

# GIZMO

## Big smile, please, for a little fibber

The latest cameras can slim people down, cheer them up and even make their holiday sunnier, finds Mark Harris

The camera may never lie, but new technology is enabling it to bend the truth occasionally. Some of today's smartest snappers can instantly rewrite history by cheering up frowning portraits, knocking a few pounds (or years) off loved ones and even adding a splash of continental colour to dull British skies.

If you're tired of taking pictures of a scowling teenager, for instance, Sony's new Cyber-shot DSC-W150 camera, which has just gone on sale, comes with Happy Face Retouch, an editing feature that locates and eradicates frowns at the touch of a button. Don't expect particularly convincing results, though, as smiling is about more than just curving the corners of your mouth, and when the rest of your face doesn't follow it can make you look as though you've overdone the Botox.

Equally aspirational is HP's slimming tool, an editing option on its

Photosmart R937 camera that takes a digital knife to generous waistlines. Again, the effect is more fun-house mirror than Harley Street surgeon, but visitors to your Facebook page won't know what you look like anyway.

Anyone who can't afford a personal make-up artist might instead consider investing in Fujifilm's FinePix F100fd camera. In Portrait Enhancer mode it smooths away annoying wrinkles faster than you can say "anti-ageing cream".

These features have become possible because of the increased computing power of modern digital cameras.

When you take a picture, processing chips go to work to hone colours and sharpen or smooth detail. Camera companies want us to be happy with our pictures — it's the best way for them to get us buying and using more cameras — and that doesn't necessarily mean producing a realistic depiction of what lies before the lens. Who wouldn't want their holiday



Alamy

snap to look warmer, their spouse younger and their kids happier? "We want our cameras to put emotion in images," admits Jeremy Gilbert, Nikon UK's marketing manager, "not just capture the cold, hard light of day."

The days of manually adjusting f-stops and shutter speeds are long gone, and the automatic program modes of cameras are getting ever more sophisticated. Several cameras (including models by Sony and Kodak) continuously analyse the scene in front of them. If they recognise trees and buildings, they'll emphasise sharpness and colour, while flowers may trigger

close-up focusing and faces will prompt flatteringly smooth reproduction.

In fact, some camera companies have decided we can't even be trusted to press the shutter. Cameras by Sony and Olympus now have a Smile Shutter option — you roughly frame a scene, then rely on the camera to trip the shutter when it detects that everyone is grinning.

So is the art of photography dead? "You're assuming that consumers want to make decisions in photography, and we don't think they do," Gilbert says. "Photography used to be a hobby.

Now recording your life is the requirement and photography is just part of that process."

HP is trialling advanced image manipulation technologies online, using the customer base of its internet printing website as guinea pigs. At www.snapfishlab.com you can try one-click solutions to wonky horizons, poor framing and much more. When these functions find their way into tomorrow's cameras, you could find yourself unable to take a bad picture, even if you wanted to.

Unless, of course, you forget to take the lens cap off.

★★★★★ KO ★★★★★ A-OK  
★★★ OK ★★ So-so ★ No-no

# GAMES



**Grand Theft Auto IV** ★★★★★  
Xbox 360, PS3; £50. Age 18+

Get ready for more carjacking and violence in the next instalment of the Grand Theft Auto (GTA) series — just leave your morals where you can't hear them scream. The game delivers the same heady blend of free-roaming adventure and casual brutality as before, but in a bigger and even more realistic arena. You

play Nico, an antihero lured by the American dream to Liberty City, a New York-like setting. The aim is to ingratiate yourself with the underworld through a wide variety of bad deeds, such as robbing banks. En route you can mow down pedestrians — or go bowling.

Gameplay is slick and innovations include the use of a mobile phone to contact other characters. The soundtrack is impressive and you can even choose what to listen to. As GTA has no linear plot, each game is a unique experience and it'll take weeks to complete. Up to 16 people can play online.

Grand Theft Auto IV is relentlessly fast-moving and looks great. It's still a winning formula, so fans will lap it up, but as the adrenaline rush recedes you'll be left with a nasty taste in the mouth. **David Phelan**



**SingStar Summer Party** ★★★★★  
PS2, PS3; £20. All ages

This is the latest edition of the SingStar series of karaoke games. You can play solo or challenge a friend to a sing-off. Grab a mic (sold separately for £20 a pair), pick a tune from a list of 30 songs and six medleys, then bawl along to the original video shown on your TV screen. The game

has barely evolved over the years but playability remains top drawer. Lyrics are displayed karaoke-style while coloured bars indicate notes and for how long to hold them. If a note is flat and you scramble up the scale to hit it, or if your timing is off, the game reveals this with excellent visual clues that don't require formal music-reading skills.

