

Review

# 3-D gimmick eclipses quality Kodak printer

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It's tough to stand out in the dog-eat-dog world of budget-priced all-in-one printers, so the Eastman Kodak Company is trying something new to grab our attention: 3-D photo printing.

The Kodak ESP Office 2170 All-in-One is the first inkjet printer in its class to deliver prints with a sense of depth. Just boot up the included Kodak AiO Home Center PC software, select a couple of pictures of the same subject taken from slightly different angles (no, it can't magically turn a single monoscopic image into a stereoscopic one), and press print.

It works. Kind of.

Three-dimensional prints require the viewer to don a pair of old-school cardboard glasses with blue and red lenses, but – assuming you've chosen a couple of images well suited to be merged into a single stereoscopic shot – elements of the picture do indeed seem to pop off the paper.

That said, the ESP 2170's prints hardly begin to approach the sort of stereoscopic wizardry seen in modern 3-D films. Plus, typically important printing elements such as colour and contrast are thrown out the window in favour of creating the 3-D effect. And keep in mind the print is useless without the glasses – which, by the way, don't appear to come included (Kodak threw a pair in the outer packing box for me to aid in my testing).

Long story short, don't buy this solely for its 3-D output.

To be fair, though, the ESP 2170's stereoscopic functionality isn't its primary selling point. It's just a bonus feature – a gimmick to make you take a closer look. Once the printer has your attention it offers a few more practical arguments.

Like cheaper ink. Kodak uses permanent printer heads rather than disposable ones, which means when it comes time for a refill you're only paying for the ink and its receptacle. A black refill rated for 335 sheets of text costs \$9.99, a colour goes for \$17.99. It's still more expensive than it should be – printer ink remains a cash cow for manufacturers – but it's significantly cheaper than replacing cartridges in comparable HP, Canon, Lexmark, and Epson units.

Getting back to Kodak's AiO Home Center software mentioned above, it does more than just provide the means to create 3-D prints. It allows users to make basic edits to pictures, quickly

upload images to online photo repositories ranging from Flickr and Facebook to Kodak's own Kodak Gallery, and – this is really neat – grab still images from video files. Obviously, most video stills won't be as clear as a camera-captured photograph, but it's nice to have the ability to pull out and print a particularly fetching frame from a family video should the want arise.

Meanwhile, the printer itself – which offers PC-free scanner, fax, and copying functionality – is a well made, if not particularly snazzy, piece of home office equipment. Its plain, matte black case has been smartly engineered to make everything from tray manipulation to cartridge replacement a snap. Setup – including printer head alignment and connecting to a home wireless network – took less than five minutes, and most of that time was spent waiting while the printer automatically set itself up. A small LCD screen makes it easy to scroll through and change local settings, while clearly marked buttons should prove welcomingly familiar to anyone with a modicum of experience using all-in-one printers.

Print quality is about what you'd expect from a budget machine with a single colour cartridge, which is to say not on par with what you'd get from a lab or a decent purpose-built photo printer with discrete colour cartridges, but good enough for casual use. Images weren't quite as warm or bright as I'd have liked, but I judged them nice enough to mail as gifts to a few family members. The ability to use Kodak's free Pic Flick app to print directly from your iPhone, iPad, or BlackBerry (though, sadly, not an Android device) is a nice bonus.

It will also oblige to serve as a light workhorse. A surprisingly deep feeder tray holds up to 150 sheets of standard stock copy paper (25 on top for the fax), and a paper sensor automatically detects size and type, saving time. It's speedier than an average home printer – I clocked it at about five text-filled pages per minute with default settings – but not nearly as quick as more expensive dedicated office printers.

The 1200 dpi scanner performs as well as you'd hope. It's fine for document imaging and does a decent job with photos, too, assuming you haven't a need to blow up pictures beyond their original size. Extra features like optical character recognition, which makes it possible to edit or search scanned documents saved in RTF or PDF formats, and the ability to automatically separate multiple images scanned simultaneously add substantial value in certain scenarios.

At \$149.99, the Kodak ESP Office 2170 is a little more than many competing models, but you should be able to recoup costs over the long term thanks to the cheaper ink – assuming that you don't waste too much dye on those mostly useless 3-D prints.

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