

CAMERA REVIEW RRP \$29,695

Hasselblad H5D-50

A timeless classic gets a contemporary update. Words and images by Ewen Bell.



■ Fill-in flash unit and hot shoe is integrated into the HV 90x-II viewfinder



■ Cosmetic updates to the H5D include bigger buttons and expanded menu interface

MARKET LEADING QUALITY

The H5D-50's sheer sensor size and quality, paired with a tremendous selection of artisan quality lenses, is what sets this system apart in the Medium Format space.

H5D-200MS MULTISHOT VARIANT

The H5D-50 has one of the largest physical sensor sizes of any Medium Format camera, coupled with 50MP of resolution. There's also a multishot version that uses several 50MP frames in sequence, coupled with very fine repositioning of the sensor, to achieve extreme resolution and colour reproduction to output 200MP RAW images.

Buying advice

Yes, it's an expensive system – but it's also the standard to which all other cameras must now aspire. You truly get what you pay for.



“As stylish as the *Lady Penrhyn* may be, she lacks the technology to keep pace with Hasselblad”

The Hasselblad H5D is the latest update of a classic camera system, a subtle round of technological refinements to an already impressive design.

Inside the controlled environment of a studio, the image quality of the Hasselblad lenses and bodies is well known. When we got a close look at the latest HD5-50 model, we chose a less constrained scenario with which to test the system's flexibility: in the open spaces of an airfield hangar, we brought together a classic design with the Hasselblad's latest.

The De Havilland Dragon Rapide was our chosen subject, an elegant aircraft bristling with technology that predates both the current Hasselblad H-system and its predecessor, the V-system. This particular aircraft was recently restored with the help of very little new technology, the original engine and cockpit graced with just a few modern improvements that go beyond the 1930s design.

Updates to the H5D have seen far more progress.

Most of the refinements in the new Hasselblad range go to the speed and handling of camera operations, with a snappier feel to the system in use and faster processing of files during capture. The improvements are incremental rather

than revolutionary, changes that don't translate into higher frame rates or more pixels, just more productive operation on the job and more confidence with focus.

There is room for improvement at the back of the camera, with connectivity limited to Firewire and the display being adequate but not amazing. It's clear that Hasselblad have put their best technology inside the body rather than dangling off the rear of the sensor.

Focus on the lens

When working with fine detail captures, the True Focus II system is one of Hasselblad's most significant features – and has been updated to give better response and a confirmation signal to the photographer. True Focus works by sensing movement in five directions and calculating very subtle adjustments to the autofocus, thereby keeping your target correctly in focus as you recompose a shot.

Battery life is excellent and during our shoot we were surprised at just how little juice was sapped with a full afternoon of captures and reviews. In the field the H5D-50 offers plenty of creative freedom without having to worry about conserving power. But it's the large and faithful sensor itself, fed by a superb range of quality digital lenses, that makes the H-series so appealing. »

» DETAILS

Website: hasselblad.com.au

Sensor: 128 seconds maximum to 1/800th of a second minimum

Sensor: CCD 50MP measuring 36.7mm x 49.1mm

Sensitivity: ISO range from 50-800

Display: 3 inch TFT with 460k pixels

Captures: 3FR RAW Image at 16-bit at 1.1fps

Autofocus: Single focus point with True Focus II technology

Connectivity: Firewire 800

Storage: Single CF card with UDMA support

Body: Magnesium Alloy with improved weather sealing

Dimensions: 15.3 x 13.1 x 20.5cm

Weight: 2.29kg

» VERDICT

The same high standard of image quality in a more refined package with better autofocus support and snappier operation.

