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Nikon Coolpix S4

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At a Glance

- **Release date:** September 14, 2005
- **Editors' rating:** 6.6 Good
- **Average user rating:** 7.7 Very good
- **The good:** Simple operation; face-recognition autofocus; excellent red-eye prevention; time-lapse capabilities.
- **The bad:** Few manual controls; limited shutter-speed range; movie clips at only 15fps.
- **The bottom line:** The Nikon Coolpix S4 resurrects the company's classic swivel-lens design with modern touches, including lots of scene modes and in-camera fixes for common problems. Image quality and performance seem a bit old-fashioned, however.

CNET editors' review

Reviewed by: David D. Busch

Edited by: Lori Grunin

Reviewed on 11/17/05 Release date: 9/14/05

Veteran digital shooters waxing nostalgic for the [Nikon Coolpix 900 series](#) will cheer for the Coolpix S4's resurrection of the swivel lens after nearly three years. The S4 comes in a more compact package, with 6-megapixel resolution, a 10X zoom lens, a 2.5-inch LCD, and Nikon's signature ease-of-use features. But a lack of manual controls makes this compact snapshot camera a poor choice for shooting indoors or on the soccer field.

Design of Nikon Coolpix S4

Although the Coolpix S4's shape is reminiscent of earlier Nikon swivel-lens designs, it looks positively Lilliputian next to a classic [Coolpix 995](#). At 4.4 by 2.7 by 1.5 inches and 9 ounces, the

silver-toned Nikon Coolpix S4 is smaller than the 990 by a full inch in every dimension and weighs a little more than half what its digital Dark Ages ancestor did.

Family resemblance aside, this newest swivel Coolpix is an ultramodern implementation of the design. You compose and review on the 2.5-inch LCD; there's no optical viewfinder at all. And, instead of using a flip-up flash, Nikon places a tiny speedlight on the swivel section, immediately adjacent to the lens.

The lens-swiveling action is a big plus for those who hanker for a self-portrait or want to shoot from waist level or overhead. The lens module rotates while the LCD remains facing you. In reverse-view mode, the image flips vertically so that the display remains correctly oriented. The LCD is large enough that you can mount the camera on a tripod and preview the image while photographing yourself using the self-timer.

The Nikon Coolpix S4 requires two-handed shooting. The most comfortable one-handed grip causes the right thumb to obscure the right two-thirds of the LCD; using two hands makes it possible to poise an index finger over the top-mounted shutter release and still manipulate the concentric zoom lever. Nikon also crams a microphone, a speaker, an on/off switch with power light, and a sliding mode switch (recording, scene selection, and movie) atop the right-hand section.

The back panel, not much larger than the LCD itself, has four buttons and a four-way rocker switch that navigates menus and controls the self-timer (left), the flash options (up), and the macro mode (down). The button array adjusts display-info options, deletes the current image, activates the menu system, and shifts into playback review. With this minimalist set of controls, you'll need to visit the menus to change exposure (plus or minus 2EV in 1/3EV increments), white balance, ISO sensitivity, and other settings. The well-designed menus are divided into a two-page shooting menu and a four-page setup menu, both with large, easy-to-read text and highlighting.

Features of Nikon Coolpix S4

The Nikon Coolpix S4's 10X zoom lens is its most compelling feature, as most superzoom cameras are a bit heftier. Nikon emphasizes telephoto with its 38mm-to-380mm (35mm-camera equivalent) range, sacrificing a wide-angle perspective. Still, the lens autofocuses as close as 1.6 inches in macro mode, and you can choose from center, multipoint, or automatically selected focus zones.

Like other cameras in Nikon's S series, this one's features favor ambitious snapshooters who crave lots of options but want to make few major decisions. For example, you can take time-lapse photos, create panoramas, shoot close-ups, or select from 16 scene modes, letting the S4 handle the vexing details.

The scene modes take care of the most common shooting situations. There are five for night photography alone (Night Portrait, Sunset, Dusk/Dawn, Night Landscape, and Fireworks Show); others include Portrait, Landscape, Sports, Party/Indoors, Beach/Snow, Close-Up, Museum, Copy,

Back Light, Panorama Assist, and full Auto. Several scene modes include onscreen overlays that help perfect compositions for portraits or landscapes.

The scene modes are the best way to customize your shots because the Nikon Coolpix S4 has no manual focus or exposure controls other than exposure compensation; manual ISO (ISO 50 to 400), white balance; and color options, including Vivid, Black and White, Sepia, and Cyanotype (blue). The 256-segment matrix metering system chooses from five f-stops between f/3.5 and f/13.5 and exposures between 2 seconds and 1/1,000 second.

