SIGMA SIGNALS EXCITING NEW DIRECTION

AP INFORMER

Insider news and analysis from latest photographic shows

PMA 2010

Samsung predicts 50% share for micro-system cameras within three years

MARKET SHIFTS TOWARDS MICRO-SYSTEM CAMERAS

MICRO-SYSTEM cameras were the main focus of attention at this year's Photo Marketing Association trade show in the USA. Although there were no new market-ready cameras unveiled, their development was the subject of a large number of discussions and interviews.

It is clear that the digital camera market is undergoing a significant shift towards mirrorless digital cameras that accept interchangeable lenses and have electronic viewfinders (EVFs). In fact, Panasonic has already achieved a 9.4% share of the interchangeable-lens camera market with its G-series of cameras. Furthermore, Seung Soo Park, Samsung's vice-president, strategy marketing team, digital media, believes that mirrorless, interchangeable-lens cameras will account for 50% of the market in three years' time. No surprise, then, that Samsung should use PMA to unveil five new lenses for the NX system, to complement its 14.6-million-pixel NX10.

GOOD FOR THE MARKET

Even manufacturers such as Nikon, that have a comprehensive range of DSLR cameras and no micro-system models, claim that the move is good for the market as it will draw in new photographers. However, as Nobuaki Sasagaki, Nikon's general manager, marketing department, indicates, the DSLR manufacturer will keep a very close eye on developments and consider introducing its own micro-system models.

It is noticeable, though, that the first micro-system cameras have come from manufacturers that have struggled to make a serious impact on the DSLR market. According to Richard S Pelkowski, Olympus's DSLR product manager, USA, Olympus is focusing on its Micro Four Thirds system at the moment. He suggested that although the full-sized Four Thirds system will continue, reflex DSLRs could disappear within 24 months.

Since Panasonic launched the Lumix DMC-G1 in September 2008 Olympus, Ricoh and Samsung have also brought out micro-system cameras.

Sony's Masashi Imamura introduces a prototype of the company's first micro-system camera, which will have an APS-C-sized CMOS sensor

MICRO FOUR THIRDS LENSES FROM SIGMA

SIGMA will produce Micro Four Thirds lenses in the future, according to CEO Michihiro Yamaki and chief operating officer Kazuto Yamaki, as they believe that micro-system cameras are set to be an important segment of the market. There is currently no time frame for their production, but Michihiro Yamaki expressed a desire to introduce small, fixed-focal-length optics with large maximum apertures. The Yamakis also confirmed Sigma's desire to produce a compact camera along the lines of the DP1 and DP2, but with interchangeable lenses.

Nissin's Four Thirds and Micro Four Thirds-compatible Di466

MICRO ACCESSORIES TO PROLIFERATE

AS THE micro-system camera market grows, accessory manufacturers will come on board and offer compatible devices. Nissin, for example, has introduced a white version of its Di466 flashgun that is compatible with Micro Four Thirds cameras such as the Olympus Pen E-P1.

DOES SONY PROTOTYPE HOLD CLUE TO NEW SMOOTH MOUNT?

IT IS possible that Sony is gearing up to present a new concept in lens mounting with its forthcoming Alpha mirrorless camera system. If the prototype body on show at PMA is anything to go by, the new system is set to have no mechanical locking mechanism and the lens throat is completely smooth. It may simply be that Sony doesn't want to reveal the actual mounting method yet, but when demonstrated by Masashi Imamura during a presentation, the Sony US imaging president just snapped the lenses on and off the body without twisting them – as though they are held in place with a magnetic system.

The lenses on display alongside Sony's concept camera had no markings to indicate how the lens should be orientated in the mount, suggesting that it may be possible for the lens be snapped on at any angle. Bayonet systems usually require the lens to be offered up to the camera at a specific point and then rotated to lock them in place. A simpler 'snap-on' system that avoids accidental mis-mounting could be very attractive to novice users, who are the main target audience for the concept camera.

Speculation that Sony has developed a new mounting system is further fuelled by the fact that the word 'secret' was just visible on a label stuck to the rear cap of one lens on the shelf of the Sony display cabinet.

