

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE

CANON EOS DIGITAL REBEL XT

WE CAN'T OVERSTATE THE popularity of Canon's EOS Digital Rebel XT—it has enough owners to populate a small country. Its responsive performance and ability to turn out high-quality photos make it the consumer DSLR of choice for hordes of serious amateur photographers.

Relative to its competition, the XT offers a modest array of settings, fine-tuning tools, and effects. But that doesn't mean there isn't more to the XT than first meets the eye. We've taken a fine-toothed comb to it, teasing out essentials and esoterica that you won't find in the manual or even by thoroughly searching the menu system.

Although we were able to find some hidden tricks, Canon provides rich documentation. The manual is clearly written, well organized, and printed in a book compact enough for a camera bag or a big pocket. The software manual, on a CD, is equally thorough and concise. Both the camera and software manuals relegate some important points to boxes at the bottom of the page, so don't skip the footnotes. If you lose your manual, you can find the text in the Support section of Canon's web site (www.canonusa.com), along with other related material.

Here are 10 tips for getting a whole lot more out of your XT:

1 FOCUS WITHOUT FUMBLING

Instead of missing your shot while cycling through autofocus points with the command dial, you can set the four-way controller to select them directly. Go to Custom Function 1 in the menu system, and select Option 4. Use your right thumb to locate the four-way controller arrow keys and center Set button as you shoot. That way, you don't have to look away from the viewfinder to pick a new autofocus point. The AF points flash red as you push the buttons.

Still want to use the four-way arrow keys to access camera settings as usual? Hold an arrow key (the Jump key and a few other buttons will work, too) until the viewfinder information display goes dark, then hit an arrow.

To set AF points automatically, press the AF-point selection button. You can also use Custom Function 1 to program the Set button for access to playback and Quality and Parameter settings.

2 DO THE TIME LAPSE AGAIN

Time-lapse photography holds all sorts of creative possibilities, from assembling a high-resolution movie to capturing the changes in an opening flower or

a busy street corner. You won't find any interval shooting option on the XT itself, but you can connect the camera to a computer and set up the initial delay and intervals between shots in the included EOS Capture software. To access, select Remote Capture in the software, and click on the Tool pulldown menu in the window that controls your camera settings. You can delay the first shot for up to 99 minutes, 59 seconds, and set intervals between shots of 5 seconds to 99 minutes, 59 seconds.

3 USE A BIG SCREEN

The EOS Capture software isn't just for time-lapse shooting. It allows you to use your computer to control basic camera functions and release the XT's shutter, and then saves your photos directly to your hard drive (as well as your memory card, if you like).



This can be useful in a studio setting or even in the field with a laptop. Looking at your shots on a big screen right away will allow you to check critical focus, and, if you're using a calibrated monitor, you can fine-tune the white balance to get just the output results you want. Some photographers also find that having a big image instantly available helps them collaborate with their subjects.

4 LEAVE AI FOCUS IN THE DUST The XT gives you a few autofocus-mode options: One Shot, AI Servo, and AI Focus. One Shot uses a single focus point, AI Servo tracks your subject by activating different focus points as it moves, and AI Focus can do both. If you don't know which is best in a given situation or just don't want to think about it, AI Focus will make the decision for you.

However, decision-making takes time, even for a camera. The brief moment that AI Focus takes to cogitate could make you miss a crucial bit of the action. If you're photo-

graphing fast-moving subjects, AI Servo will get right to the task of tracking them, without pausing first to decide to do so. If you want to photograph moving subjects in an automatic mode, select Sports—it's the only fully automated mode that uses AI Servo.

5 BE PARTIAL TO CENTER FOCUS In Partial and Center-weighted-average metering modes, and when you use manual focus, the XT's autoexposure lock is always linked to the center AF point. That shouldn't be a problem with centerweighted metering, since you use it while focusing on a subject in the center of the frame.

