

Using the Z5, what do I miss from my experiences with the Z7? I've grown attached to the Z7's 12X Zeiss, with its externally geared mechanical zoom and mechanical focus — both of which take me back to the years of 16mm Angénieux zooms.

More critically, I miss the placement of the auto/manual iris switch and push-auto iris button near the rocker switch on the Z7's handgrip. This is where these functions are located on all 2/3in. professional cameras, and it's where they should be located on handhelds. The Z7 gets an A+ in this regard, but it's painful to encounter the Z5's retrograde Iris/Exposure button, which feels as small as a cell-phone QWERTY key, at the lower-left corner on the side opposite the handgrip. On handhelds with handgrips like the Z5, the ring finger of my right hand seeks in vain the push-auto exposure button (as if remembering a phantom limb). This is a finger that otherwise has nothing else to do when operating the camcorder.

To compensate, I assigned the iris/exposure function to assignable button number seven, which is a new assignable button on the handgrip directly above the rotary on/off switch. This returned the habit of frequent exposure checks (I shoot a lot of documentary) to my right hand, where it belongs when handholding. It's great the Z5 offers this key function to its assignable buttons, one of which is thankfully on the handgrip.

The tiny, misplaced Iris/Exposure button is the single design gaffe in the impressive Z5. With its versatile built-in mic, wider-angled 20X zoom, superb low-light performance, progressive scan, dual tape/CompactFlash recording, and proven ergonomics, the formidable Z5 leaps to the front of the documentary pack. The more I shot documentary with it in the field, the more reluctant I grew to return the review unit to Sony. Seriously. The Z5 will arrive in December with a MSRP of \$4,950 — essentially, the same price as the classic Z1 it replaces.



Back to the future: The Z5's 20X zoom and operator-side loading recalls 1995's forerunner of all MiniDV Handycams, the classic DCR-VX1000.



External controls are clear and well organized, although the Iris/Exposure button belongs on the handgrip.

bottomline

Company: Sony
www.sony.com/professional

Product: HVR-Z5U

Assets: Shares many of the HVR-7ZU's features; adds a 20X fixed G lens, built-in stereo microphone, and color peaking.

Caveats: Shorter rocker switch may require user to adjust zooming technique, tiny Iris/Exposure button poorly placed.

Demographic: Professional videographers.

PRICE: \$4,950

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