

# technopolis

Cruise the highways and rat runs of Gizmo City with the grand wizard of gadgetry, Jonathan Margolis.



## SONY HDR-TG7VE

I make no apology for this month's page being so photography dominated. It's August. If you're not on holiday, you should be, and if you are, you should be taking lots of photos and videos. As Mr Kodak used to say, "Memories are made of this." And as Mr Simon and Mr Garfunkel also rightly said, "Preserve your memories; they're all that's left you."

This newest camcorder from Sony, the HDR-TG7VE, isn't much bigger than a pack of cigarettes but can pack six hours of full HD recording onto its 16GB of internal memory. (If you need to shoot more you can slot in one of Sony's irritating Memory Sticks.) At just 117mm x 30mm x 62mm, it's made of titanium and has a solid, metallic feel. A big, thumb-sized button dimpled in the centre with a knurled surround for zooming in and out acts as an ergonomically pleasing mission control. To the left of this is a nice firm button to select still or video operation.

So to the TG7VE's grooviest second-rank feature. This is one of the first camcorders with GPS. Steady on, you think, is that sort of incongruous, like, I don't know, a hi-fi having a bilge pump? It does seem a little odd, but the automatic geotagging, is clever, especially for holidaymakers, because it gives you the chance to check on a map where your video was taken.

No longer, then, that years-later syndrome where you watch hours of charming footage, but have no idea which country, let alone which town it portrays. Nope, automatic geotagging sounds like silly fallage, but it genuinely enhances the value you get.

About £800, Google for best prices, and see [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk) for information.



## POLAROID TWO

It's funny the ways we react to technology. Decades ago, when photography involved something called "processing", Polaroid cameras seemed like a 21st-century miracle come early. My father, who was a film fundamentalist, wouldn't allow a Polaroid in the house even though I nagged incessantly to try one out. Some of our flashier relatives and a lot of American visitors to our house had Polaroids and I was entranced by the mysterious process of peeling various layers off those film packs and watching the image appear on a previously white sheet of paper.

My father's anti-Polaroid argument was that the photos were rubbish, which they were. I also recall him saying the Polaroid film packs were full of cyanide, and if you didn't scrub your hands after using them you would die horribly, which was complete rubbish. I think the old man's more trenchant objection was actually that Polaroid photos cost 75 p each or something, which for those who don't recall the days of pounds, shillings and groats was about three times my weekly pocket money. Whatever, I never got to do the peeling thing myself and Polaroids retained a mystique for me. Once I could afford to get my own Polaroid stuff, it had disappeared from local shops, as cheap, swiftly developed colour prints had arrived.

Polaroid has continued to exist as a company, of course, although not one that's ever figured much on my tech radar. So it was with little more than curiosity that I wandered up to its stand in a remote pavilion at the Berlin IFA show, one of the big gadgetry trade events, last summer. Its reps

were keen to show me a little portable photo printer, the Pogo, which came out last year, but had never fascinated me particularly. Then one of the chaps mentioned that some time they would be releasing a Pogo printer and camera combined. Now this did excite me. "So you're saying," I reasoned in my slow way, "that you've reinvented the Polaroid camera?" And yes, he was indeed saying just that.

For months afterwards, I harassed Polaroid for news of the relaunch, and here, at last, it is. And even in an age when we can take thousands of superb photos for free on a thing the size of a credit card and view them in brilliant quality without needing to print them out, I have to say the Polaroid Two is kind of magical.

It's neither tiny nor huge at 11.8cm x 7.6cm x 3.7cm, and packs a mere five megapixels. The prints that issue forth from it are necessarily tiny, too, at a wallet-sized 3in x 2in in old money. And they take nearly a minute to appear. And, although charming, they're not exactly Samuel Cooper miniatures. Yet I can't stop loving the new Polaroid.

It's just very cleverly conceived and designed. One of the worst things about the original Polaroid was having to go through the motions of "processing" even dud shots. With the Polaroid Two, you take your photo, check, correct and crop it on the built-in screen, and only then print. The printing, furthermore, requires no ink. If you don't want to print a shot, you can transfer it to a computer and deal with it as you would a normal digital photo.

Amusing, novel gadgetry, then, which will entertain by the pool and at parties - even though I still can't explain why instant prints seem as miraculous, if not more so, than they did in the 1960s. £230, from [www.firebox.com](http://www.firebox.com) with 10 sheets of paper. Extra paper, £1795 for 70 sheets.

## LIQUID IMAGE UNDERWATER DIGITAL CAMERA MASK

This is the neatest underwater camera I've seen in a long time. Why it's almost exclusively available from this (excellent) website, I don't know, because it's of remarkably good quality, especially for the diminutive price, and of flawless, thoughtful design - and would have been enough to have kept any of my children (not to mention me) happy for days on a beach holiday.

Made in a universal size that fits children of eight-ish to adults, the combined swimming mask, video and still camera provides the proverbial hours of fun. It works down to 5m depth, which is plenty, since the natural light is unlikely to be usable deeper than that. The internal memory isn't up to much, but with a cheap 2GB Micro SD card slotted in you'll get space for thousands of photos, or 52 minutes of video.



£70, from [www.cutebitz.com](http://www.cutebitz.com), 020-3286 7414.

## RICOH CX1

I was thinking of ceasing my on-banging about Ricoh until I saw this little guy in Tokyo and heard that it was being released here too. Ricoh is big in Japan, where it's niche and professional-ish without being expensive.

Ricoh's new CX1 has many of the pro-photographer on-hols features of its pricier Ricoh brothers, but is a real press-and-shoot camera. The killer feature is its Dynamic Range Double Shot Mode for scenes in which there are bright areas and dark areas and you have to make a choice between which to expose correctly for.

DRDSM gets over the problem by taking two photos effectively at the same time with one exposed correctly for the dark area and one for the light. The camera then combines the two still images with their different exposures, and records a single photo which looks oddly lifelike. This mimics the processing in our brains which also manages to combine light and dark and "see" a unified scene. It's a great holiday camera, given the contrast-heavy nature of most holiday photos. Don't expect to pick one up last-minute at the duty-free as the camera is niche, and not generally found on the high street or in department stores. About £280, Google for best prices, and see [www.ricohcx1.co.uk](http://www.ricohcx1.co.uk) for stockists.



## SILLY STREET

For this month's mandatory dose of daffness, I finally diverge from the photographic to a piece of glorious tat which is still as summer-holiday-flavoured as it gets. The remote-controlled VW Camper Van is as useless a piece of entertaining rubbish as it's possible to imagine, but managed to amuse me from the moment I saw it. I know, I know, it will not be winning the Nobel Prize for Gadgetry any time soon. It's endearingly kitsch, with stickers depicting views of 1960s smelly-socks alternativeness on the windows.

Yet such sloppy gadgetry somehow adds to the gimmick's hippie-esque charm. A perfect gift, both in this holiday season and in the run up to - eek! - Christmas for anyone (and almost any ex-Earls Court Aussie of a certain vintage) who enjoys regaling you with tales of the Summer of Love and their adventures touring Europe on 3p a day in a beat-up Volkswagen van. £20, from [www.gadgets.co.uk](http://www.gadgets.co.uk), 01923-750 075.



how to spend it