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## Expert Guide to Sony's HDV camcorder

By **Kenny Hemphill**

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The Sony HD camcorder, the Handycam HDR-FX1 is being marketed by the company as 'world's first HDV 1080i consumer camcorder'. But at \$3,700, its price tag is stretching the consumer label somewhat.

However, there's no doubt the the industry sees HD video as a consumer format and prices will come down over the next couple of years. This Sony HD camcorder is just the start of what is sure to be an avalanche of HD camcorders from electronics companies over the next few months.

So, does this mean we can all look forward to shooting Hollywood-quality home movies in the future? Not quite. Although its true that some Hollywood fetatures, such as George Lucas' 'Star Wars: Attack of the Clones' are being shot in high definition video, its not the same high definition as is shot and recorded by these camcorders.

If you look again at that Sony quote, you'll see the important label, 1080i. If you're familiar with HDTV, you'll know that 1080 refers to 1080 lines of vertical resolution and the 'i' means the video is interlaced. 1080i is one of the two most common HDTV formats, the other being 720p (720 lines, progressive scan).

Hollywood HD movies are shot on another format, 1080p. This is higher quality than the other two, as it mixes the higher resolution with the better-quality progressive scan picture.

There is another important difference too. Hollywood HD is uncompressed, whereas the video shot by cameras like this Sony HD camcorder is compressed as MPEG-2. This compression inevitably lowers

the quality of the video stored on the camera's DV tape. However, it's necessary because the HDR-FX1 connects to a computer using a FireWire cable and FireWire, whether it is the 400 or 800 variety, doesn't have the bandwidth to transfer uncompressed HD footage. Even if it did, the sheer size of the files would make it impractical because of the large amount of hard disk space needed to store it and the processing power needed to edit it.

Another fly in the HD ointment is that, currently, very few applications are able to edit the footage from this Sony HD camcorder. However, that looks set to change, as Apple has already announced that the next version of its Final Cut Express and iMovie applications, due at the end of January, will be able to edit HD.

HD video will eventually become a common consumer format, when prices come down and editing software is able to work with it. However, until a compression format is found that can squeeze the data contained in HD without noticeably reducing the quality, there will be little benefit over current DV format camcorders.

Kenny Hemphill is the editor and publisher of

The HDTV Tuner

– a guide to the kit, the technology and

the programming on HDTV.

### **Expert Guide to DVD Camcorders**

**By Kenny Hemphill**

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Thinking about a mini DVD camcorder? You're not alone, it's a rapidly growing sector of the camcorder market, with Hitachi, Sony and Panasonic all making more than one mini dvd camcorder.

These camcorders differ from regular digital video cameras in one important way – they record video onto mini DVD discs, rather than DV tape. This has a number of advantages. DVD discs are more robust than tape and won't get chewed up in the camera. Although this is thankfully a rare occurrence, it scares me every time I hear a strange noise coming from my camcorder, so it's with bearing in mind.

The second advantage is that DVD discs are random access, compared to tape on which everything is recorded sequentially. This means that there's no need to rewind and fast forward to find the clip you're after, just select it from the menu. Some cameras even allow you to perform basic editing functions on-camera. An additional side-benefit is that a mini DVD camcorder doesn't have tape heads to get worn or dirty as happens in regular mini DVD cameras.

And thirdly, you can easily watch your home movies by removing the DVD from the camera and playing it in practically any DVD player.

However, there are negative factors to. The most significant one is that video is encoded as MPEG-2 on a mini DVD camcorder, as opposed to DV format. This means that it needs specialist software to edit – you can't just use your regular video editing program (unless it specifically supports MPEG-2). And if a Mac user you're out of luck, as there are no MPEG-2 editing applications for the Mac.

Also, mini DVD camcorders tend to cost more than similarly specified mini DV cameras. And the media is also more expensive. However, if you don't intend editing your movies and don't mind the extra cost, a mini dvd camcorder does offer extraordinary convenience.

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