Although at present it is only at the concept stage and there are very few details available about the camera, Sony plans for it to go on sale this year. No firm dates were given, but with the biennial photokina show taking place in September, an autumn arrival seems likely.

Intriguingly, Sony's concept camera has a completely smooth, bayonet-free lens mount

FLD glass used in latest range of mass-market optics for improved performance

SIGMA INTRODUCES FLD GLASS

OPTICAL performance is now the highest priority, according to Sigma's chief operating officer Kazuto Yamaki (pictured above left with CEO Mishihiro Yamaki), and although the company reportedly has no specific pixel count in mind, the new raft of lenses are claimed to be more than a match for the resolution of current DSLRs. This desire for improved performance has led Sigma and Hoya to work together to produce the new FLD ('F' Low Dispersion) glass, which is claimed to have the aberration correction and reduced dispersion properties of fluorite without the weight and at a more affordable price.

Although Sigma has used FLD glass before, it has only appeared in bespoke lenses produced for specific applications. Three of the latest batch of five lenses from Sigma feature two or more FLD elements, and this is the first time the manufacturer has used the glass in a mass-market optic.

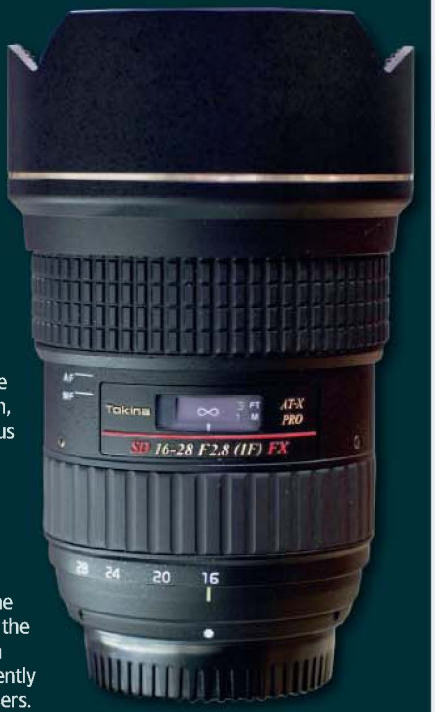
While the new 8-16mm f/4.5-5.6 DC HSM has four FLD elements, the 17-50mm f/2.8 EX DC OS HSM and 70-200mm f/2.8 EX DG OS HSM have two each. The FLD glass was not considered necessary for the new 85mm f/1.4 EX DG HSM, and could not be slotted into the existing design for the 50-500mm f/4.5-6.3 DG OS HSM, which, like the 70-200mm f/2.8 EX DG OS HSM, adds Sigma's Optical Stabilizer system to an existing optic to extend the safe handholdable shutter speed by (Sigma claims) up to four stops.

LENS HOOD DESIGN

Sigma has also rethought how lens hoods are used. Two of the new optics, the 70-200mm f/2.8 EX DG OS HSM and 85mm f/1.4 EX DG HSM, which produce an image circle that covers full-frame sensors and 35mm film, are supplied with an adapter that is designed for use when the lenses are fitted on a APS-C-format camera. This provides added protection for the centre portion of the image circle of the lens that is important with smaller format cameras.

An adapter isn't necessary, or practical, with very long telephoto optics like the 50-500mm f/4.5-6.3 DG OS HSM, as the light rays enter the lens at a narrower angle than they do with shorter focal-length lenses.

TOKINA TO RELEASE WIDE ZOOM



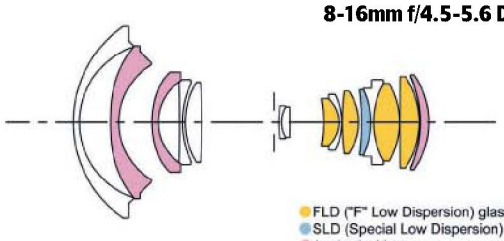
TOKINA is set to introduce a 16-28mm f/2.8 zoom (pictured) for full-frame digital cameras at the end of the summer, according to distributor Kenro. The ATX-Pro-designated lens will feature an internal focusing system, and a push/pull AF/MF focus ring action. The lens will be produced in all popular mounts, including Sony Alpha. All Tokina lenses will now be available for Alpha users, Kenro's Paul Kench told AP, including the 11-16mm f/2.8 zoom and the forthcoming 16.5-135mm f/3.5-5.6 ATX, which currently is only on sale for Nikon users.