» RATING

9/10



■ Taxiing to the runway
H5D-50; HCD 24mm lens;
1/160sec; f/4.8; ISO 200

WHAT WE THOUGHT Love it:

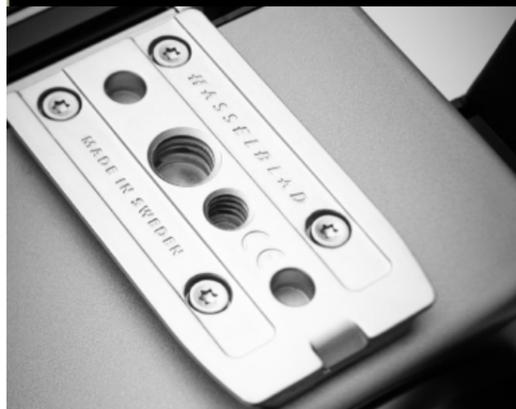
✓ Simply the best image quality you can hold in your hand.

Like it:

- ✓ Seriously solid build quality.
- ✓ Simple and reliable operation.

Loathe it:

✗ Rear display could use more pixels, more brightness and a touch interface.



Not all Medium Format cameras offer anything like a 5x4cm sensor, most sitting partway between that and a DSLR full-frame sensor. The H5D-50 has a 50MP sensor measuring 36.7x49.1mm, delivering 16-bit images with the most accurate tonal and dynamic range that money can buy.

Hasselblad describe the 50MP sensor as having a 1.1 crop factor when shooting with older lenses. Shooting with the HC 35mm f/3.5, this sensor effectively delivers a field of view equivalent to 38mm on a pre-digital model. (For added confusion, this equates to a 24mm DSLR lens). Attach the latest digital lens such as the new HCD 24mm f/4.8 and you get exactly what it says: the full 24mm perspective. (Which is equivalent to 17mm on a DSLR full frame.)

It's a minor difference but it demonstrates Hasselblad's intention to stick with the HCD format as a moniker of their best lenses for the latest sensors.

Phocus on the desktop

The pairing of digital lens technology with the latest refinement of the Hasselblad sensor is extended off-camera to the Phocus software package that ships with every system. This dedicated toolkit for manipulating H-series RAW files is strong on correcting lens aberrations and delivers the essentials for converting captures to a useful image.

While the RAW images are still on-camera, the H5D uses a space-efficient

file format called 3FR. Once transferred to the desktop, they're imported and rewritten as FFF files. Why the second format for the same capture? FFF files are designed to encapsulate data and edits to the image without destroying the original RAW information.

A full history and reversible chain of edits are stored in the FFF file, along with any additional metadata, colour profile matching and lens correction data. When shooting tethered to Phocus, the images appear directly within the application as an uncompressed FFF file, whereas shooting to CF card employs the smaller footprint of 3FR files.

Recently Adobe have done a deal to add Lightroom support for the H-series digital backs, and every H5D also comes with a copy in the box in addition to Phocus. The additional flexibility and features in Lightroom are backed by an extensive level of lens correction data as well, but your edits and metadata are handled in the conventional manner of Lightroom instead of the unique approach already pioneered by Hasselblad.

Hasselblad have gone to great lengths to make tethered shooting as practical as possible, as this model will most often be used in a controlled light environment. A Firewire 800 port on the digital back is sturdy enough to pick up the entire unit by the cable without it slipping, and delivers fast file delivery to your disk. »

DEEP DISH

50MP sensor is interchangeable and can be used with electronic shutters on other view camera systems.

DIGITAL WIDE

Hasselblad's new HCD 24mm f/4.8 is designed with the latest sensors in mind.