But if you use Partial metering and select an AF point or

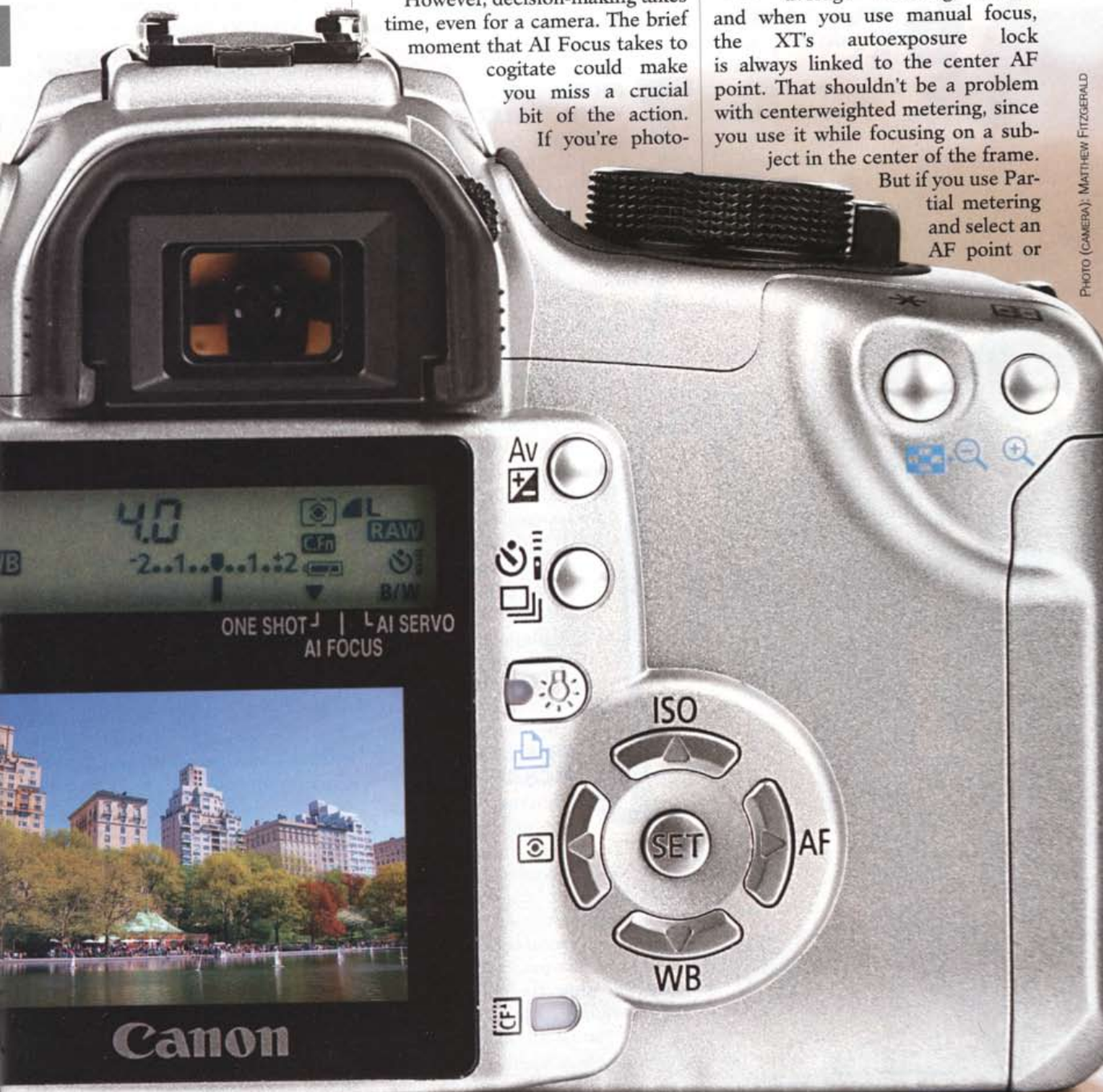


PHOTO (CAMERA): MATTHEW FITZGERALD

manually focus on an off-center subject, it may not be exposed the way you'd intended. It's best to use the center AF point with partial metering, which meters the center 9 percent of the viewfinder image. If you don't want your subject in the middle of the picture, lock the exposure and focus, and then compose your shot again the old-fashioned way—by moving the camera.

6 AVERAGE YOUR FLASH

By default, the XT uses evaluative metering for flash illumination.

tion, basing its calculations on how the preflash bounces off 35 zones of your image. For most subjects, this works well, but if you're photographing a subject that fills a large portion of the frame and includes a variety of light and dark tones, average metering might give you better results. A large area of a particularly light or dark tone—a bride's dress in a group photo, for example—could throw evaluative metering off. To switch to average flash metering, go to Custom Function 8 in the menu system and select Option 1.

7 PRESERVE YOUR PALETTE

Toying with black-and-white effects can be a lot of fun, except when you discover that they didn't produce the results you wanted in important photos. Play it safe and shoot in RAW + JPEG mode when you're working in monochrome. That way, your JPEG file will give you the black-and-white effect you spent all that time tinkering to achieve, while your RAW file of the same shot will preserve a digital negative with the original color. You can always convert your color RAW file to black-and-white later with Canon's included software or an image editor such as Photoshop, but when you save an image as a black-and-white JPEG, you pass the point of no return.

8 TONE DOWN THE BACKGROUND

If you're using a flash, chances are you'd rather have some of the background illuminated to put your subject in a natural-looking setting. That's why Canon set up the XT's aperture-priority mode to use slow flash-sync shutter speeds. The flash illuminates your subject, and then the shutter stays open long enough to expose the background (or vice versa if you've selected second-

curtain sync, which is under Custom Function 9). For the times when you'd rather have a dark background, you can fix the flash-sync speed at 1/200 sec by going to Custom Function 3 and selecting Option 1.

9 STARRY STARRY NIGHT

Because of the relatively low visual noise levels it produces at high ISO settings, which can be improved further with in-camera noise reduction, the Rebel XT has proven a popular camera among astrophotographers. Canon makes a software developer's kit (SDK) for the XT available in the Support area of its web site, and third-party programmers have created astrophotography software that's compatible with the camera. These programs provide features for controlling the camera from a computer, as well as tools for working with images. A few to take a look at are iAstroPhoto (homepage.mac.com/stevepur/astrophotography/iAstroPhoto), ImagesPlus (www.mlunsold.com), DSLRFocus (www.dslrfocus.com), and DSLRControl (barkosoft.com/DSLRControl).

10 BORN AGAIN XT

The Rebel XT offers a black-and-white mode, along with numerous filter and toning effects. By playing with these options, white-balance settings, and contrast levels, you can come up with innumerable cool monochrome looks, including ones that appear similar to infrared photography.

But if you want to have your XT permanently optimized for either infrared or astrophotography, you can get it modified by a number of companies—just remember that this voids your Canon warranty. Astrophotographers can buy a modified Rebel XT from Hutech (www.sciencecenter.net/hutech) or send in their own for modification. For infrared shooting, Max max.com (maxmax.com/aXNite-CanonRebel.htm) and IRDigital (www.irdigital.net) sell modified XTs and will also do modifications for customers. But, again, you'll have to kiss your Canon warranty goodbye if you go the mod route.

