




### On the disc

Load up the *Digital Photographer* cover disc to view a selection of test shots captured by our reviewer

# Hasselblad 503CWD

**SRP PRICE £8,250** Classic retro design meets high-resolution digital technology: is Hasselblad's tribute to its founder more than just a pretty face?

 The Hasselblad 503CWD has all the style and charm of a traditional Hasselblad medium-format camera, coupled with the awesome power and functionality of the manufacturer's high-quality digital back.

Limited to just 500 units, the Hasselblad 503CWD has been developed to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Victor Hasselblad, sporting chrome details and Victor's engraved signature on the camera body and back. There's no denying that this camera looks stunning. Underneath the beautiful skin of the 503CWD, beats a powerful heart: Hasselblad's first-class digital back with a 16MP

■ **[Below]** The 2.2-inch screen hides the true quality of images, but is fine for checking exposure

square-format sensor, ensuring that anyone fortunate enough to own one of these magnificent cameras has the means to create truly spectacular photographs.

The price of one of these cameras is steep, but if you have the spare cash, the 503CWD is guaranteed to bring a smile to your face. Out in the field you feel privileged to be using the camera, and the retro aesthetics and handling make shooting with it a real joy. We also found that it's a bit of a head-turner, attracting inquisitive and

admiring glances from people of all ages. You're not just getting a great camera; you're buying a piece of history and a real conversation starter.

The digital back, with its 16MP square-format sensor, stores images as 3FR files for lossless image compression, saving 33 per cent more storage space than other file formats. 3FR files can also be converted straight to DNG (Digital Negative) for further processing in Photoshop. Image files have a full set of metadata attached to them, including capture conditions, keywords and copyright, helping to safeguard your images and keep track of any alterations made.

The Instant Approval Architecture is a fantastic tool for quickly categorising your images while you're shooting. Images are automatically assigned a green, amber or red status by the camera, which you can choose to modify using a dedicated button on the digital back or on your computer screen as you go along. You can then review images according to the tag they've been assigned. Great if you've got a client waiting to view your shots and you only want them to see the very best ones.

The 503CWD offers flexibility when it comes to storage solutions, with a choice of shooting to a CompactFlash card, to the optional Imagebank, or tethered to a PC or Mac. FireWire 800 output ensures speedy performance in the studio and, if you're out in the field, the 2.2-inch OLED screen is a formidable tool. It offers a wide viewing angle and performs well in bright conditions, although it could perhaps be improved further with an anti-reflective coating. The colours it reproduces aren't always entirely accurate, yet it's excellent for inspecting sharpness and the histogram provides a quick way of checking your exposure. To be fair, you can't really expect a relatively



[Inset photo] Deepanita Sharma photographed by Tarun Khiwal, India

**Best for...**  
Taking incredibly detailed shots in situations where image quality is of the utmost importance. An excellent tool for wedding, portrait and landscape photographers in particular, the camera performs brilliantly in and out of the studio. The price tag limits it to pros, but it is worth every penny.

## In detail: features



**VIEWFINDER:** The focusing screen is large and bright, offering high magnification of the scene for easy and accurate focusing. The whole thing folds down neatly for easy storage.



**16MP SQUARE FORMAT SENSOR:** 50 per cent larger than a full-frame DSLR sensor, the 503CWD's square-format sensor records an incredible amount of detail across the frame.



**WINDING LEVER:** For that true Hasselblad experience, there are no automatic features on the camera; you even get to wind the lever to reset the mirror and cock the shutter.



■ [Above] The classic retro design hides a wealth of modern technology for the professional

small screen to show off your images in all their high-resolution glory anyway. That pleasure is reserved for later, when you view your shots on the computer screen or, even better, on paper. The prints from this camera are exquisite, with tremendous detail and incredibly accurate colour and texture rendition.

The modular design offers the benefit of being able to access the image sensor with ease, making it simple to keep your CCD clean and your images dust-free. You can also remove the focusing hood to replace the viewfinder or magnifier and the winding crank. You can also replace most of the

Colour management is also taken care of, with the 503CWD making use of Hasselblad's RGB profile. This works in conjunction with FlexColor to ensure you get accurate, rich colours straight from the camera every time. We were particularly impressed with the camera's capability to deal with the colours, tones and textures of such a wide variety of subjects, from human skin and sandy beaches, to cats' fur and rugged rocks. Everything is captured with astonishing precision and clarity.

The lenses – as you might expect from their price tags – are of supreme quality, producing spectacularly sharp results at

## “The prints from this camera are exquisite, with tremendous detail and incredibly accurate colour and texture rendition”

components that are likely to need replacing on your own, instead of having to send your pride and joy off to the manufacturer for a fortnight every time something needs doing.

