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- **Fuji FinePix S2**
- **Kodak 8500  
Dye-Sub Printer**
- **Canham 6x17 Back**

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Cover photograph by  
Douglas Dubler

## Fuji FinePix S2 Pro:

Is it  
Digital,  
or is it  
Film?



Credits — Cover Image and Above

Photographer: Douglas Dubler 3; model: Jessica Riccardi, Elite Models NY; stylist: Pat Kurs; hair and make-up: Sylvia for MakeUprules.com; necklace: Throckmorton Fine Arts NY; digital enhancement: Willie for Cursorinc.com NY; lighting: Balcar.

by **Douglas Dubler III**

Having been involved with Fuji's first-generation professional digital camera, the S1, I was more than eager to see what several years and advances in Fuji's technology would produce. I was pretty certain I

wasn't going to be disappointed. My first experience with

the Fuji FinePix S2 was a comparison shoot I did with

several other digital SLRs and medium-format backs. As always, I also shot my trusty Mamiya RZ67 loaded with Fuji Astia film (the gold standard!) as my control.

As customary with my equipment reviews, I'll refer my readers to the manufacturer's web site for detailed S2 technical data, and also defer to published reviews by my esteemed colleagues. Instead, I'll concentrate on the results and what it produces.

When I first picked up the camera, I was both pleased and a little disappointed. Pleased that the camera body had been upgraded from a Nikon N60

to an N80 body to accept the better AF Nikkor lenses, but disappointed that the S2 wasn't enclosed in an F100-type metal body. My guess is that Nikon didn't want Fuji that close to their flagship, the D1X. I can't say that I blame them.

### Fuji Camera Shooting Software

After installing the S2 software into my Apple Dual 1-gigabyte G4, I was off to the races. Since the Fuji Camera Shooting Software only works in Mac's OS 9.2 (and lower versions), I couldn't boot my G4 into OSX, where it really takes advantage of the dual processors. (Fuji says the OSX version should be available by the time you read this.) I, for one, can't wait to leave 9.2 OS in the past. The instability and extension conflicts (a

serious problem with 9.2) are, for the most part, non-existent with OSX. Studio photographers will also take note that the Fuji S2 connects to the computer via Firewire (my favorite), a feature not often found on digital cameras in the S2's price range.

Next, I performed a custom white balance (which I always recommend), set the camera for raw data, and proceeded to take pictures. Allow me to digress a bit with regard to raw data: there seems to be at least two (if not more) schools of thought on this subject. Being on the hyper-quality side, I always use raw data. In addition to being able to process files faster (writing and reading), the smaller file gives me the advantage of reprocessing the data at a later date using different parameters—something you cannot do if you shoot tiff. (And I won't even comment about jpeg, except for its usefulness for e-mail.) The downside is you have to develop the files after you shoot—not unlike film—except a lot faster. And, I might add, for a lot less money.

When I shoot digital, I always take a color temperature reading with my Minolta ColorMeter III. This habit has proved quite useful with the S2. The software developer gives you an option to develop by color temperature, and I've found the skin tones I achieved with this method are much more accurate than those obtained by relying solely on the custom white balance. So why even bother to perform a custom white balance? For comparison purposes and redundancy; besides, it gives the assistants something to do.

The results of this first test were quite interesting. The Fuji FinePix S2 was definitely the winner with regard to accurate and pleasing skin tone reproduction. In all cases, it out-performs cameras in its price range (and even those considerably more expensive). I found the noise in the three channels to be quite low and not blotchy, which in my experience, can produce abrupt tonal transitions. That's something that has been high on my list of challenges to digital capture.

Another side note: if you're a still life or landscape shooter, these issues probably will not concern you. Aside from file size for large-scale reproductions, there are many digital cameras suitable for these types of photography. Alas, however, I have the cross of beauty photography to bear! This enticing specialty has its dragons hidden among the

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damsels—and in more ways than one. But as a beauty photographer, I (and others like me) am always obsessing over those smooth continuous transitions and purity of color-without-cast that defines the Holy Grail. For us, it's an ongoing journey with both good and bad turns in the road.

### Test driving the FinePix S2

Now that I had a good idea where the gas pedal and clutch were located, my next step was to use the S2 for a commercial job. I chose an editorial assignment for *Zoozoom* magazine, which I named "Medusa." It was a beauty story based on the mythological tale of the beautiful temptress Medusa (if only she could do something about those snakes in her hair), whose gaze would turn men into stone. In my version, she becomes ensnared in her own trap; having observed her own reflection, she begins her own journey from flesh to stone. I wanted the stone to be represented by black-and-white, and the flesh by color. The series consisted of six images that began as color, and ended as black-and-white. This issue's cover was the fourth in the series, and the photo you see here was the fifth. (The entire series may be viewed on my web site, [www.douglasdubler3.com](http://www.douglasdubler3.com).)

The challenges for the S2 were considerable. Not only was I interested in the usual transition issues, but I added the additional complications of black-and-white to color transitions. In the past, I've never been pleased with the digital conversions I've seen for color to black-and-white. They are typically performed by desaturating the color file, which throws away a lot of information. That process leaves you with a very flat tonal scale, or what I call "mush in the middle." What I envisioned was a full-scale, Zone System, selenium-toned, silver gelatin black-and-white with this \$2,500 digital camera.

Was I delusional? Maybe. To make life even more difficult, I chose a single-source lighting scheme for a dark, moody and dramatic mood. The source was one Balcar Prisma light powered by

a Nexus A3200 wt./sec. pack. I slightly underexposed the image to give the skin plenty of texture, and to make the black-and-white appear to be stone.

I conferred with my partner-in-beauty (and digital artist extraordinaire), Willie, and together we came up with a plan. As always, I would shoot raw data and later produce a black-and-white and color image from the same file. The two images were sandwiched together to produce a 70MB file. Willie later delicately erased the top color file to reveal the black-and-white file beneath.

The results, I thought, were nothing less than spectacular. In this case, this was a job that could only be done digitally—unless you think you are good enough to get the same shot twice. (Can't be done.)

### Multiplier (1.5) helps find the perfect focal length

I printed the shot on the Epson 2200 and 9600 printers loaded with Fuji Pictography 4000II digital paper, and was very pleased with the results. Here's one other little secret I'll share with regard to quality with digital capture: for this shot, I used an 85mm *f*/1.4 AF Nikon lens, which, in my opinion, is among Nikon's best optics. On the S2 with its multiplier of 1.5, this becomes a 130mm lens, a perfect focal length for shooting beauty. I purposely avoided a zoom lens because of the superior characteristics of a fixed focal length lens. I would have certainly been disappointed with a wide-angle lens and the resulting pixel shadowing around the frame's edges. (Some day we'll have lenses specifically designed for digital capture, and not have to wear our older brother's clothes!) With raw data combined with color temperature developing, I feel I was able to optimize the potential of the FinePix S2 in these images.

My conclusion? If you're in the market for a superior digital camera—and don't want to mortgage your home to purchase it—you owe it to yourself to look at the S2. Like me, I'm sure you'll be delighted. ■

*Douglas Dubler III is a NYC-based fashion and beauty photographer who works on editorial and advertising assignments. His clients include the major cosmetic companies, fashion designers and fashion magazines. He is a staff member of The International Center of Photography, and serves as a consultant to numerous manufacturers.*