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Some sad bozos carry a portable telephone just so that they can say "Hello mum, I'm on the train". Or so they can drive their 4x4 with one hand very fast around corners, phone glued to their ear as they catch up on the office gossip. Except, that is, when their 4x4 gets into the outside lane of a dual
carriageway and the road climbs a gentle hill. Then these bozos seem determined that no other vehicle will ever be able to top the 25mph that their speed-challenged bloatmobiles are capable of without advanced notice.

Instead of a mobile phone they could be carrying a gadget that every Mac user should consider an essential piece of kit. Alongside a modem, scanner and printer, a digital camera has become de rigour. It's no longer a case of 'if' you get one but 'when'. The Fujifilm MX700 digital camera is so good that Apple could have designed it!

A cool £550 at Dixons buys you a neat little aluminum package about the size of a pack of cigarettes easily small enough to slip in a pocket. This little beauty will take pictures with superb image quality that seldom needs tweaking to improve. In highest quality mode the images will supply offset-litho print quality A5 pictures, lower resolutions give excellent pictures for on-screen viewing such as Web sites or catalogue work. See the section for anoraks below for full specifications.

Fuji supplies just about everything you will need in a joint Windows/Mac package. A CD and full set of cables for both computers allow you to connect the camera to a TV or computer and recharge its long-lasting Lithium-ion battery. The storage medium is a SmartMedia card - a wafer-thin solid-state
hard disk. The 2MB card accompanying the camera has space for between 2 and 22 images depending on resolution, larger cards are available.

There are three methods to get the images into a computer. The simplest being the Twain plug-ins and serial cable but Fuji also supply a Floppy Disk adapter that takes the SmartMedia card and allows it to be read (read only on a Mac) in the floppy drive. The best way to grab the images is either directly into the computer or to use a card adapter in a PowerBook's PC card
slots. For a heavy user this would be essential.

The accompanying literature and software are as good as the camera. Each part of the hardware and software has its own booklet written in plain English taking you step-by-step through set-up and usage. The software includes Adobe's PhotoDeluxe, a capable image manipulation package, plus
Fuji's own Flashpath, Picture Shuttle and EZtouch that control all aspects of camera operation and elementary picture enhancement. This even includes artistic filters, colour balance and sharpening.

Operating the camera could be confusing at first largely because of the breadth of features on offer. These are accessed by a brilliantly conceived multi-functioned button which coupled with the 4 x 3cm LCD screen gives access to the features. These range from zoom, control of the flash output and red-eye reduction, white point, exposure control, sharpening, picture resolution and amount of jpeg compression. The LCD or optical viewfinder can be used to take photographs and full manual control is easy to select and operate, as is the self-timer. A really fun feature is the ability to take up to 16 images in rapid succession. Fuji helpfully point out this could be used to capture a golfer's swing but it could just as easily provide the basis for Web animation.

This camera is a well-designed piece of kit that take excellent pictures rivaling cameras costing far more. It is easy to use and you want to carry it with you at all times. So far there has been nothing to fault it on except price. At many times more than a full-featured SLR camera you must really need a digital camera, have deep pockets or lots of pocket money. In my case it was the need to produce one-off images that couldn't be found in photo-libraries and with no time to process film and scan in the results. The Fujifilm MX700 performed flawlessly in poor lighting on automatic settings with a Mac user who believes devotedly in point and click as the only way.

Anoraks apply within:

Resolution: 1280 x 1024 or 640 x 480, 1.5 million pixels
File format: JPEG with three levels of compression
Storage media: SmartMedia (3.3v/5v, 2MB to 8MB)
Lens: F3.2/F8 (equal to 35mm)
Focus: Automatic, 9cm to infinity
Sensitivity: ISO 100
Shutter speed:1/4 to 1/1000 sec.
White balance: 5500K or 4-stage manual
Flash: Automatic up to 2.5m with 4 stages setting
LCD monitor: 24-bit colour
Output: Video and serial
Power: Rechargeable Lithium-ion, AC Power adapter
Dimensions (WxHxD): 80 x 101 x 33mm
Weight: 245g without battery
Microprocessor: RISC
Time to process image: 5 seconds (12 seconds with flash recharge)

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