The bundled software – the excellent FlexColor – equips you with everything you need from start to finish, from a live video tool and overlay masking during tethered shooting, to image processing and export. The program runs on both Windows and Mac platforms and the copy you receive with your camera is licensed to enable you to distribute free copies to your employees, or install the program at work and at home.

the plane of focus, with buttery smooth bokeh where the focus falls off. You set the aperture and shutter speed on the lens itself and there's also a switch you flick to check depth of field. Avid DSLR users may need a little time to get used to the different handling, but we soon grew to love it. The camera comes with a 80mm Zeiss Planar CFE f2.8 lens, although Hasselblad supplied two additional lenses with our review unit so we could get more of a feel for the camera and really put it through its paces. For those of you that already shoot with a Hasselblad, you'll be pleased to hear that ▶▶

### WAIST-LEVEL VIEWFINDER

The focusing screen features image format markings to help with composition and a built-in magnifier that you can flip up if you need to get a closer look



### MAGAZINE CATCH

Slide this to the right while depressing the magazine catch lock to remove the digital back

### DIGITAL BACK RETAINING CATCH LOCK

This ensures that you don't accidentally release the back from the camera body

### A single charge will provide...

When it comes to battery power, Hasselblad states: “With a fully charged battery [based on the NP970, which is the bigger size], in comfortable ambient temperatures, you should expect up to eight hours of use.”



**DESIGN:** The classic retro design makes this camera a thing of beauty. We love all the little finishing touches, including Victor's signature on the camera body and back.



**INSTANT APPROVAL:** Photos are automatically tagged green, amber or red during shooting, but you can review and modify the status of your images at any point – a real timesaver.



**SOFTWARE:** FlexColor offers a comprehensive solution to your shooting and image-processing needs, with the option of live video when tethered to a computer.



## On the disc

Load up the *Digital Photographer* cover disc to view a selection of test shots captured by our reviewer

## LENSES

### 40MM DISTAGON CFE

PRICE: £2,815 (+VAT)

WEB: [www.hasselblad.co.uk](http://www.hasselblad.co.uk)

TEL: 0208 731 3250

■ This wide-angle lens offers superb image quality and edge-to-edge sharpness thanks to its floating lens elements (FLE). Offering a maximum aperture of f4, this lens delivers an 88-degree angle of view and focus from 0.5 metres to infinity. At 1,130g, the lens is fairly weighty, but on the camera it feels well balanced and the internal focusing makes it easy to handle.



### 120MM MACRO PLANAR CFE

PRICE: £1,605 (+VAT)

WEB: [www.hasselblad.co.uk](http://www.hasselblad.co.uk)

TEL: 0208 731 3250

■ The Macro-Planar design makes this lens perfect for shooting close-ups, with the lens producing sharp, detailed images even when shooting wide open. The closest focusing distance of the lens is 0.8 metres, allowing a scale of reproduction of 1:4.5, however this can be further enhanced with optional close-up accessories.



#### WINDING LEVER

Wind the lever in a clockwise motion to reset the mirror and cock the shutter in between shots



#### SHUTTER RELEASE

A cable release can be screwed in to further reduce the effects of camera shake

#### LENS RELEASE BUTTON

Depress this button and rotate the lens anti-clockwise to remove it from the camera body

▶ the 503CWD is compatible with all C-series lenses that feature an integral leaf shutter and therefore allow flash sync at all shutter speeds.

In contrast to some of the high-end DSLR manufacturers out there, Hasselblad has kept everything remarkably simple with the 503CWD. As aforementioned, you set the aperture and shutter speed on the lens barrel, focus, check your depth of field if required and fire the shutter. The digital back has a spartan menu system, with just a few options and no complicated options to scroll through endlessly in order to get to the setting you want. You simply turn it on, set your ISO and white balance (the top two functions in the main menu) and start shooting.

■ [Above] The build quality is superb, as you might expect, with all the levers and dials extremely robust

Hasselblad recommends shooting with the 503CWD mounted on a tripod and using a cable release in order to achieve optimum results.

In bright conditions, however, it's perfectly viable to shoot handheld, as we found out. The maximum ISO offered is 400, so you can't expect to get great results shooting handheld in gloomy circumstances, but we got some first-rate shots of stormy skies using a tripod and ISO 100. The camera's sensor recorded every last detail and a whole range of rich and subtle tones in the heavy clouds coming in off the sea.

With a lack of automatic functions, this camera isn't going to be first choice for sports or action photographers (unless

**“Allow time to meter, dial in your settings and focus, but that’s not to say that the camera can’t keep up with modern shooting situations”**

## In detail: menu functions



**ISO:** Use the + and - buttons to scroll through and select from a choice of ISO 50, 100, 200 or 400 easily. Noise is pretty much nonexistent throughout the ISO range.



