

**THE DSLR TEST**  
BUDGET ENTRY-LEVEL DSLR

**Olympus E-420**

RRP (WITH 14-42MM): £??? (£330 street price)  
 IMAGE RESOLUTION: Ten-megapixels  
 LCD: 2.7in HyperCrystal II (230,000 pixels)  
 STORAGE: CompactFlash and xD  
 WEIGHT: 380g (without battery)  
 PHONE: 08705 143723  
 WEBSITE: www.olympus.co.uk

**Handling & ease of use**

The thing that strikes you most about the E-420 is its size – it's quite easily one of the smallest DSLRs on the scene, in fact its smaller than some bridge 'compacts', especially if fitted with a 'pancake' lens (very small, prime lens), in which case it becomes pocketable (albeit in a fairly big pocket!).

While it's true that larger cameras offer a firmer hold, the E-420, despite its modest handgrip, still provides a decent enough grip, in the main because it's so light and small. In terms of build quality, it feels very solid, so you can feel confident that this little camera is able to withstand the odd knock.

One common failing of small cameras is that the buttons and dials tend to be fiddly to use, but that's not the case with the E-420. Its control layout follows the same set-up as most previous consumer-level E-series DSLRs, with a clean top-plate featuring the main exposure dial and a couple of buttons, with the rest of the controls on the rear. It's a tried and tested system that only requires a short learning period to get used to, which would make this a suitable choice for beginners.

The key shortcut to accessing functions quickly is the OK button at the centre of the four-way control system, to the right of the LCD monitor. Pressing the OK button highlights a key function on the LCD monitor and you can then use the four-way control to change whichever settings you want, quickly and easily. There is also a menu button for accessing all camera functions, but unless you're after a lesser-used facility, you'll find it more convenient to use the OK button.

The LCD monitor has a 2.7in screen that displays a sharp, bright image, which is important as the E-420 offers a LiveView mode. The menu system is clean and easy to navigate, with a set of tabs running down the left allowing access to the various types of functions. The viewfinder holds no real surprises and is very similar to what you'll find on similarly-priced DSLRs from rival brands. It's sharp and reasonably bright, but quite small. Exposure information appears in an area to the right of the screen, which has black markings for the AF points and the central metering zone. The deep hood offers good protection from glare, while a wheel to its right allows dioptic correction for spectacle wearers. In summary, the Olympus E-420 is a compact, well-made DSLR that has good all-round handling and is not at all difficult to operate. **SCORE 22/25**

**Features**

The E-420 may be small in size and low in cost, but it's certainly not short of features. At its heart is a ten-megapixel Live MOS (LMOS)



The small dimensions of the E-420 makes it an ideal choice for travel photography.

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sensor that delivers images with a maximum resolution of 3648x2736 pixels. Images can be recorded in JPEG, Raw or in both, with the TruePic III processor delivering a maximum frame rate of 3.5 frames per second. The lens mount accepts all Four-Thirds lenses from Olympus, Panasonic or Sigma, with a resultant increase in focal length of 2x (ie a 14-42mm is effectively a 28-84mm zoom). As with other Olympus models, the E-420 uses both xD and CompactFlash memory cards.

There is no shortage of exposure modes, with over a dozen scene modes for absolute beginners, as well as full auto, program, aperture-priority, shutter-priority and manual modes. The metering system is pretty sophisticated too – as well as 49-zone, spot and centre-weighted, there are also spot modes biased for highlights or shadows.

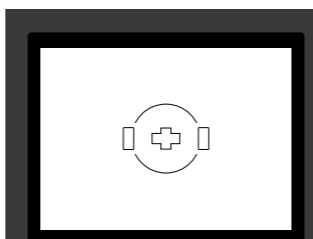
The autofocus system is more basic, with only three AF points to choose from. The outer points are located to the left and right of the central sensor and can each be selected individually or used simultaneously in single-shot or continuous AF modes. Select LiveView and other focusing options come into play, including Imager AF, which uses contrast detection to facilitate focusing.

The camera's integral flash can be used to provide extra illumination when required, and depending on the mode you're using, it will pop up automatically or need to be raised manually by pressing the button on the top-plate. It offers a number of modes, including slow-sync and red-eye reduction and has a Guide Number of 12 (ISO 100, m).

The E-420 lacks an image stabiliser (a feature found on the E-520) but boasts a Supersonic Wave Filter to reduce the risk of dust settling on the sensor. **SCORE 21/25**

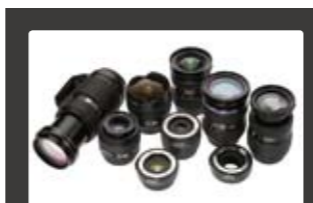
**Supplied accessories**

Boxed with the Olympus E-420: Shoulder strap, body cap, BCS-1 charger, BLS-1 lithium-ion battery, USB and AV cables, EP-4 eyepiece cover, instruction manual and Olympus Master 2 software CD.



**Viewfinder**

A small but reasonably bright viewfinder with a sharp screen. The active AF points each have a red LED that illuminates when the sensor is activated.



**Four-Thirds system**

Olympus created the Four-Thirds system back in 2003 and established it as the first SLR system made exclusively for digital (other brands use a system based on its 35mm film SLRs). It's a system open for any manufacturers to make DSLRs for, and currently only Panasonic has done so, though Sigma makes lenses for the Four-Thirds mount.

**PRO TIPS**  
**CLEVER TECHNOLOGY**  
 The Olympus E-420 features Shadow Adjustment Technology to brighten deep shadow areas and Face Detection to recognise up to eight faces, and adjust the focus and exposure accordingly



**Snow scene**

As expected, the large area of snow caused problems for the multi-zone meter. Exposure Compensation of +1.3EV ensured that it didn't underexpose.