated. A 100mm will now be 150mm, and a 500mm jumps to 750mm. You get the idea. This is a real bonus for photographers who like to use long lenses, but it limits the use of wide lenses. Photographers who were proud of their very wide 14mm lenses will only have the focal length capability of a 21mm film-camera lens.

A very nice feature that is carried over from the S1 Pro is the camera's ability to accept both SmartMedia and CompactFlash cards. If you really need to take a lot of images in one session, you can even use the IBM one-gigabyte Microdrive, which will store hundreds of images. You can download the images through the camera's internal FireWire or USB ports or via an auxiliary card reader.

For maximum control, the S2 Pro has four shooting modes: single frame, continuous, preview and multiple exposure. It also features four exposure modes: Multi Programmed, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority and Manual. The Multi Program allows maximum flexibility as you can rotate a control and change the combinations of apertures and shutter speeds, while still maintaining correct exposure. In addition, the camera features two custom white-balance settings along with preselected settings.

A new function on the same exposure dial is labeled CSM, and it allows you to customize many functions of the S2 Pro. You will have control over display illuminators, multi-exposure, close-subject focus, focus area selection, grid line display, self-timer, AE lock, and adjustments to an exposure bracket.

Left and below: Setting the S2 Pro for ISO 400 and the lens wide open provided a fast 1/3000 shutter speed for sharp results with hand-held long lenses (a 28–200mm zoom at 200mm for the photo at left; a 75–300mm zoom set at 299mm for the shot below). Normal JPEG compression at 4256x2848 pixels was used for all the images accompanying this User Report. Aperture-priority AE let us choose the aperture and coupled with Matrix pattern metering, produced excellent exposures. The image at left was cropped in Photoshop.



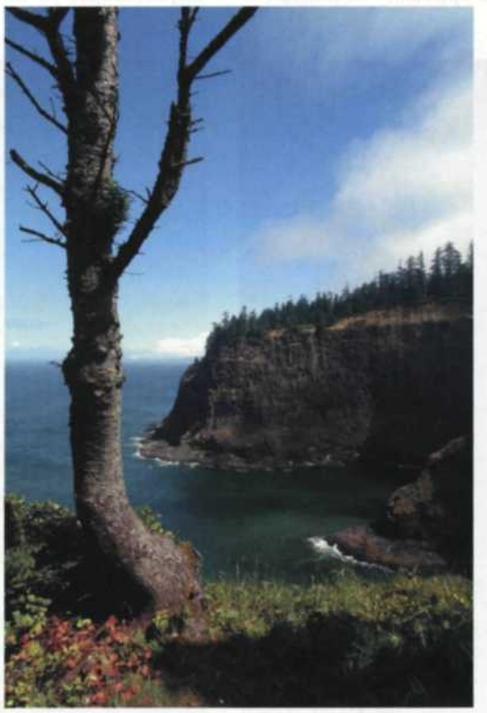
Specifications

CAMERA: Fujifilm FinePix S2 Pro
TYPE: Pro AF digital SLR
IMAGING ELEMENT: 36.49-megapixel 23.0x15.5mm Super CCD sensor; 6.17 effective megapixels
IMAGE RESOLUTION: 4256x2848 (interpolated), 3024x2016, 2304x1536 and 1440x960 pixels
IMAGE FILE TYPES: CCD-RAW (12-bit), TIFF (8-bit) and JPEG
STORAGE: Two slots; SmartMedia in Slot No. 1; CompactFlash cards Type II and Microdrives in Slot No. 2
LENS MOUNT: Nikon F bayonet
FOCAL-LENGTH CONVERSION FACTOR: 1.5X
FOCUSING: TTL phase-detection AF with 5 focus areas; Dynamic AF and Dynamic AF with Closest Subject Priority; AF range EV −1 to 19 (ISO 100); single-shot and continuous predictive AF modes, plus manual via focusing ring on lens
METERING: TTL Matrix, center-weighted and spot metering
EXPOSURE MODES: Shiftable program AE, shutter- and aperture-priority AE, metered manual
SHUTTER: Electronically controlled vertical-travel focal-plane shutter with speeds from 30 sec. to 1/4000 plus B
ISO SETTINGS: ISO 100, 160, 200, 400, 800, 1600
ADVANCE MODES: Single-shot and continuous (up to 7 shots at 2 fps)
FLASH: X-sync via hot-shoe and PC terminal; TTL flash with built-in flash and accessory Speedlights; maximum flash-sync speed 1/125
VIEWFINDER: Fixed eye-level pentaprism type with built-in eyepiece correction from −1.8 to +0.8 diopters
VIEWFINDER INFORMATION: Focus status, shutter speed, aperture, exposure status, metering system, AE lock, exposure mode, exposure compensation, frame count, flash status, multiple exposure, focus area, spot-metering area, on-demand grid lines
EXTERNAL LCD PANELS: Display all pertinent shooting data, other settings
LCD MONITOR: 1.8-inch TFT color LCD displays exposed images, setting info
SELF-TIMER: Electronic, 2-, 5-, 10- or 20-sec. delay (cancelable)
POWER SOURCE: 4 AA alkaline or Ni-MH batteries; AC for image-handling system via supplied adapter and DC coupler
DIMENSIONS: 5.6x5.2x3.1 in.
WEIGHT: 27 oz.
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: $2400
DISTRIBUTOR: Fuji Photo Film; 800/800-FUJI; www.fujifilm.com

Camera: Fujifilm FinePix S2 Pro
Category: AF digital SLR

AF Performance	★★★★★
Metering Performance	★★★★★
Feature Set	★★★★★
Ease of Use	★★★★★
Ergonomics	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★

Above: A feather from a Scarlet Macaw was photographed with a 105mm macro lens and SB-28 electronic flash. Exposure was 1/60 at f/32 with the camera set for ISO 100.
Above right: Increasing the camera's ISO setting to 800 gave us an exposure of 1/4000 at f/5, fast enough to sharply freeze this hummingbird hovering at a feeder. This image was enlarged in Photoshop.
Right: With the S2 Pro's 1.5X conversion factor, the 14mm lens used for this shot shows the field of view of a 21mm lens on a 35mm film SLR. ISO 100, 1/250 at f/6.7 (a benefit of digital shooting is that the camera stores exposure data with each image).
Far right: This handy dial lets you quickly choose an exposure mode, as well as set ISO and custom functions.



