

photo, it'll probably take some extra work. Even so, I was dang impressed with Content-Aware Fill.

The improved image selection and masking features in PS 5 are also a standout. We've all had the problem where stray or frizzy hairs on a subject makes the delicate job of selecting and deleting backgrounds a nightmare. With the Refine Radius tool (from the Refine Edge dialog box) you can make those selections more "intelligent," i.e. have Photoshop do the work in finding edges, not you. Just casually paint around the edges of stray hairs and CS5's Smart Radius technology will determine which is the subject and which is background, right down to the whisker.

The new Puppet Warp tool should be a big boon to commercial and advertising photographers and designers (among others) since it allows you to easily recompose an image to improve it aesthetically or to have it fit a layout. Just drop a series of anchor pins on parts of a subject you want to stay fixed—in a test image I dropped pins along the trunk of an elephant—and then use the hand tool to adjust the appendage to where you want it. In the case of the trunk, I moved the end of it closer to the elephant's mouth while the rest automatically adjusted itself to compensate for the shift in pixels. This should do wonders for photos of models in awkward poses. But once again, serious photojournalists should stay away.

#### HDR, PAINTING & RAW DEALS

The ever-controversial topic of HDR (High Dynamic Range) imaging gets no reprieve with Photoshop CS5. Adobe's added a host of new HDR features to the program which are sure to cause more and more ordinary photos to become ridiculously over-processed. This is, of course, not the fault of Adobe which is just acting as an enabler here. What you choose to do with your shots with PS CS5's new HDR tools is up to you.

If you want to do what HDR was originally intended for—balance an exposure by combining several different images into one—you can use the HDR Pro controls. Select the images—each, ostensibly, captured at a different exposure: dark, bright, and in between—and use the Merge to HDR Pro dialog box to combine them into one evenly balanced image.

In my testing using three RAW images, I found the Merge to HDR Pro to be effective but slow. Using a top-of-the-line Apple MacBook Pro, it took me a few minutes just to open the images in the controls and then a few more minutes to merge them. It wasn't dramatic but it was noticeable in a program that otherwise runs quite speedily.

You can also add an HDR "effect" to a single image with the HDR Toning feature. This is, of course, just mimicking a real HDR photo merge and some of the "photorealistic," "surrealistic" and heavily saturated pre-sets—to my taste, at least—look positively nauseating. Again, I don't fault Adobe for giving the people what they want but I do have to say that overdoing it with HDR is a trend I hope will end soon.

Painting on photos is not really my cup of tea either but that's not because I don't always like the effect, it's just that I'm not very good at it. Adobe makes the process easier in Photoshop CS5 thanks to the new Mixer Brush and Bristle Tips features. The Mixer Brush lets you blend multiple colors on a single brush and then transform the photo into a painting with a few strokes. Meanwhile, Bristle Tips changes the shape, length, stiffness, thickness, angle, and spacing of your virtual brush in Photoshop, giving you some serious control. (FYI: If you like the painting functionality in Photoshop, a Wacom tablet is an absolute must.)

Adobe's added several great new tools in its Camera Raw 6 plug-in including an effective new algorithm to reduce both Luminance and Color (Chroma) noise in your images. You can also add in "grain"—which seems counterintuitive considering the noise reduction tools—but I genuinely liked the effect when trying to add some mood to color and black-and-white images. The same goes for the Vignette feature in ACR 6 though I wish this, and the grain functions, were also available in Photoshop proper.

As PDN went to press, Adobe also added automated Lens Correction to Camera Raw 6.1, a feature that's also new to Photoshop CS5. The tool lets photographers apply profiles to fix geometric distortions, chromatic aberrations and lens vignetting. Photographers can also create and share corrected lens profiles via Adobe's Lens Profile Creator. And, of course, you're free to make manual adjustments as well.

#### WHAT'S MISSING?

Where Photoshop CS5 comes up short is in virtually ignoring one of the biggest trends in photography right now: digital SLRs that shoot HD video. Other than some basic playback options in Adobe Bridge, there's nothing offered here in terms of HD video editing. Sure, Adobe would rather you performed those functions in its latest video editing program—Premiere Pro CS5—but as I said in my review of Apple Aperture 3 last month which was also light on HD tools, photographers who shoot video are looking for something in one package, and if they don't find it in Photoshop, Aperture, Lightroom etc., they're liable to look elsewhere. Just something to think about.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

I'd hate to be a Photoshop plug-in company right now. Adobe has added so many new tools to Photoshop CS5 that once were the domain of plug-ins and standalone apps—HDR, lens correction, and painting, just to name a few—I find myself going less and less to the third-party filter dropdown menu with this latest release. (That's also probably because many of my plug-ins still had not been updated to CS5 at the time of this review.) And while I noticed a few bugs with the new features—particularly the Merge to HDR Pro functionality, which was slow—most everything else in Photoshop CS5 hums along like a well-oiled machine

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thanks, no doubt, to the native 64-bit support. If the lack of HD video editing is disappointing, there's a lot to like in this latest version of Photoshop, though I don't recommend the pricier "Extended" version unless you have some deep affection for 3D. But if you skipped the underwhelming CS4 version and have been on the fence about upgrading now, take it from us, Adobe Photoshop CS5 is well worth the investment.