CAMERAS GET BAGS OF SUPPORT

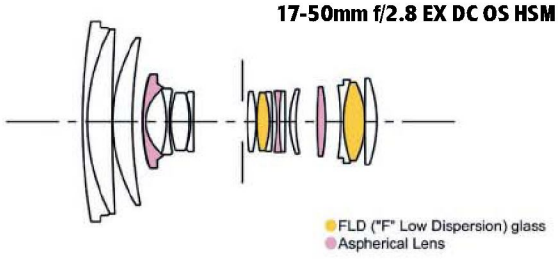
A NEW series of bags with built-in camera supports could be about to make life easier for photographers keen on hiking. The new ClikStand series from Clik Elite comprises three bags, each with a built-in powder-coated aluminium frame that tips forward onto its pull-out stand. A pair of bars (or feet) can also be swung out to give the pack extra stability. The extending mounting bar can be pulled up to almost double the height of the pack and a threaded mount provides an attachment point for a camera, a tripod head or a lighting head.

While the ClikStand bags provide support when they are on the ground, the BodyLink Telephoto Pack (pictured) has an extendable camera support that can be used with the bag across the photographer's chest. The bag can hold a DSLR with a lens mounted and may be worn as a rucksack on the back or chest. Visit www.clikelite.com for details.

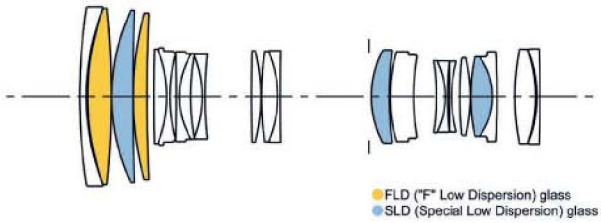
8-16mm f/4.5-5.6 DC HSM



17-50mm f/2.8 EX DC OS HSM



70-200mm f/2.8 EX DG OS HSM



HASSELBLAD LAUNCHES TRUE FOCUS

A NEW focusing system that automatically corrects shift in recomposed images is set to come to the aid of wide-aperture Hasselblad users. Called True Focus, and incorporated into the company's new H4D camera, the system is designed to compensate for the shift in focus that occurs typically when a central AF point is used to focus on a part of the subject and then the image is recomposed. Often, when a shallow depth of field is in use, the focus plane will swivel as the camera is tilted and will fall behind the desired focus point. True Focus uses a pair of sensors in the camera body that can detect the angle of camera movement after the original act of focusing and, using lens, aperture and subject distance information, then determine the amount of focus compensation that will be required.

The Hasselblad H4D is available now in 40 and 50-million-pixel versions, with kit prices starting from £14,500.

NIKON REVEALS FUTURE PLANS

WE CAN expect to see many new lenses from Nikon during 2010, according to Nobuaki Sasagaki (pictured left), the company's marketing department general manager, who was talking about Nikon's plans in an exclusive interview with AP's Damien Demolder and Angela Nicholson. Although there will be lenses to satisfy those who have been requesting fast, wideangle optics, this isn't the sole focus of Nikon's attention. We can expect a range of lenses, with both fixed-focal-length and zoom optics being planned.

When quizzed about the inclusion of Vibration Reduction (VR) technology in the new 16-35mm VR f/4 G ED VR, Sasagaki said that VR was now advanced enough to make it of benefit to wideangles optics. He claims that it enables the camera to be handheld at shutter speeds as low as ½sec when the new lens is mounted.

Although Nikon is leading the way with low-light capability and noise control in its DSLRs, this is just one area that Nikon is working on. According to Sasagaki, Nikon is aiming to make its DSLRs more versatile. When asked how high, in theory, sensitivity settings could go, he said he didn't know, but if users demanded it Nikon will push higher than the ISO 102,600 maximum of the D3S. However, with compact cameras Nikon aims to 'inject more fun' so users get more enjoyment out of their Coolpix camera photography. There will also be DSLR and Coolpix models with Wi-Fi capability in the near future.

