

Camcorders JVS / Canon Review

Pros

- Widescreen and standard aspect ratio modes
- Vivid LCD display works well in sunlight
- Satisfying image quality and stability
- Extra-long battery life

Cons

- No viewfinder
- VGA-quality still photos

JVC's camcorders are a refreshingly unpretentious camcorder that not only keeps its operation simple and direct, but provides excellent, high-quality video as well. If you don't have a lot of money to spend and like the versatility of the MiniDV format, this is the camcorder to get.

Design

Camcorder is slightly heavier than its peers, the Canon and JVC has designed it to be squarer and thicker than its tall, thin counterparts. Despite its portly design, this camcorder is still very comfortable to hold and carry. The shape of the device makes it easier to grip and gives the impression of greater control over the taller models; it feels like the difference between grasping a football and palming a basketball.

Controls

The camcorder isn't cluttered with buttons and switches. Most of the major functions are assigned to a simple directional joystick on the LCD bezel, which can adjust the focus, enable backlight compensation, trigger the LED light for illumination, and do a quick review of the most recent footage recorded. The LCD bezel also features a button that allows the user to quickly switch between the 16:9 widescreen and 4:3 square aspect ratios. Advanced features like exposure adjustments and video effects can be accessed through the easily navigable menu system.

Very Good Performance

Compared to other budget camcorders we've tested, the JVC offers superior video quality. Video taken looked bright and true to life, with vivid colors and superior definition. Because accessing the camera's settings is so simple, making adjustments to compensate for environmental factors like bright light or deep shadow was a snap. Because it also accepts SD Cards, the camera is capable of taking still photos, but they're only VGA quality.

The camcorder's 35X optical zoom also stood out as an exceptional feature. Even at full extension, the shots were crisp, in focus, and free from significant jitters or shakes. Much of this stability is probably owed to the extra heft carries. JVC's NightAlive didn't fare as well as Sony's NightShot: It seemed to slow down the frame rate, making the video stutter and appear choppy. However, its Tele Macro mode was more useful and effective than Sony's. The lighter Canon and Sony did not perform as well on long zoom shots. The Canon also has the longest battery life of the bunch, at 115 minutes, a full half-hour longer than the next best.

Verdict

With excellent ergonomics and endurance, and better video quality than more-expensive competitors.

While it may be a little bit bulkier, you—as well as everyone you show your vacation videos to—will appreciate the steadier shots.