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## **DIGITAL CAMCORDERS DELIVER CONSISTENT QUALITY AT AFFORDABLE PRICES IN *CONSUMER REPORTS*' TESTS**

*CR Outlines the Various Recording Formats; Details Ratings and Buying Advice*

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YONKERS, NY — A few short years ago, the major decision for camcorder buyers was which format of analog tape to choose. Today, few analog models remain and nearly all camcorders on the market are digital. To help buyers sort through the new choices that come with this new generation of video technology, the inaugural November Electronics issue of *Consumer Reports* offers timely advice on more than two dozen models, outlines the various recording formats and offers buying advice for shoppers.

The Sony DCR-TRV260 (\$350) is identified as a *CR Best Buy* in the all-new Ratings featured in the issue.

Compared to the camcorders of a decade ago, today's models are generally much smaller and offer a host of new features, not all of which are worth having. *Consumer Reports* advises that even though several

models offer functions beyond video – taking still photos, for example – it's preferable to look for products that handle their main task well.

When shopping for a digital camera, *CR* recommends that consumers first choose a recording format:

- **TAPE** - MiniDV tape is the most prevalent, and D8 uses the same tape as Hi8 analog recorders. Tape, and the cameras that use it, are the most economical. Tapes can be reused but deteriorate over time if not cared for or stored properly. There is no random access to selected scenes, and the camera is needed for playback.
- **DVD** - Small DVDs (3 1/4-inch) come in either a reusable format (DVD-RAM) that doesn't work with all players, or a one-time format (DVD-R) that works in most. The discs and the cameras that use them are more expensive than tape-based models, but users can randomly access scenes the way they do with pre-recorded DVDs.
- **Memory cards** - These are used in smaller recorders, and their capacity is smaller as well. They're best suited to small video clips, and image quality is not generally as good as with digital tapes or DVDs. The cards are reusable, and it's convenient to transfer video to a computer's hard drive. However, because of their lesser performance, the *CR* Ratings in this issue do not include any card-based camcorders.

Once the format is chosen, *Consumer Reports* recommends that shoppers consider the following:

- **Check the size, weight and controls.** Try a unit in the store and make sure it fits your hand, and that the most frequently used controls—the zoom control and the record button—are easy to find. Try changing the tape or DVD, as well as replacing a battery, to see how convenient those processes are, and if you’re going to use a tripod, make sure it doesn’t interfere with any of those functions.
- **Consider supersizing the display.** Most camcorders have a flip-out LCD viewer about 2.5 inches across diagonally. Larger displays can add about \$100 to the price tag, but the easier viewing may be worth it. Make sure the viewer on your model isn’t susceptible to glare and remains viewable under bright sunlight.
- **Think about the lighting.** While performance outdoors or in brightly lit rooms is seldom a problem, consider whether you’ll want a built-in video light that can improve your results when shooting close-ups in dimmer spaces.
- **Don’t forget about old tapes.** While the majority of today’s models are digital, *Consumer Reports* Ratings include two analog models, the Hi8 Sony *CCD-TRV128* and the *VHS-C* Panasonic *PV-L345D*, that can play the tapes you’ve shot over the years. An alternative would be to have your analog tapes transferred to DVD by a professional service.

While LCD viewers, full-auto modes, “quick-review” buttons and built-in lights are useful features to have, *Consumer Reports* advises that other features are less vital. Audio/video inputs and microphone jacks are “nice but not necessary,” still-image capture features usually fall short of what dedicated still cameras can provide, and exaggerated zoom ranges usually go beyond the camcorder’s optical capabilities and rely on digital zoom, which comes at the expense of image quality.

The *CR* Ratings of 26 digital camcorders and two analog models take into account picture quality, ease of use, image stabilization and audio quality, and track the availability of several popular features.

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***Consumer Reports’ inaugural November Electronics issue contains a 24-page section devoted to ratings, recommendations and buying advice for a wide range of digital electronics products including LCD and plasma high-definition televisions, digital cameras, camcorders, MP3 players, digital video recorders and much more.***

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The November 2004 issue of *Consumer Reports* will be available October 5 wherever magazines are sold. To subscribe, call 1-800-765-1845.

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