Image quality comes at the top of the list of requirements for high-end Nikon compact cameras, followed by small size, low weight, a good level of control and a raw shooting mode. A wideangle lens is a common request for the higher end compact cameras, but Nikon doesn't consider a model with a larger sensor a priority.

MICRO-SYSTEM CAMERAS

Sasagaki also told us that Nikon is watching developments in the world of Micro Four Thirds and micro-system cameras closely, and a small mirrorless camera with an EVF could be considered in the future. However, this is just one option that is being considered and the manufacturer is making advances in producing smaller DSLRs with optical viewfinders.

Enthusiast photographers targeted with sub-£400, ten-million-pixel model

SAMSUNG UPS BRAND WITH TOP-END COMPACT

SAMSUNG'S desire to be taken seriously as a camera brand took a theoretical step in the right direction at the recent PMA show, with the announcement of a high-end compact camera aimed squarely at enthusiast photographers. The Samsung EX1, due out in April priced £399, will feature a super-fast maximum aperture, raw capture, dual-image stabilisation and a swivel screen. A maximum aperture range of f/1.8-2.4 in a 24-72mm Schneider-Kreuznach-labelled zoom lens is certain to attract attention, as will the 3in AMOLED articulated screen.

The camera will be fitted with a hotshoe on the top plate that will be compatible with the SEF42A and SEF20A flash units launched to accompany the NX10. The larger-than-usual 1/1.7in sensor bears more than a passing resemblance to that used in Canon's PowerShot G11, with ten million pixels and VGA video recording.

Samsung will be hoping that the retro styling and high build quality will help the brand span the gap between its usual compact market and the sub-DSLR micro-system camera market it is approaching with the NX range of interchangeable-lens bodies. Since the GX series of DSLRs, Samsung has not had a top-end product, and the company wants to establish credibility in the enthusiast market ahead of further developments in the NX series.

To bolster the NX system, the company also announced a further five lenses to bring the list of NX optics to eight. The new lenses include a 20mm f/2.8 pancake and a 60mm f/2.7 macro, which will appeal to more advanced users, as well as three zooms – a 20-50mm f/3.5-5.6, an 18-55mm non-OIS f/3.5-5.6 and an 18-200mm OIS f/3.5-6.3.

CAMERA RESOLUTIONS TRIGGER LENS IMPROVEMENTS

MANUFACTURERS are having to improve the optical performance of their lenses to meet the demands of high pixel-count cameras now that 24-million-pixel models such as the Nikon D3X, Sony Alpha 850 and Alpha 900 are available. In addition to the introduction of performance-enhancing FLD glass elements by Sigma, we are set to see improved optics from Tamron and Nikon, with Tamron planning to improve the glass in its lenses over the next year.

In an interview with AP's Damien Demolder and Angela Nicholson, Nobuaki Sasagaki, Nikon's marketing department general manager, said that Nikon will be putting a lot of effort into its lenses over the coming year and that we can expect to see a new range arriving. In addition, some lenses will be followed by camera firmware upgrades to enable them to apply the correct level of vignetting correction.

Sigma CEO Mishihiro Yamaki told AP that the company's novel FLD glass will appear in new lenses as optics are introduced. He went on to say that two of the biggest optical problems are ghosting and flare, which are caused by light bouncing around inside the lens or even reflecting off the sensor surface. Although lens coatings can go some way to combating these issues they are just one option, as internal baffles and extended lens hoods can also help cut out stray light.

BACKLIT SENSORS BEAT NOISE

'BACKLIT' imaging sensors are increasingly being employed to help reduce imaging noise in cameras. In use in current models from the Canon, Casio, Fuji, Nikon, Samsung and Sony ranges, backlit sensors are effectively sensors that have their structure vertically reversed so that the sensitive areas of the device sit closer to the surface while the wiring and support components sit below. With less to block the passage of light, these sensors are claimed to be twice as efficient at gathering light than normal sensors, and in theory produce half the amount of noise at any given ISO setting. Sensors seem limited to ten million pixels and the CMOS type at the moment.

