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By: Alex Vochin, Gadgets Editor

[Samsung DualView ST550 Digital Camera Review](#)

A true revolution in the field of consumer-oriented digital cameras



Samsung ST550
Samsung

Have you ever come across a certain item that, from the moment you laid eyes on it, you felt like it really brought something innovative to its category? I mean, a device providing certain unique, never before seen features that you felt were going to change the respective product segment for good?

Well, if you have (and I'm pretty sure all of you must have felt like this regarding a gadget at some point), then you'll completely understand why we were so excited when testing Samsung's DualView ST550 digital camera, which, as far as we're concerned, really manages to fit within the above description, at least from certain points of view.

Launched back in mid-2009, the ST550 was, at the time, the world's only digital camera to feature not one, but two displays. Of course, there was the main display (touchscreen with haptic feedback, absolutely great in terms of control), but Samsung decided to help out people crazy about self-portraits (and if we take only a quick look at pretty much any social networking service, we'll notice just how many such people are out there) and added a secondary one, which could be employed to allow users to view exactly what they were shooting at any given moment.

While this is, without a doubt, the main selling point of the entire DualView family, there are quite a few other features that make this particular camcorder a very interesting choice, especially for those people out there who aren't as much interested in tacking an artistic photo as they are in taking quick snapshot memories of themselves and friends having fun or even save on video some interesting live action scenes.

There's a lot more to be said about Samsung's ST550 camera, so we hope we've managed to get you interested in this subject.

[[BREAK=Aesthetics and Design]]

Overall design features

If you're packing an ST550 and you take it out of your pocket to snap a quick photo, people around you will certainly notice it. I mean, this thing oozes high technology and style, with its glossy exterior and that combo of piano black, silver and bright orange (yeah, that's orange, although it could have fooled us into believing that it's actually red). Plus, it fits both male and female users quite well, unlike some other devices of this type, some of which, at least, are quite a bit gender-biased.

It's also important to point out that the materials used for making the ST550 are all high-quality, the same going for the level of finishing. Practically, there's absolutely nothing wrong with the looks of the Samsung camera... until you get to touch it, of course.

Now, as we all know, the main problem with piano-black finishing is the fact that it's pretty fingerprint-friendly. And that's exactly the problem the ST550 suffers from, as the camera tends to get quite dirty with fingerprints very fast, which takes away some of its luster. However, it's not something a piece of cloth can't take care of, and those people who want

their ST550 to be all shiny and clean every time they use it will be able to keep it so without too much effort.

Size and portability

As far as Samsung is concerned, the ST550 has been designed in order to be carried around wherever the user might go, to be able to catch that perfect snapshot whenever needed. For this reason, the digicam is, in fact, quite compact, measuring just around 99.8 x 59.8 x 18.6mm and weighing around 165.7g (without battery and card). However, the overall weight, including the battery and the card, is not that high, so it's not like you'll feel burdened in any way while carrying around the ST550.

[IMG=33][IMG=34]

Similar to most other compact digital cameras out there, Samsung's ST550 also comes with a lanyard, which attaches to a specially designed opening that can be found on the left side. Quite obviously, it's perhaps a good idea to go ahead and use this lanyard whenever you use the camera, simply because dropping the ST550 might have some unpleasant consequences (especially if the haptic touch screen gets damaged in any way).

Controls

The ST550 compact digital camera from Samsung offers two different control options: a couple of physical buttons (which, nevertheless, only control the camera to a limited extent) and the touch screen display that allows users to access all of the camera's various functions.

Most of the physical buttons can be found on the top side of the ST550, apart from the one activating the playback function, which has a slighter lower position. So, from left to right, we can see the power switch, followed by the shutter button, which is large enough to ensure that users will have absolutely no problems pressing it (plus, there are certain cases when you won't even have to push it, but we'll talk about those functions a little later within our review).

Next in line comes the zoom controller, which is somewhat strange, compared to the modern trends regarding these particular control options. Instead of a small dial or wheel, the ST550's zoom button can simply be pushed either to the left or to the right to control the zoom level. It's pretty simple and effective, but fine zooming could prove to be a bit trickier. Moving from full wide angle to wide telephone will take 2-3 seconds, so you should be careful to take this issue into account when choosing your next subject.

As mentioned above, there's also a button for activating the playback feature (quickly reviewing photos and videos you've just taken), which can be found right underneath the zoom control. Finding and pressing it shouldn't be a problem, despite the fact that it is, most likely, the smallest of all the ST550's buttons.

The last button we'll talk about is the one opening the battery and memory card compartment, located on the bottom side of the camera. The button has a limited functionality, but at least it works without any problems, opening and closing the respective compartment being a fairly easy process.

Now that we're done with the buttons, let's move on to the touch screen. While we won't get into details regarding the actual quality of the display, we will say that in terms of control and feedback, the 3.5-inch rear screen is quite OK, allowing users to easily control all of the

camera's features. There is one thing we would have liked to see implemented (a button for locking the rear display when taking a photo), but we'll talk a bit more on this issue a bit later.