**WHITE BALANCE:** Again you need to use the + and - buttons to select a white balance option. Choose from Daylight, Cloudy, Shade, Flash, Fluorescent, Tungsten or Manual.



**MANUAL WHITE BALANCE:** This option allows you to either take a shot of a grey card or a neutral object to generate a reading, or you select your desired colour temperature.

## OLED SCREEN

With a wide viewing angle, this screen allows you to review images and navigate menus in most lighting conditions

## COMPACTFLASH CARD SLOT COVER

This metal door protects the CF card slot from dust and moisture



## DISPLAY MODE

Preview images, call up the histogram, view image details, display the image full screen or switch the screen off

## READY LIGHT INDICATOR

Illuminates yellow when the back is 'busy' and green when ready

## INSTANT APPROVAL

Allows you to assign green, amber or red status to images as you review them, or functions as an OK button on some menu screens

you're very experienced and quick off the mark). You'll need to allow time to meter the scene, dial in your settings and focus manually, but that's not to say that the camera can't keep up with modern shooting situations. For the experienced fashion photographer, for example, the 503CWD is the perfect tool for capturing beautiful shots throughout fast-paced shooting sessions.

The camera really comes into its own when you're out photographing landscapes, or in the studio, capturing rich, detailed photographs of whatever you choose to point your lens at. In terms of aesthetics, the 503CWD may not feature contemporary styling or a modern ergonomic design, but it does have an abundance of retro chic appeal for those who appreciate the simple beauty of the Hasselblad V-system. The camera also delivers stunning results that are enough to make a high-end DSLR user turn green with envy. Conclusive proof, then, that this medium-format digital camera represents a fantastic option for

■ **[Above] Buttons are minimal but functional on the digital back and let you work fast**

professionals who demand the very best when it comes to image quality, for a considerably lower price than any of the closed systems

Hasselblad has produced for the digital market. However, you can't ignore the fact that there are ways of building yourself an even higher-resolution digital Hasselblad system without giving your credit card too much of a battering.

The 503CWD is a limited-edition product for a reason. Although it is up to the job of professional usage, it's also a collectable item that celebrates the manufacturer's successful past and looks towards a bright, digital future all at once. It'll certainly attract affluent Hasselblad devotees – professional photographers or not – but whether it will take off as a working camera remains yet to be seen. Whichever way the Hasselblad community responds, we're sure that those 500 units will be gone in the blink of an eye. Get them while they're hot!

DP

## Technical data

<b>Model</b>	Hasselblad 503CWD
<b>Price</b>	£8,250 (+VAT)
<b>Web</b>	www.hasselblad.co.uk
<b>Phone</b>	0208 731 3250
<b>Megapixels (effective)</b>	16
<b>Max resolution</b>	4,080 x 4,080
<b>Sensor information</b>	36.7 x 36.7mm, CCD
<b>Lens data</b>	f2.8 (80mm)
<b>Zoom</b>	Fixed focal length
<b>Focus/macro</b>	By lens
<b>Shutter speed</b>	32-1/800sec
<b>ISO sensitivity</b>	50, 100, 200, 400
<b>Exposure modes</b>	Manual
<b>Metering options</b>	N/A
<b>Flash modes</b>	N/A
<b>Connectivity</b>	FireWire 800
<b>Weight</b>	1,620g
<b>Dimensions</b>	113 x 110 x 193mm
<b>Batteries</b>	Sony InfoLithium L
<b>Storage</b>	CF, Imagebank, tethered to Mac or PC
<b>LCD</b>	2.2"

## Verdict

### Features **10/10**

■ The retro design looks great and the 16MP sensor produces images of stunning quality. Its beauty lies in its simplicity

### Build quality **9/10**

■ Lives up to the high standard of quality we've come to expect from Hasselblad. Everything looks and feels like it's built to last

### Handling **10/10**

■ The camera weighs a fair bit more than a high-end DSLR, but it feels well balanced in the hand

### Quality of results **10/10**

■ Image quality is wonderful, with superb sharpness and clarity and accurate colour reproduction

### Value for money **9/10**

■ Obviously, the price tag is quite a bit larger than that of a top-notch DSLR, but you can't put a price on image quality

## Total

If you like the square-format sensor and are fond of Hasselblads, you'll love the 503CWD

# 96%



**BROWSE:** Define which images you'd like to review on the screen, choosing from: All, Green, Green and Yellow, Yellow or Red (tagged with the Instant Approval Architecture).



**STORAGE:** Open this sub-menu to delete images, format your storage media, copy images, create new batches or set the default approval level (Auto, Green or Yellow).



**SETTINGS:** Set options for language, power saving, sound, date/time and OLED display. Additional menus let you set your exposure time and check your firmware version.