Even so, it's sometimes baffling why your performance of one line is judged "cool" and the next "awful" by the game's invisible judge. The songs range from Blondie numbers to those by more up-to-date chanteuses such as Amy Winehouse. A dedicated PS3 SingStar was released last year but Summer Party is better value as it boasts most of the features (albeit fewer songs) at half the price. **David Phelan**

gear@sunday-times.co.uk

## TECHNOLOGY NEWS

### GUIDANCE FROM ABOVE

**NDrive G800 sat nav £315**  
smartdevicesdirect.com  
0870 0272 127

This new sat nav replaces cartoon graphics of your route with the real thing. Rather than follow yellow roundabouts and purple roads on its 4.3in touchscreen, you can instead have your journey overlaid on genuine aerial photos. The maker says that the NDrive shifts automatically between four diagonal perspectives and a bird's-eye view to keep the navigation clear, regardless of the direction in which you're headed. It comes pre-loaded with maps of the UK and Ireland, plus speed-camera data. Bluetooth enables hands-free mobile phone calls, and there's an FM transmitter that can play turn-by-turn voice directions through your car's stereo. The G800 also has a built-in battery for pedestrian use. However, so far NDrive has full photo mapping for 29



only UK cities, including London, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Leeds, Glasgow and Sheffield. The G800 will be available to buy from the end of April, though it is initially exclusive to the website above.

### FEET OF NATURE

**Geox Alpha running shoe £100**  
www.geox.com  
020 7837 3592



These new running shoes are the first to have soles that breathe, allowing sweat to exit through a membrane while preventing external water or mud from creeping in. The membrane runs the full length of the shoe, and should keep active feet cooler and drier. Dry feet are less likely to suffer from blisters or fungal infections such as athlete's foot. And as the bacteria that cause foot odour also thrive in moist conditions,

there's a chance the Alphas could even prevent unwelcome smells. Of course, you need a running shoe to soak up shocks too, and the Alpha frames the membrane with an anti-slip polyurethane and rubber surround. The styling, though, is garish.

### SLOW-MO MAESTRO

**LG Secret KF750 (price to be confirmed)**  
www.lgmobile.com 0870 873 5454

LG's latest Black Label-series mobile breaks new ground for videophones. You can shoot your own videos at a blistering 120fps (frames per second), giving smooth slow-motion playback, then edit the clips and add an MP3 musical soundtrack (on the handset) before uploading your masterpiece to YouTube using the Secret's high-speed HSDPA mobile broadband connection. A 5Mp camera and LED-type flash give basic photo-taking capability but don't expect it to match a real camera. Its slim (12mm) carbon fibre casing should resist bumps and scrapes, although previous LG phones with similar touch-sensitive controls have been extremely tricky to use. The LG Secret will be available in shops shortly.



## DON'T PANIC

NIGEL POWELL ANSWERS YOUR TECH-RELATED QUERIES

**Q** When I try to open a PDF file in an e-mail, Internet Explorer opens up, even though I have Adobe Reader software installed. Can I fix this?

Paul Hepworth, York

**A** Yes, you can. The file association (or link) between the Adobe PDF files on your PC and Windows has become corrupt. The easiest solution is to uninstall Adobe Reader software (go to Start, Control Panel, Add/Remove Programs), then download the latest version from tinyurl.com/6ip and reinstall it.

You could also try the free Foxit Reader software instead from tinyurl.com/h9wx4 — this is a specific PDF tool for Windows that opens this type of file extremely quickly.

**Q** How can I change short films that I have taken on my digital camera from landscape to portrait format? I use Weatherall, via e-mail

**A** Most people prefer to shoot video in landscape format, as the footage is better suited to the shape of a television screen or monitor. If you want it in portrait format — for example, to display the clip on a digital photo frame — try the free Video Flip and Rotate Windows program from tinyurl.com/yuaw4a.

Download and install this tool, specify which video file you wish to rotate, and the program will convert the clip as required.

The software works fast and, more important, doesn't seem to enlarge the file size or degrade the image resolution too much.



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