Several new controls have been added around the eye-level viewfinder. Previously, there was a diopter control for eyeglass wearers and an AE lock button. The S2 Pro has the same diopter control and AE lock, but has added the AF lock and controls for Matrix, spot, and center weight metering.

We have seen a lot of digital cameras in the last couple of years, and one of the best features in a digital camera is a separate LCD menu display. With most consumer cameras, these menus use the same LCD screen as the image display, and you have to toggle back and forth to make camera settings. Both the S1 Pro and the new S2 Pro use a rear display panel just above the LCD monitor.

This special display panel is controlled by the function button located to the left of the panel, and four individual control buttons situated below. When you turn on the camera, the menu will display the ISO sensitivity, date, time, shots remaining, type of memory media, and battery power. Pressing the menu function once will allow you to adjust white balance, focus-area mode, image compression, and image size. Pressing the function button again enables you to set the color control, tone adjustments, sharpness, and function lock menus. Each separate menu can be adjusted by cycling through all the possible settings.

The S2 Pro has also expanded its ISO speeds to 100–1600, with the default setting at 200. This gives you a better control of lighting situations and it really makes a big difference when the action is fast. The ISO control on the S1 Pro was located in the menu system on the back of the camera, but now is a part of the exposure mode dial on the top of the S2 Pro camera. In addition, the camera has a shutter speed range of 30 seconds to 1/4000 (plus Bulb) and continuous shooting at approximately two frames per second up to a total of seven frames.

If you like to use studio strobes, the S2 Pro now has a standard PC flash connection to make using an auxiliary flash a breeze. It also features a built-in flash that is ready to come to your aid at the push of a button.

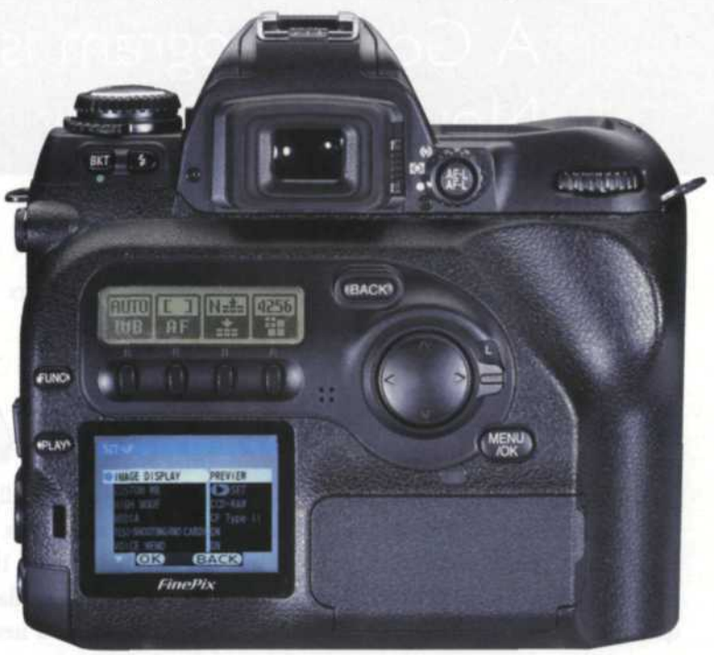
Now let's move on to the camera's field tests. When we

received the S2 camera, we were busily in the process of proofing our new Advanced Digital Camera Techniques book. As we sat at a picnic table proofing the copy, we had the S2 Pro with a 75–300mm zoom lens setting on the table, just in case. Sure enough, after about 10 minutes of reading, a brightly colored hummingbird came within a few feet, attempting to get some nectar from a feeder. We quickly picked up the camera, pressed the shutter button, and the 1/4000 shutter speed captured the full wing spread of the bird in flight.

A few seconds later, the bird returned and a second shot was captured as he hovered near the feeder. We were able to preview them on the large LCD preview screen and we got so excited, the book copy was quickly forgotten. We hurried into the office to download the images and take a closer look. We were amazed at the image quality as we zoomed in on a small section. Even though the ISO had been set to 800, the quality was still holding with no digital noise that was prevalent with early digital cameras shot at the higher ISO speeds.

We love to take nature images, especially macro. So naturally, our next test was with our 105mm macro lens. Because our 105mm was now closer to a 150mm macro, we could now go beyond 1:1 because of the increased focal length. We could get closer to the subjects without the aid of extension tubes. With the long lenses, our 300mm was really a 450mm, so bird photography was now within our reach. What a nature photographer's dream!

By the end of our camera review, we had collected thousands of images, and we tried just about every lens we owned. We were sold on the S1 Pro, but even more so on the Fujifilm FinePix S2 Pro. If you are considering taking the step into digital SLR photography, we highly recommend this camera. Suggested retail price is about $2400. To find out more about the FinePix S2 Pro, log onto www.fujifilm.com or call 800/800-FUJI. ■



Right: A separate LCD panel above the monitor simplifies many camera settings. The large color monitor displays images after exposure, and is used for additional settings.
Below: We set the camera to ISO 400 to get the necessary shutter-speed/f-stop combination to sharply record this low-light scene.