HISTORY OF HASSELBLAD

- 1841 Hasselblad family business begins.
- 1888 Hasselblad becomes Swedish distributor of Kodak Eastman products.
- 1933 Dragon Rapide was first designed by De Havilland
- 1953 Hasselblad 1000F was released
- 1957 Hasselblad 500C released (first of the V-system models)
- 1976 Hasselblad sold to an investment company
- 2002 Hasselblad H1 is released (first of the H-system models)
- 2013 Hasselblad H5D is released

“It's the most refined Medium Format system money can buy”



■ Matter of scale
H5D-50; HCD 24mm lens;
1/80sec; f/4.8; ISO 200



LADY PENRHYN

Built for the RAF during the war in 1944 and came out to Australia in the late 1970s. It had a crash in England, nosed over and damaged the propellers. It was deemed to be uneconomical to repair. Maurice Rolfe decided otherwise and embarked on a 30-year effort to bring the *Lady Penrhyn* back to her former glory. The frame is timber with fabric covering with a finish of silver paint, giving the appearance of something very solid when in fact it's light and thin.

Airfield testing

Taking a new Hasselblad into a large and cavernous aircraft hangar provides very poor light conditions, and the ISO range of the camera is immediately tested. We evaluated the H5D-50 without additional flash equipment or controlled lighting. That's right: not so much as a reflector to fill in the odd cool spot.

At the maximum sensitivity of ISO 800, the Hasselblad performs well and delivers good dynamic range while keeping noise under control. Remembering that these Medium Format-scale sensors are designed around image quality rather than flexibility, the ISO 800 restriction on the H5D-50 is actually pretty good. Storage to CF cards was painless and practical in the absence of tethered shooting.

In choosing the Hasselblad for this photo session, I wanted the most suitable camera to document the aircraft and its restoration, with the most amount of detail possible. A 1944 built Dragon Rapide, freshly restored as a work of dedication and affection for the engineering of the day, deserves the best possible image quality. The quality of the work is what I wanted to capture, along with the man who made it all possible.

I wanted a visual record of Maurice Rolfe and the Dragon Rapide named *Lady Penrhyn* that would do justice to them both.

■ Sleek lines
H5D-50; HCD 24mm lens;
1/100sec; f/4.8; ISO 200

LIGHTROOM INCLUDED

The full range of creative tools are packaged with the H5D-50.



High lights

Our shoot day began with overcast skies and soft light, but the last few minutes of the day saw a little sunshine appear below the clouds. The combination of great dynamic range and excellent lens optics delivered ideal shooting conditions for just a very short burst. Even at 1.1 frames per second the H5D was fast enough to make the most of the moment, with a standard of image quality equal to the restoration work at hand.

The HCD 24mm lens proved the perfect choice, a remarkably straight wide angle lens with a very broad field of view. In the tight conditions of the aircraft hanger, it proved an attractive camera system to work with – while the long lines of the DH89A wingspan could be tamed without distortion.

In the years since the Dragon Rapide first took to the skies, we've seen the birth and rebirth of the Hasselblad brand. The H5D-50 retains some classic appeal that we recognise from the days of the 500C, but this latest refinement is very much the best of class in the digital age.

As stylish as the silver finished *Lady Penrhyn* may be, she lacks the technology to keep pace with Hasselblad, inside or out. Fortunately the craftsmanship and style behind the restoration effort has now been well documented for future generations with the help of the current generation H5D.

RETINA IN PHOCUS

Version 2.7 of Phocus introduced support for Apple's Retina display. Lightroom offers more tools compared to Phocus, but doesn't take advantage of the FFF format for embedding your optimisations and fine-tuning.



“This Hasselblad H5D is the benchmark against which all others will be compared”

LEAF SHUTTERS

Larger sensors create a technical challenge for high-speed shutters, and dragging a shutter up and down the focal plane is often a clunky exercise. Hasselblad decided that leaf shutters placed in the lenses are the key to reliable photography, and so have done away with the focal shutter entirely.

OPEN VIEW

Choice of eye-level or hip-level viewfinders can be attached to the body.

Conclusion

This is simply the most refined Medium Format system that money can buy. The H5D is a milestone in the history of Hasselblad, representing a very mature set of lenses and sensors coupled with the new body. The key to value in Medium Format photography is quality, and the H5D is the benchmark against which all others will be compared.



■ The True Focus system has been updated and improved