#### Adobe Photoshop CS5

[www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

**Pros:** Offers a host of helpful new marquee features including Content-Aware Fill, intelligent selection and masking, and Puppet Warp; easy to access images in Photoshop via Mini Bridge; very fast performance thanks to native 64-bit support for Mac and Windows computers; dozens of user-suggested fixes; more HDR and painting tools and increased Camera Raw functionality

**Cons:** Lacks serious editing features for HD video; Merge to HDR function was slow and had some bugs; not much new in Adobe Bridge

**Price:** \$699 for Photoshop CS5; \$999 for Photoshop CS5 Extended; \$199 for upgrade

## Steadicam Merlin

This lightweight camera rig will help you create magical tracking shots with your HD-DSLR.

We review all kinds of rigs for balancing your HD-DSLR in these pages but one of the best comes from perhaps the best known name in the business: Steadicam's Merlin. The Steadicam brand is so ubiquitous in the world of cinematography—and now in the world of digital SLRs that shoot HD video—most people ask for it by name even when they don't quite know what they're asking for: "We need a nice steadicam shot here" or "Does anybody have a steadicam we can use?"

What people usually mean is they want some kind of stabilizing mount for the camera to produce a nice, smooth tracking shot. That the Steadicam brand is so associated with this type of device is a mixed blessing for Tiffen, the company that owns the trademark and distributes Steadicam products. (Sort of similar, perhaps, to how Abode feels about the term "photoshopping" being applied to any and all image editing.)

The Steadicam Merlin (\$799) is a product that had been around for a few years before the whole HD-DSLR phenomenon hit the scene. An extremely light rig—it weighs just 13 ounces—the Merlin initially appealed to videographers seeking to "float" their small camcorders in tight shooting conditions. That the Merlin is also tailor-made for



The Merlin's lightweight design is great for HD-DSLRs.

DSLRs such as the Canon 5D Mark II and Nikon D90 which both shoot HD video is one of those “happy accidents” that has to please Tiffen.

I tested the Merlin recently with photographer Jason Group who has added what he calls “FUσιοN”—

a marriage of photography and video—to his list of services. Jason's been scouting around for the ideal device for creating smooth tracking shots with his 5D Mark II—see our review of the Humble Monkey camera truck in the May 2010 issue of PDN—and so far it's been a case of Goldilocks and the Three Bears: “This one's too small. That one's too big,” etc.

The Merlin, designed by Garrett Brown, the inventor of the original Steadicam Jr, may be the “just right” rig for Jason. Lighter than a can of soda, the all-aluminum Merlin uses a six-ball-bearing gimbal to isolate the camera from the shooter to create a smooth shot even when the camera operator is moving quickly over uneven ground. Jason had tried less expensive “knockoffs” of the Merlin previously but now wishes he saved his money for the original.

The Merlin kit includes an instructional DVD, led by Brown, to help you get the proper balance with the camera rig. After that, set-up takes just a few minutes and Jason was off and flying his 5D II. Initial impressions?

“Awesome,” he reported. “It handles so much more comfortably than any other rig I've tried.” For his FUσιοN videos, Jason could see using the Merlin to create establishing shots outside a church during a wedding shoot; or of the bride and groom during the reception. For free-form street shooting, which Jason does with his urban “I (Heart) NY” sessions, the possibilities with the Merlin are wide-ranging.

The Merlin uses a dual extended weight system—the top mount where the camera goes and the curved section you see jutting out at the bottom—to increase stability. The counterbalancing weight can be adjusted to steady cameras weighing from 0.5 ounces up to 5 lbs.

We were able to hold the basic Merlin rig steady for about 30 seconds per shot but with the optional Merlin Arm and Vest (\$1,495) which attaches the device to your body, you can lock it in for extended smooth shooting. Because of the Merlin's lightweight design, adding any kind of serious zoom lens, without using the arm and vest, throws off the balance. Even when shooting with a 5D II and short prime lens, it takes practice with the Merlin to keep things steady.

After testing it in New York, Jason brought the Merlin to a destination wedding he was shooting in Aruba. Since the Merlin folds up neatly using a well-designed hinge system, it was easy to pack in the included hard case and bring on an airplane. There are few similar devices that are so portable.

Our main gripe with the Merlin was with the thin mounting plate/screw for your camera. If the screw was just eighth of an inch longer it would make attaching and removing a DSLR much easier. Even better would be a specially designed quick release plate. As it was, Jason used his own tripod quick release plate to attach the 5D II to the Merlin but it added weight, was somewhat clunky, and hard to lock down. That's a small quibble but it's one that shouldn't be hard to remedy.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

If you're interested in creating smooth looking HD footage with your DSLR, don't settle for imitations, spend a little extra money and get the excellent Steadicam Merlin. Designed for the on-the-go photographer/cinematographer, this lightweight camera rig packs up neatly and will give you superb tracking shots whether you're shooting near the studio or on location.

#### Steadicam Merlin

[www.tiffen.com](http://www.tiffen.com)

**Pros:** The best lightweight rig on the market for “flying” your HD-DSLR; folds up small and fits in an included traveling case; very comfortable to use.

**Cons:** Optional arm and vest is an expensive upgrade; needs better mounting system.

**Price:** \$799

### Canon PowerShot SD4000 IS

Slick point-and-shoot camera boasts an f/2.0 lens and superior low-light capabilities.

Photographers are always looking for the perfect little camera to stuff in a pocket or bag for a day