Connectivity

We really like what ST550 has to offer in the field of connectivity, as the engineers from Samsung have managed to keep everything simple and neat. So, the digicam only sports one interface (a proprietary connector, to be precise), placed on the bottom side. However, this single connector can be used for connecting the camera to a computer via a suitable USB 2.0 adapter (a process during which the battery also gets recharged), to a TV set (via another adapter), as well as to the USB power adapter included in the package.

Practically, by using this system, photographers won't have to worry about misplacing the various cables that typically come within the package of any digital camera, and they can also travel light, since they don't have to take too many accessories around for the ride.

Slot placement, speaker and microphone

Of course, the aforementioned connector is by no means the only interface found on the ST550. So, there's also a Micro SD (up to 4 GB guaranteed) / Micro SDHC (up to 8 GB guaranteed) memory card slot, which can be found on the bottom side, behind a protective cap that also keeps the camera's battery protected (yeah, you've guessed it, the two slots are placed right next to each other).

[IMG=23][IMG=32]

The fact that the engineers from Samsung opted for a MicroSD/SDHC format instead of the classic SD/SDHC is particularly interesting, since it allows users to easily take out such a card from their mobile phone and use it with the camera, need be. Very good choice, in terms of versatility.

Similar to most other digital cameras out there, Samsung's ST550 features a tripod mounting socket on the bottom side, right next to the battery compartment, which pretty much concludes our list of available slots.

[IMG=27][IMG=28][IMG=29]

The ST550 comes equipped with a mono microphone, used for recording audio within video clips or even for turning the digital camera into an impromptu voice recorder, as well as a built-in speaker (also mono), found on the left side of the camera. Since both of these things are mono, don't expect too much out of them, although the microphone does manage to provide a very good audio background for the high-quality movies recorded with the help of this digital camera.

Secondary display and lens

The secondary display represents the most important innovation differentiating the ST550 from all other digital cameras out there and, at the same time, its main selling point. The display is placed on the front side, to the left of the lens, and can be activated only by tapping on it (to tell you the truth, it took us a while to figure that out when we first played with the Samsung camera, as we were desperately searching for the button switching on or off the display).

[IMG=30][IMG=31]

Anyway, after getting it started, we were quite impressed by just how large this thing is (1.5 inches - 3.8 cm in diagonal). I mean, one shouldn't have any problems getting a pretty good shot with the help of the display, although, once again, we'll talk about this issue a lot more

- Tilting, Drawing X and half circle);
- Smart Face Recognition (Register 6 people manually and 14 people automatically);
- One Touch Shooting;
- Smart Auto;
- Smart Album (Smart Album Category: Type, Date, Colour, Week, Face, Favorite);
- Beauty Shot (1,2,3 Steps);
- High Definition Movie Recording: - 720p Resolution @30fps / H.264 Movie File;
- HDMI CEC (Optional HDMI cable and Connector needed);
- Multi Slide Show / Recycle Bin;
- High Sensitivity ISO3200 (Full Size).

[[BREAK=Real Life Performance]]

Overall considerations - menu navigation, setup, controls

Now that we're done talking about just how Samsung's ST550 looks like and about the features it has to offer, it's about time to move to that section of our review most of you have probably been looking for, namely the one regarding the camera's real-life performance. You won't be disappointed, although, to tell you the truth, you shouldn't really expect DSLR-grade results from this device.

After all, we must not forget that the ST550 has not necessarily been designed for pro (or even semi-pro) photographers, but rather for a wide consumer range, comprising people of all ages who want a device that will enable them to take both self-portraits and normal shots, as well as 720p videos. And by all ages, we really mean that, since the gadget from Samsung even offers a feature that will certainly help parents in photographing their offspring a lot easier.

Before moving on to the menus and just what one will have to do in order to properly control and setup the ST550, we'll have to go through a very quick talk about the various uses of Samsung's DualView camera. As mentioned right from the first chapter of our review, young people who love taking photos of themselves and their friend in all sorts of situations (and we're pretty sure you've seen quite a lot of such photos for yourselves over time) will find the ST550 useful and, why not, quite trendy, given its good looks and advanced functionality.

[IMG=65][IMG=66][IMG=67][IMG=68]

Another possible use for the Samsung camera involves kids. I mean, getting a child to stay put and smile for the camera can be a pretty difficult task, but this is exactly where the camera's secondary display comes into play, since it allows users to display some funny, colorful images, which will be sure to draw the child's attention. Plus, once the child has smiled, the camera's automatic smile detection technology will kick in and make the shot.

[IMG=69][IMG=70][IMG=71][IMG=72]

As you might have guessed from our segment dedicated to the ST550's control options, working with this device should be a pretty easy task for most people out there. I mean, how hard can it be to compose the button and press the shutter button?

[IMG=73][IMG=74][IMG=75][IMG=76]

Well, things are not exactly that easy, but we'll talk more about this issue in due time. What we will mention here, though, is that the user interface / haptic touch screen combo is a very interesting and intuitive one, letting one actually "feel" that he/she has pressed a certain button and/or activated a certain function.