Nikon's signature features include Face Priority focus, which is especially fun to use the first time you try it. In this mode, a square happy face appears on the LCD. When a human face comes into view, a set of brackets chases it around the screen, constantly maintaining focus on the facial features.

You'll also want to explore the Coolpix's in-camera fixes. These include Best Shot Selector, which takes a series of up to 10 pictures and saves only the sharpest or best-exposed version; an effective in-camera red-eye-removal tool; and D-lighting, which can brighten inky shadows in a murky or high-contrast shot and save a copy of the resulting image. You can set the Interval (time lapse) feature to take a shot every 30 seconds to 60 minutes.

The Nikon Coolpix S4 has 13.5MB of internal memory, good for just four full-resolution shots. Nikon positions this as an emergency feature, useful when your memory card fills--sort of like the backup gas tank on '50s-era cars without a fuel gauge. Plan on buying a Secure Digital (SD) memory card when you purchase this camera.

Despite the generous amount of power available from the AA cells this camera uses, the electronic flash is good out only to 10 feet (ISO unspecified). You can choose from flash off, fill flash, auto, auto with red-eye reduction, and slow sync. While you can choose between single and continuous autofocus for your image-stabilized 640x480 movie clips, you'll be shooting movies at a jerky 15fps.

Performance of Nikon Coolpix S4

The Nikon Coolpix S4's performance results were pretty average. It took 2.5 seconds to awake from its slumber and capture an initial shot. Thereafter, it could snap images every 2.8 seconds, slowing to a lethargic 5.6 seconds with the flash. The camera maintains a continuous-shooting speed of 1.1fps, whether at full resolution or at a low resolution of 640x480 pixels. However, at full resolution, the S4 could grab just six shots before its buffer filled, while shooting a virtually unlimited number of frames at low resolution. We snapped 66 photos in 60 seconds before shutter-finger fatigue set in.

Shutter lag was middling at 0.8 second under high-contrast lighting, and the red focus-assist light helped this Nikon maintain a similar pace under more challenging low-contrast conditions: we clocked a lag time of 0.9 second.

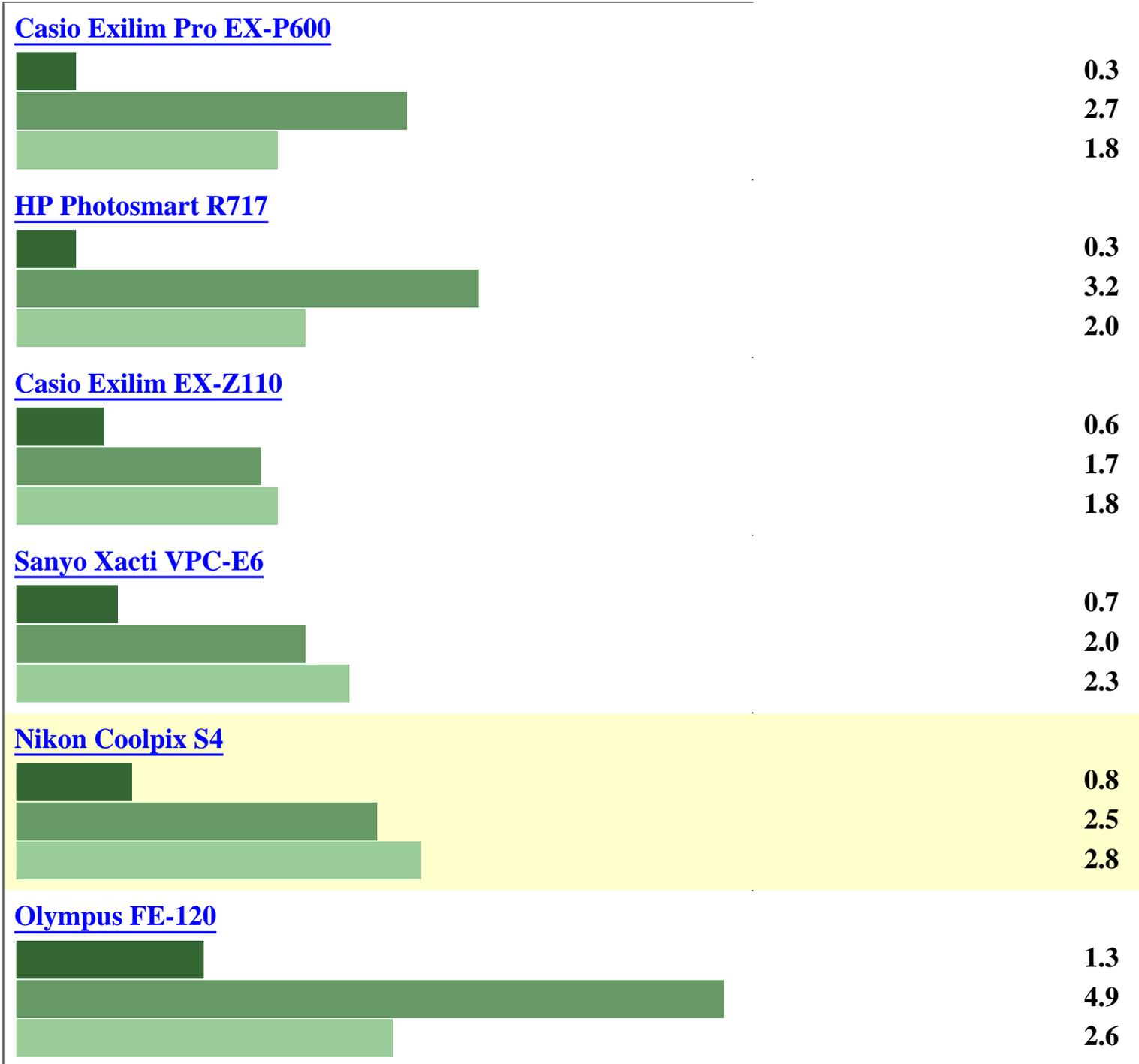
The large, brightness-adjustable, 110,000-pixel LCD provides only 97 percent of the actual field of

