

CLEARING THE CONGESTION

The latest generation of CompactFlash (CF) and IBM Microdrive cards offer storage space of up to 1GB per card, a figure that would have seemed beyond all needs not too long ago. But camera resolutions have also grown at a rapid rate. The Fuji S2 Pro, for instance, needs 35MB per image if used in its highest quality TIFF mode, filling a 1GB card with just 28 images.

Such hefty storage demands beg for somewhere to put the images when the card is full. A laptop is one answer, but that's not always practical. A better answer is a portable, battery-powered hard disc, with one of the latest being the eFilm PicturePad from Delkin. Our test model provided 20GB of storage and sells for £600, although a 30GB unit is available for £700.

SIZE MATTERS

With dimensions of 146x82x29mm and weighing in at just 290g (with CF card and rechargeable 1400mAh Lithium-Ion battery), the eFilm PicturePad has been designed with portability in mind and fits nicely in the hand. The package also includes a belt pouch, USB connector, AV cable and remote control, which is used when the device is connected to a TV.

It took almost two hours to fully charge the battery, giving a little over two hours of continuous use. This is more than the



With the continued growth of digital file sizes, extra space is needed to store images and reduce card congestion. Andy Steel investigates Delkin's eFilm PicturePad, introduced to help remedy the problem

Option buttons work the functions listed at the bottom of the LCD screen – Settings, Options, Cancel, Menu and OK.

THE TEST

I used a 512MB CF Type II card, while the camera was set to

full resolution in and JPEG modes. The ePad will accept all of types, but you cannot files on the LCD es are displayed y – RAF (RAW), TIF I (JPEG) – ou have to view image ally before the tells you which y are saved under. ransferred by selecting rom CF Card' option u menu. Once e device indicates the files to be copied ard and, by default, it a new folder for the ese can be renamed if necessary.

It took 5 minutes and 43 seconds to transfer 14 high-resolution TIFF files that filled a 512MB CF card. This gives a writing speed of about 1.5MB per second. This is fast enough to supplement the needs of most photographers, although the number of images that can be transferred is limited by available battery power.

One gripe is that there's no timer on the screen, just a progress bar, making it difficult to tell how long a download will take. In addition, users cannot specify the number or type of image files they would like to transfer in one download: the PicturePad copies all files from the card. Stored images can be viewed full-screen or enlarged up to 4x using the zoom tool, and unwanted images can be selected and deleted. A memory gauge in the main menu displays the storage space remaining.

The device uses the native drivers in Mac OS 9.1 and later versions, so no additional software has to be installed. There are no drivers available for earlier Macs, so it can't be used

with these machines. PC users need to install the driver supplied in Windows 98/98SE.

CONCLUSION

The eFilm PicturePad will meet the demands of users seeking portable storage space, although limited battery power makes its full capacity unusable without a recharge. It will also appeal those who need to be frugal when viewing frames on their camera's LCD screen. However, it could be refined in number of ways, such as providing more control over image transfers and also better power-saving facilities.

Potential buyers may also like to consider other products soon to enter the market that have similar hard disc space and sell for less, but are designed with multimedia in mind rather than solely for digital photography. For example, the Archos Jukebox Multimedia has an identical storage capacity of 20GB, but sells for £400, which represents better value. We have yet to test this product.

The PicturePad is just the tip of the iceberg; expect a flood of new digital storage products now that image file sizes are growing at such a rate. ■

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