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By:

[The Battle of Zooms, Part 1](#)

Prosumer category

In the times of analogic cameras, when digital photography was just a nice dream, a 10X or 12X zoom meant a humongous lens, with a weight that required supplementary means of support, the photographer being required to carry impressive weights for the different tasks he had to accomplish. This fact is also valid today in the case of digital and analogic SLR cameras. But this article will not focus on SLR, instead we will approach the prosumer segment with zooms equal or bigger than 7X (200mm, 35mm equiv.) The cameras belonging to this segment have given and will give amateurs the chance to tackle a wide range of photographic areas, these models being the only ones capable of covering almost the entire range of focal distances and a wide range of manual settings: aperture, exposure, bracketing, flash and exposure compensation, the light metering method (spot, evaluative, center-weighted) and many others. Let's start with the beginning and see which are the pioneers of this category. Although, we would have expected to see the first over 7X zoom coming from Canon, Konica-Minolta, Olympus or Nikon, we were surprised to find out that the first type of camera was produced by Sony in 2000. Its code-name is FD-91 and not only did it have the longest zoom of that time, but also the longest zoom ever. FD-91 has a lens capable of an incredible 14X zoom and unlike many cameras today, it also has stabilization system (Steady Shot technology). Other specifications are: 800,000 pixels, apertures ranging from 1.8 to 11, ISO 100, manual focusing, etc.; the cameras from the Mavica series have a more unusual storing medium: floppy disk. Shortly after this model, the Japanese producer launched FD-95, whose zoom was reduced to 10X and the sensor's resolution was increased to 2.1MP. The 10X Mavica series was completed by the MVC-CD 1000 which gave up on the floppy and implemented a CD unit. Sony got a response from Olympus who launched in December 2000 C-2100UZ. The camera has a 10X zoom, also stabilized, apertures ranging from 2.8 to 8, exposure times of up to 1/800 and 114,000 pixel LCD. In 2001, Canon joined the long-zoom crowd and launched the model Pro90 IS which has a 10X, image stabilizer, an effective resolution of 2.6MP and apertures ranging from 2.8 and 8, focus ring placed on the lens and compact flash storage. Canon Pro90 IS is also the first camera that has a swiveling TFT display. In 2001, Minolta debuts the first cameras from this category: Dimage 5 and 7. Both cameras have a 7X zoom, apertures ranging from 2.8 to 9.5, exposures times ranging from 4s to 1/2000, manual focus via "focus by wire" ring at rear of lens barrel, 300 segment metering and compact flash storage. The only difference between the two models is the sensor, which in case of Dimage 5 it has 3.14MP, while the Dimage 7 has 4.92MP (effective resolution). By studying the design of the two cameras, one could observe a technological evolution: the devices no longer have the lens fully enclosed, the producers adopting a new optical system which extends the lens in front of the camera. In this way, the new products have significantly reduced dimensions. Clearly 2001 was a decisive year for extended-zoom prosumer cameras, in March, Olympus launching C700 UZ, touted as the smallest 10X zoom camera ever produced. Unfortunately, miniaturization has its disadvantages, C-2100UZ's descendent giving up on optical stabilization, autofocus lamp and the 1.8 inch TFT. Another reproach that can be brought to C700 UZ is related to the sensor, which is the same 2MP solution used on the C-2100UZ. In 2002, Minolta, building on the success of Dimage 7, launches Minolta 7i which is essentially the same camera, except for some features: the possibility to use filters and a new flash control mode. The same year, Olympus launches C720 UZ with an effective resolution of 3MP and an 8X optical zoom. Unfortunately, manual focusing and image stabilizing are missing. If up until then, Nikon had not been a player on this market segment, in May 2002, it launches a

model with state of the art features. Code-named Coolpix 5700, the camera boasts a 5MP effective resolution and an 8X optical zoom. Aside from the possibility to manually set everything on this camera, Coolpix 5700 allows the user to save in RAW format, being one of the first models that offer this feature. The only reproaches that can be brought to this model are the absence of the autofocus lamp and the complicated structure of menus. If you want to read the second part of our long-zoom history, click [here](#).