At PMA Samsung launched the EX1 (see above), which uses a backlit CMOS sensor.

FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHER WHO HAS EVERYTHING...

MINI SD PROJECTOR

SUNPAK USA is introducing an SD card-compatible mini-projector (see picture, top) that is designed to go in a pocket or a camera bag. With a brightness of ten lumens it rates alongside the Nikon Coolpix S1000pj camera projector, but is powerful enough to make an image of up to 40in across the diagonal. The unit has a built-in two-hour battery, 128MB of internal memory, a 200:1 contrast range and VGA resolution. It is available now at $250 (around £165). At the time of writing we couldn't find the UK distributor.

FORE!

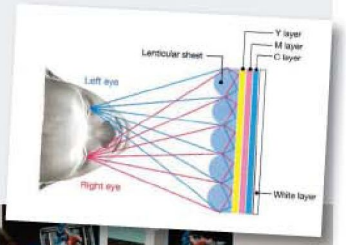
A GENIUS idea for photographers who also love golf, the LogoJet Express 24 allows printing onto plastics, wood, metals and ceramics, and comes with a tray that holds up to 24 golf balls (see picture, above left). Custom software allows images to be cropped and placed over virtual balls on-screen and, once the balls are treated with a sizing spray, the pictures are printed with oil-based inks onto the balls. Including printing and drying, the process takes about ten minutes. The downside is that the printer costs $10,000 (around £6,600), but it's great fun all the same. Visit www.logojet.ca for more information.

ANNIE, GET YOUR CAMERA

A RANGE of leather handmade camera cases and holsters (see picture, above right) was on show at PMA made by US company Skytop. The cases, which fit to belts or hang on their own straps, are made from 'premium full-grain leather' and come in a series of designs to fit specific camera models. The company offers holsters in brown or black finishes, and with hand-worked patterns for an extra charge. A new range of material-clad EVA vinyl cases will be available from the end of the summer. Prices for leather cases start at $282 (around £186). Visit www.cameraholster.com for details.

3D PRINTER IN ACTION

FUJIFILM'S forthcoming dye-sublimation printer, which is designed for its 3D camera system, will print onto clear sheets of plastic lenticular material, according to Katsuya Makioka (pictured below), from Fuji's product planning division. Due to arrive in the UK this summer, a dummy of the printer was on show at PMA. Printing on the clear material, the printer will apply the usual cyan, magenta and yellow inks, but with the addition of a white layer to create a base. The finished prints are slightly transparent and will be able to be displayed backlit. As well as printing images from 3D cameras, the printer and software are designed to create composites of normal 2D images on a 3D background. Fuji expects the machine to be used mostly by event and theme-park photographers, but AP hopes a domestic version will eventually become available.



RICOH UNVEILS DEVELOPMENT PLAN

RICOH is committed to making a success of its GXR system. This was the message spelt out by Kazunobu Saiki (pictured right), Ricoh Europe's general manager, in an exclusive interview with AP's Damien Demolder and Angela Nicholson. In addition to announcing two lens units that will go on sale later this year (see *News*, AP 13 March), Mr Saiki told AP that he considers a minimum of one extra lens unit and one functional unit (for example, a projector or hard drive) every six months to be essential in maintaining the GXR system. Also, Ricoh will not be limiting itself to in-house technology for the functional units and is consulting other manufacturers about developments.

A lens unit that contains a sensor and a lens mount, perhaps to accept Leica M, Micro Four Thirds or Pentax K-mount lenses, is also being given serious thought. Saiki stated that a full-frame camera unit is technically possible, but it would be expensive.

Saiki explained that Ricoh is investigating devices that could extend the functionality of the system,

and hard disk, printer and projector units that attach to the GXR back are already under study. A remote-control unit, using wired or wireless technology, is also a possibility.

Saiki believes the GXR system is a viable alternative to both DSLR and Micro Four Thirds cameras, and that it provides a solution for those who want a small, light camera. He sees the fact that the lens is built specifically to work in harmony with the sensor in a sealed, dust-free environment as a key benefit. He also believes that making the operation the same regardless of the camera unit in use is something many photographers will appreciate.