

Take-out

Epson Picturemate 500 Inkjet Printer

Barrie Smith has a look at the portable, personal photo lab from Epson.



EPSON FELL ON A GREAT NAME FOR ITS new PictureMate 500 inkjet printer: they called it a 'personal photo lab'. Got me! And, while you can pick up a docking printer for around the \$100 mark, these low cost models have quite a few limitations. On the other hand the Epson costs a dollar less than \$400 (but probably down to the mid \$300s in retail-land). For this you could buy two or three A4 inkjet printers, while the PM 500 outputs only a 4x6 inch (10x15 cm) print.

Oh, but there's more... the printer has a 6 cm LCD screen that is used to operate the system as well as to select images. Prints are made with Epson's six colour (black, cyan, magenta, yellow, red and blue) UltraChrome high gloss pigment inks; power can be drawn from a mains connection or from an optional, internal rechargeable lithium ion battery; prints can be made directly from a PictBridge-enabled camera or all popular memory cards (SD/MMC, Memory Stick, Compact Flash Types I/II, SmartMedia, xD-Picture Card and Microdrive); and the system provides a link for a USB computer connection or external storage devices, such as a CD-ROM or Zip drive. An optional Bluetooth module is also available.

Epson's use of the highly-regarded UltraChrome Hi-Gloss pigment ink means you can enjoy lightfastness of up to 104 years (see www.wilhelm-research.com). The ink is also water-resistant and less susceptible to scratching compared to dye-based inks.

Portable

The printer is compact and easy to carry, thanks to the lift-up handle. The LCD screen is very useful and quite large enough to make image selections and navigate through the menus.

However, the real joy of the PM500 is its adaptability and its wide range of image sources. Accordingly, you can happily use it in an office environment or on the road, thanks to the battery.

Some of the tricks you can get up to, thanks to the comprehensive choices in the menu, include: print an index card showing 20 images on the print; add the date and/or time the shot was taken; frame your image on the print; print an image in full colour, B&W or sepia; adjust the brightness, colour saturation and sharpness of a picture; crop a picture or add an adjustable white border around the image; make two smaller images on the one print; print small photo ID images; and the LCD's screen image contrast is adjustable — a big help if you're using the printer in daylight.

I was surprised to find that the PM 500 is able to download card-stored images to an external device, such as a CD-ROM or Zip drive. Additionally, if the printer is connected via USB to your computer, then any memory card that is loaded into the printer will come up on the desktop.

Extras

The PicturePack is priced at \$43.95 — this includes the six ink cartridge plus 100 sheets of

4x6 inch paper. The price per print works out at 44 cents.

The rechargeable lithium ion battery costs \$99. One charge of this battery will provide continuous printing for up to 90 mins or up to 50 4x6 prints. The Bluetooth adaptor is \$189.

The Verdict

On the test chart the printer performed extremely well, with ambitions fulfilled well beyond its station, no doubt with thanks to the UltraChrome six ink cartridge. Clean colours, smooth gradations throughout, clean text, right down to the smallest size. In general printing tasks it produced perfectly natural prints.

The portability factor of the printer is a major feature but be careful not to mistreat it when out and about. There is a fallback: the usual full range of Epson printer alignment tools is built in so you can clean or realign the heads — just like the big models.

The PictureMate 500 is possibly the best printer of its type on the market.

VITAL STATISTICS

\$399

Epson

PictureMate 500

Drop Size: 3.0 picolitre droplets per inch.
Resolution: 5760x1440 optimised dpi.
Media Size: 15x10 cm.
Paper Tray Capacity: 20 sheets.
Single Image Print Speed: 86 seconds per print (without borders).
Card Slots: SD/MMC, Memory Stick, Compact Flash Types I/II, SmartMedia, xD-Picture Card and Microdrive.
LCD Screen: 6 cm (76,800 pixels).
Interface: USB 2.0.
System Required: Windows 98/2000/XP/Me.

Mac OS 9.1 or later, Mac OS X 10.2 or later.
Supplied Accessories: Photo cartridge and paper; AC adaptor; CD-ROM of software (printer drivers, Epson EasyPrint Module, Photo Print, Easy Print, Print Image Framing Tool, PIF Designer v 2.23).
Dimensions (WHD): 256x167x154 mm.
Weight: 2.8 kg (without battery and photo cartridge).
Price: \$399.
Distributor: Epson Australia 1300 361 054 or www.epson.com.au