view when composing images and 100 percent during picture review. The screen was usable outdoors under all but the brightest conditions, and it offered an acceptable view indoors under dim illumination. We saw some ghosting, however.

Shooting speed in seconds

(Shorter bars indicate better performance)

■ Shutter lag (typical) ■ Time to first shot ■ Typical shot-to-shot time



Typical continuous-shooting speed in frames per second

(Longer bars indicate better performance)



	3.3
<u>Sanyo Xacti VPC-E6</u>	
	3.0
<u>Olympus FE-120</u>	
	1.2
<u>Nikon Coolpix S4</u>	
	1.1
<u>Casio Exilim EX-Z110</u>	
	0.7
<u>Casio Exilim Pro EX-P600</u>	
	0.6

Image quality of Nikon Coolpix S4

The Nikon Coolpix S4's overall image quality was good for a compact 6-megapixel camera. It produced even exposures and was not easily deluded by backlighting, whether or not we were using the D-lighting option. Digital cameras inevitably show blown highlights, but the S4 did better than most in this department, rendering detail in shadows and fluffy clouds within the same photograph. Chromatic aberrations were worst at the extreme telephoto end of the scale; cyan fringing was the most notable problem.



Unfortunately, the Nikon Coolpix S4 produced some of the noisier photos we've seen lately, with visibly noisy shadow areas at settings as low as ISO 50. The camera lacks built-in noise reduction.

The combination of preflash and in-camera red-eye scavenging did a virtually perfect job, despite the flash's proximity to the lens. Our flash shots of humans showed white catchlights in the eyes and no trace of red pupils.

Basic Specs

Product Specifications:

Product Description: **Nikon Coolpix S4 - Digital camera**

Product Type: **Digital camera**

Dimensions (WxDxH): **4.4 in x 1.5 in x 2.7 in**

Supported Flash Memory: **SD Memory Card**

Integrated Memory: **13.5 MB**

Sensor Resolution: **6 megapixels**

Effective Sensor Resolution: **Video:**

Shooting Modes: **Frame movie mode**

Focus Adjustment: **Automatic**

Min Focus Range: **11.8 in**

Focal Length: **6.3 mm - 63 mm**

Red Eye Reduction: **Yes**

Microphone: **Microphone - Built-in**

Viewfinder: **None**

Display: **LCD display - TFT active matrix - 2.5 in - Color**

Supported Battery: **2 xAA (Included)**

Product Basic Spec:

Video input type: **Digital camera**

Digital Zoom: **4 x**

Sensor resolution: **6 megapixels**

Optical sensor size: **1/2.5 in**

Optical sensor type: **CCD**

Gross sensor resolution: **6,400,000 pixels**

Still image format: **JPEG**

Lens Aperture: **F/3.5**

Optical Zoom: **10 x**

Camera Flash: **Built-in flash**

Exposure metering: **Spot , Multi-segment**

Exposure compensation: **±2 EV range, in 1/3 EV steps**

Display type: **2.5 in LCD display**

Battery type: **- Alkaline**

Weight: **0.4 lbs**

Buying choices

for **Nikon Coolpix S4** from online stores:

\$199.99 - \$399.95

[Authorized stores:](#)

RitzCamera.com

[\\$199.99](#) | In stock: Yes

[See prices from 1 authorized store](#)

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