

Is The Time Right For You To Change Camera Systems?

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As humans, we all harbor a natural resistance to change. It is understandable, as change forces us out from our long held comfort zone into a new and unknown environment. I freely admit to being one who looks for any reason to hold off making changes. "Why fix it, if it isn't broken?" is my standard credo. So you might wonder why after nearly thirty years of photography using a single 35mm system, I voluntarily switched to another system? Why, for that matter, should any photographer consider making the shift to a different brand? Have you thought about switching brands? Let me share with you my reasons for making the decision, the trials and tribulation of the transition, and, finally, my thoughts after a year of using the new gear. The intent of this article is not to portray any one brand as superior to another, but rather to share my experience, and in the process, enlighten other photographers who may be considering the same.

My conversion from Nikon to Canon 35mm system took place one year ago. It was a difficult decision, somewhat like saying goodbye to an old friend. Several factors led to the decision. My forte is bird photography, and I wanted a system which I felt would best serve my interest. Today's modern camera systems are so technically advanced, that all major brands are sufficient for the task. It all boils down to which features are the most important, and which brand appeals to your personal taste. I studied and weighed the advantages of each before finally settling on Canon. Image Stabilization (IS) technology in their big glass lenses was a heavy influence, as was full meter coupling and auto focus (AF) with extension tubes. I took the plunge, and in less than a week, the new gear arrived. It was then that shock settled in, as I came to realize the learning curve ahead

for me.

I spent hours on end pouring over and studying the owner's manuals, trying to make sense of this foreign object in my hands called an EOS-1v. In the past, I had taken for granted the controls and features on my F5. The two bodies operate in a similar fashion - both will produce first-rate images, but they are vastly different in design, especially where controls are located and "feel." At first, it was like learning to do everything left-handed, after being right-handed since birth. Bird photography requires a full understanding of equipment and its capabilities. Speed often makes the difference in good vs. no image with birds and I was anything but fast. For weeks, I practiced, imprinting in my mind the nuances of the new system. I wanted it to become second nature. It is important to note here, that the experience during transition was similar to "back to basics." In other words, I had to think through the rudimentary elements of exposure, metering modes, customs functions, etc. Few, if any photographers, utilize all of the features offered in their cameras. Most of us select and learn the features we desire, and we settle in on a few exposure modes and then practice technique. Admittedly, it took several months for me to "unlearn" my old habits and feel comfortable with my new tools.

Now a full year into the transition... what are my thoughts? Do I regret making the switch? I have to say the move for me, overall was positive, and I have no regrets. Sure, I miss the level of comfort I had before. And, I still prefer certain aspects and features of the Nikon system to that of Canon, but *overall*, I am pleased. In the past year, my proficiency and speed have gradually progressed to where it was when I was using Nikon gear. Having now owned and used both systems, I feel my knowledge and skill have improved. Neither system is perfect, and each has advantages and disadvantages. I see no need to dwell on a detailed comparison of the two systems here. While I have gotten more images at low shutter speeds due to IS, at the same time, Nikon's RGB in-camera meter did a better job



of gauging exposure in difficult situations. Equipment alone does not a photographer make. I am reminded of a time, several years back when I aspired to play the game of golf. But alas, my skills were lacking. I sold my hand-me down set of clubs and promptly bought a shiny new set which set me back a chunk of change. I was sure the new tools would cut numerous strokes off my game. As you might guess, such was not the case. An old-timer with whom I was playing just shook his head and remarked with a grin, "Son, it's not the club, but the clubber that counts."



Have you thought about changing brand and/or systems? Before doing so, assess your current needs and specialties as a nature photographer. Does your current equipment adequately fulfill your requirements? If not, determine what additional bodies, lenses, and accessories are available for your system regardless of brand. Compare, as I did, similar features, overall quality, and amenities of several brands before making a decision. Set your goal, and as finances become available, begin to acquire the components of your new system. Become intimately familiar with your newly obtained equipment as soon as possible. Seek out other more experienced photographers that use the same equipment and learn from them. Conversely, share freely your knowledge with others eager to learn.

Our goal is to perfect our craft, nature photography. The tools of our trade undeniably play an important role. Attitude is also essential. The ancient Greeks had a term that best fits: *Hubris*. It meant simply, "Be all that you can be!"

About the images...

Trumpeter Swan
Tulsa, Oklahoma
Nikon F5 600 F4 Nikkor
RGB meter, + .3 compensation
Exp 1/250 @ F8, Provia F

Eastern Kingbird
Warner Robins, Georgia
Nikon F5 600 F4 Nikkor
RGB meter, 0 compensation
Exp 1/160 @ F8, Provia F

Killdeer chick
Great Salt Plains NWR, Oklahoma
Canon EOS 1v 600 F4/1.4X TC
Evaluative meter, 0 compensation
Exp 1/200 @ F7.1, Provia F

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