

# **A Brief, subjective comparison of the Sony PMW-200 versus the Panasonic HPX-170 with regard to ergonomics and design**

By Mark S Donnell, MD      October 1, 2012

I received my PMW-200 four days ago, and have had a few hours over the weekend to evaluate it from a design perspective. I have been shooting with a Panasonic HPX-170 for several years, and it has been a decade since I have used a Sony camera. This comparison is only with regards to the design of the camera – I have not yet shot any video with the Sony, nor do I feel qualified to do a formal video evaluation.

When you open the box and take out the PMW-200, the first thing I noticed is the width of the camera, which is actually a bit of an illusion due to the wide LCD screen lying in a flat horizontal position above the lens and the large, twist-on lens cover with a manual open-close shutter cover. Also striking is the external microphone mount, which protrudes upward and to the right above the lens. If you don't need an external mic, this holder can be easily removed by opening the latch and removing the two small screws at the base of the unit. I personally shoot mostly indoors, so the lens cover assembly is usually unnecessary. Removing it makes the camera look much less imposing and shortens the unit by almost two inches. You will need a 72 mm screw-type lens cap to protect the lens during travel if you take off the shutter unit. Sony should have included one but didn't.

When you pick up the camera, the first thing you notice is the very poor weight balance of the camera. The PMW-200 and the HPX-170 are about the same physical size, but the 170 is almost perfectly balanced when you hold it by the handle. The PMW is heavily front-weighted, and when you hold it by the handle it tends to droop forward. I was very surprised to find the tripod mount at the very back of the camera on the right side. Putting this camera on a tripod feels very insecure – make sure that one of the tripod legs is facing forward to avoid having the tripod fall over (yes, even with a heavy-duty tripod).

I have not used the LCD – so no comments on that. The EVF on the Sony is far inferior to the EVF on the Panasonic. Sony's EVF is dull and considerably less bright, with washed-out colors. There are adjustments for the EVF in the Sony menu, but even with brightness increased by 50% and contrast increased by 30% this EVF was not even close to the bright colorful Panasonic EVF.

Regarding the lens, the Sony is reported as 14x, while the Panasonic is given as 13x. At full telephoto, framing an object to fill the entire vertical height of the Sony viewfinder only filled the Panasonic about 80%. For me the extra telephoto on the Sony is a plus.

Regarding exposure, I made several checks at full telephoto, indoors, in a marginally-lit room. Setting both cameras at 1/60 sec exposure, with or without the same small amounts of gain added in both cameras, the auto iris setting of both cameras chose the same apertures in multiple tests. In other words, the exposure settings were identical with or without gain added. This surprised me, since the PMW is advertised as having better low-light capability than other cameras, partially because of the 1/2" chips in the PMW. The Sony does have an advantage, however, because at full telephoto the Sony has a maximum aperture of 1.9, whereas the Panasonic's maximum aperture is 2.8.

That's about it for my first observations. Despite my criticisms above, I am very happy that I got the PMW-200 and I look forward to getting some excellent video from this unit. One final observation – the PMW does get warm on the upper part of the camera body after 20 minutes of continuous use. Warm, but not hot.