

Canon RC-760 (1987)

Text and photos by Jarle Aasland

I wouldn't normally bother to pick up a Canon camera (not because I'm a Nikon fanatic, but because I can't collect everything), but I really wanted a Canon RC-701 and/or RC-760 to keep my original Kodak DCS and Nikon QV-1000C company.

First filmless SLR models from the three big names in professional photography.

I finally found my RC-760 on eBay in October 2005. Paid \$305, including an original 11-66mm f/1.2 lens, two Canon BP-7N batteries and the BC-60N charger. (Another bidder raised the price from \$127 to \$300, more than doubling my investment. I'm obviously not the only one collecting these old things.)

This camera was released about the same time as the Nikon QV-1000C, and both use the same 2" video floppy (VF) disks. Not surprisingly, you'll need a special reader to access such disks. Luckily, I can use the transmitter (i.e. reader) that came with my QV kit. Here's some QV info that also applies to the RC-760:

The camera uses a 2-inch video floppy disk capable of recording 50 or 25 images. The number of images that can be recorded on a floppy disk depends on whether the image is recorded in "field" or "frame" mode.

The field mode uses one track per image on the floppy disk and allows 50 images to be recorded on one disk. The field mode provides poorer resolution because there are less pixels per picture. The frame mode uses two tracks per image and allows 25 images to be stored on one floppy disk. The frame mode provides higher quality because more pixels per image are recorded.

«Smooth as silk»

The camera is in great shape. Similar to the QV-1000C (and most high-end camera equipment made in the 1980's), both the camera body and lens is very well built. Zooming and focusing is very, very smooth.



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«The SV-SLR cameras themselves, however, did plenty to reinforce the impression of solidity and endurance of the medium. They were, in every way, handsomely crafted instruments with a very solid feel. The Canon RC-701 and RC-760 (essentially the same camera, the later having the "high-band" signal that migrated from videotape formats like hi-8) to this day have the satisfying feel of a well-made instrument, while the focus and zoom rings of the special-built lenses are as smooth as silk. In materials and finish, the Canon SLR seemed every bit the equal of Canon's best 35mm. Novel for their possession of a flat top plate – Canon installed their viewfinder prisms in an inverted position – the cameras bristled with innovation and futurism.»

I completely agree.

I don't know how many RC units were made, but apparently it was a relatively popular and common camera compared to the much more expensive and rare Nikon QV-1000C.

USA Today began to cover special events with Canon Still Video cameras in 1987, when the paper published the first digital image on the front page of a US newspaper. According to Photo District News:

«Shot with a Canon RC-701 by staff photographer Tom Dillon, the images were taken at a World Series game in Minneapolis. Photo editor Frank Folwell was impressed with the transmission speed - he was viewing the images on his computer in Virginia 12 minutes after they were taken. But the technology still had a long way to go to meet image-quality standards, even for newspapers.»

According to another article (Seybold Special Report, May 19, 1993), quality wasn't the main issue:

«Resolution isn't the key. They can live with the still-video quality on a deadline event. One factor is cost, particularly given that papers would need to buy multiple units and that - as with anything digital - they would need backup.»

Another problem is that photographers don't like to give up the flexibility of film and film cameras. They know how to expose them. They like the larger field of view, plus the easier focusing. And they don't like ccd technology's noisy patterns in the shadows, or that it doesn't react well in low-light conditions. Lastly, digital images require a digital archive.»

From my own experience, I can confirm that the archive part was a real issue (and I guess it still is). One particular newspaper I know (I won't mention any names) bought a bunch of the first Nikon D1's and kept them locked into a closet since there was no digital archive in place. Took about a year (if I remember correctly) before the cameras were used.



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Canon RC-760 with a 11-66mm f/1.2 and Nikon's first still video camera, the extremely rare QV-1000C. The Nikon lens is a special 10-40 mm f/1.4 QV Nikkor. Unlike its competition, Nikon's first filmless camera would only capture grayscale (black and white) images. And -- it was also much more expensive than the Canon models.

Power problem

The eBay seller couldn't make the camera work (and clearly told so in the auction description), but I have a feeling it's only a battery issue. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to test this yet. The charger accepts 110V input only, so I'll need yet another gadget to power up the charger (or find a 220V charger). I measured the two batteries (the seller had charged them when trying to test the camera) -- the best one is now 4.27V -- it should be 8.4V.

I also asked the seller about the history of this particular unit:

«Regarding history, I purchased this from a software company that downsized and moved into a smaller building. The person in charge of selling off a bunch of items, indicated that this particular equipment was no longer needed by his company, because it was outdated, and they have since upgraded into newer higher resolution cameras.

I was advised that these were functional units, however, much to my dismay, it does not seem to power-up.»



operational (not that I plan to use it -- but as always it would be nice to take a few test shots).

The same shop can also modify the original 120V charger to accept 220V input. Good news, meaning I'll soon have a fully functional camera (I hope). With some luck, I'll be able to update this page with some sample photos later.

To be continued..



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Specifications

- Type: SLR Type Still Video Camera
- Sensor: CCD Image Sensor (600,000 pixels)
- Image Sensor Size: 2/3"
- Recording Format: Still Video Format
- Recording media: Still Video Floppy Disk

- Shutter: Focal Plane Type
- Shutter Speed: 1/2000[sec] - 1/8 [sec]
- Power Supply: Dedicated Ni-cd Battery Pack
- Dimensions: 162(W)X51.5(D)X101(H)mm
- Weight: 975g (without battery , Floppy Disk)

Further reading

Discuss old DSLR models in the vintage Nikon and Kodak [forums](#)

- [RC-760 in the Canon camera museum](#)
- [Digital SLRs: The Long and Winding Road](#)

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