Living with your Computer

Dealing with Dottiness: Part Two

In the first part of this article in the October / November issue, we considered what digital photographs are and how to get them into your computer and store them. In this second part we will concentrate on using the photographs and this often means manipulating or improving what you have taken.

Of course it saves work if you think before pressing the camera button. What are you trying to photograph; your friend? your friend and their friends? your friend and all the countryside for miles around? The best bit of photographic advice I ever heard was; "There are two things to remember in taking a photograph; firstly get in close and secondly get in even closer!"

Perfect Exposure

Although there is one perfect amount of light to achieve perfect exposure you can attain this either by choosing a slow exposure and a small aperture or by a fast exposure and large aperture. Does it matter which combination? Well it does actually. Most people can only hold a camera steady at no slower than 1/30 of a second. You will need at least 1/250 of a second to stop fairly rapid movement such as children running or water flowing over a weir.

Small apertures (think about the effect of squinting with your own eyes) bring things into focus in the foreground as well as in the background. Conversely if you choose a large aperture and focus on the subject's face you can get the distracting background deliberately out of focus. Don't always rely on the small flash which comes with cameras. If things are a bit gloomy turn up the speed of the camera (the ISO setting) say from the normal 100 or 200 ISO to 600 or even higher. This is like having a whole set of more sensitive films in your camera bag; another plus for the digital camera! You get to see the result straight away and can delete it if you are not pleased.

Working with your Photographs

By now you have some satisfying photographs on your hard disk and you want to work with them, typically to print some out or to send them by email so that a friend can see them on their computer monitor. Open the photograph in your photographic processing program or in the free program Picasa which I mentioned in the last article, obtainable by downloading from Google.

Most photographs, which I have to edit, can be improved in four areas. Firstly, in spite of the advice to get in close, they can usually be cropped more tightly around the main subject area. Secondly they are either too dark or too light or do not have enough contrast. Often programs have a setting called something like 'auto correction' and this will make a good attempt at correcting your contrast and even colour balance at one go. This is always worth a try as you can cancel the effect if you are not pleased. In Picasa you can adjust brightness, contrast and colour to make the result more accurate or just more creative.
The third area of dissatisfaction can be

Continued on page 51

some unnecessary detail such as a tree coming out of the subject's head. In this case you can remove the offending item by 'cloning' or taking some innocuous area of the photograph such as sky and painting it over the bit you don't want. However to do this you will need a more sophisticated photo-processing software such as Photoshop or Paintshop Pro. Finally a high proportion of photographs are out of focus. To some extent this can be improved by subjecting the picture to 'sharpening'. This can be done in Picasa. Strangely, in the more sophisticated programs, the facility to use for the best results is called 'unsharp mask' but it still makes things sharper!

Size Matters

Now you need to size your picture according to how you want to use it. Two useful figures to remember here are that printers can only work with 300 dots per inch so if you give them more to play with you are wasting their time and your own as you will be waiting around for enormous files to be processed. The other figure is 72 dots per inch which is all that you need for viewing on a monitor screen i.e. on the web.

All this means that, if you start with a jpg having 3,872 dots across the width, you can print it up to 3,872 divided by 300 or nearly 13 inches wide without losing any quality. Please do not send anybody a massive raw photograph file without resizing it, e.g. reducing the resolution to 72 dpi and the width to say 12 cms. This can cut the file down to a very reasonable size of around 225 kilobytes. If you send a 10 megabyte file to a friend, who does not have broadband, it can block their system for days until they work out how to clear things.

Don't Drive me Dotty!

Conversely please do not send me anything under about 500 kilobytes.
It will just drive me into dottiness trying to recover something of your favourite black cat photographed in a coal cellar at midnight using a mobile phone and what a shame that would be … you don't often see a cat using a mobile phone!

Alan Vickers

Unsung Heroes

The unsung heroes of our villages have to be the happy band who willingly drive so many people to the Oxford, Chipping Norton and Banbury hospitals or on short runs to the Wychwood Surgery; you name it they will get you there, always on time, even on that famous day when the rains came down!
One driver kept going despite the water getting deeper all the time, until, seeing a car ahead being helped out of really deep water, quickly turned around and found an alternative route to the hospital.
Driver and passenger still arrived in time for the appointment.
The drivers are prepared to leave home at 9am to go to the Eye Hospital and not get back home until 2:30pm or later. How boring must it be to sit and wonder how much longer an appointment can possibly take? They are our heroes, always cheerful. **Thank you** to you all.

A Grateful Patient

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer driver for the Wychwood Surgery please ring Vanessa Newman, Practice Manager on: 01993 831061 for further details.