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PLAY test MINI CAMCORDERS

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PLAY

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The mini camcorder is all about size. How can you cram the most functionality into a small box



and still have a useful product? Count only the key features: ease of use, low weight (under 2 pounds), hi-res digital video, decent battery life, and durability. If you find all that, consider the sound.

- James Turner

SPLURGE

Panasonic PV-DV851 (pictured)

This 1.2-pounder is a rarity in the nano-size DV world — a product you can hold comfortably and use with one hand. The minicam records good color, even in low light, and there's never any awkwardness when accessing the controls. The hi-res PV-DV851 has a 100X digital zoom, slick movie quality, and standard battery life (80 minutes). Bonus: a still-camera mode with 640 x 480 resolution.

\$1,600, www.panasonic.com.

BEST BUY

Sharp VL-NZ150U

One look at the NZ150U, and it's obvious that single-handed operation wasn't the goal of its engineers. Its pivoting body and the absence of a viewfinder mean you'll need both your mitts - and it's actually the smartest way to manipulate the 1-pound machine. This utilitarian DV cam has standard still-picture functionality and color, controls, and battery life.

\$800, www.sharppusa.com.

OVERRATED

Sony DCR-PC120BT

This 1.25-pound camcorder is billed as a one-handed wonder, yet critical controls, like zoom, are almost impossible to use without a second hand. The Bluetooth connectivity is the biggest bummer: Two 15-second MPEG videos take a ridiculous 30 minutes to transfer to the Web. Bummer number two: Color washes out under low light.

\$2,000, www.sonystyle.com.

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