Plus, the level of vibrations emitted by the ST550 can be easily adjusted (three different settings are available), and the same goes for the emitted sounds. We should also note the

screen's level of sensitivity which, as far as we're concerned, is absolutely fantastic, compared to other touch screen products we've tested over time.

[IMG=77][IMG=78][IMG=79]

One of the things we've particularly enjoyed about the way one can control the camera from Samsung is the Smart Gesture feature, which enables users to activate certain functions by applying gestures on the display or even shaking the camera (there's also an accelerometer sensor built-in, which can really come in handy for scrolling between photos). To be perfectly honest, after experimenting with the gesture feature for a while, we decided that simply pressing the icons in order to get the job done is a much faster and easier method, but that's besides the point.

[IMG=63][IMG=64]

While most of the controls are fairly easy to get accustomed to, navigation between the navigation shooting modes might pose a small problem. So, unlike in the case of most other compact digital cameras, where moving between shooting modes is an extremely easy task (typically carried out by a built-in dial or wheel), when working with the ST550, one will have to first press a special, camera-shaped icon in the top left corner, and only then access the main shooting options menu (which is also wheel-shaped, but maybe this is just a coincidence).

Taking photos

We've talked about a lot of things related to the ST550, and it's now about time to move on to its main function, namely photo shooting. In order to make things a bit easier, we've divided this particular chapter into two different sections, one related to the photo shooting process, the other to the overall quality of the resulted shots.

Photo-shooting process

In terms of photo shooting options, the Samsung ST550 digital camera is an extremely versatile device, providing a little something for everyone, whether you're an absolute beginner or someone who's done their fair share of photo shooting over the years.

[IMG=35][IMG=36][IMG=37][IMG=38]

[IMG=39][IMG=40][IMG=41][IMG=42]

Now, if this is your first digital camera, it's perhaps for the best to start with the Smart Auto or Auto modes, because these will pretty much automatize the whole photo shooting process, by doing their best to choose the appropriate settings that match the lighting conditions and environment characteristics. And in most cases, they manage to achieve quite OK results, so do rely on them when you're not quite sure what other options to choose.

There's also a Scene Mode selector, which works pretty much in a similar manner to all of the other pre-set scene modes found in Samsung's cameras (other manufacturers' devices too, of course). Moreover, the ST550 offers a Dual IS mode, which allows users to select between optical and digital image stabilization. These modes work particularly well when hand-holding the ST550 in low-light conditions or when using the telephoto end of the zoom range.

[IMG=43][IMG=44][IMG=45][IMG=46]

[IMG=47][IMG=48][IMG=49][IMG=50]

Regardless of the shooting mode of choice, you'll most likely want to tweak at least some of the settings, and the way to do it is by accessing either the function menu, which pops up when one presses the bottom side of the display, or the Menu button. Naturally, the functions available via the function menu will depend directly on the shooting mode of choice, and they're typically useful, especially if you've been using this thing for quite a

while now.

Some of the shooting features that really managed to draw our attention were related to the focus system, users being able to either choose the classic central focus, focus on multiple areas, and even choose the exact focus point by pressing the corresponding point on the screen for a longer period of time. An AF tracking feature is available as well.

[IMG=51][IMG=52][IMG=53][IMG=54]
[IMG=55][IMG=56][IMG=57][IMG=58]

The Smart Auto mode also holds a couple of interesting surprises, especially related to the camera's "smart" features, such as blink detection, smile detection, face detection and even face recognition, the camera being able to actually save the users faces' characteristics - up to 14 users, to be precise).

The Smile Detection is particularly interesting (the camera takes a shot whenever it detects a smile, and it's particularly accurate at doing so), and one will certainly have a lot of fun toying around with this function.

From the point of view of usability, there are at least a couple of features that differentiate the Samsung ST550 from many other cameras we've encountered thus far. And without a doubt, that secondary display is one of them, since, as we've already mentioned a couple of times, it will prove helpful when creating photos. Plus, it can be used for displaying the countdown timer, which we'll detail a bit later on, and proved to be versatile enough for our tastes, given the fact that we were able to easily choose what was displayed on the respective screen at any given moment.

[IMG=59][IMG=60][IMG=61][IMG=62]

Now, coming back to the timer, we'll have to say that the ST550 offers some extremely interesting timer-related options, such as the possibility to take the shot at 6 seconds after all movement in front of the camera has stopped (Motion Timer) or the double timer feature, which allows the camera to take a first shot at 10 seconds after the shutter has been pressed and a second one, just 2 seconds later.

The camera's built-in flash module manages to provide sufficient light in little or no light situations, the ST550 providing a few flash modes. Probably the most interesting and useful one is red-eye reduction, which we're pretty sure a lot of people are going to use (especially those who aren't very well accustomed to using a photo editing software application).

[IMG=80][IMG=81][IMG=82]

Since we're talking about image altering applications, we'll also have to add that Samsung's DualView camera offers quite a few options of this type, such as Vivid, Forest, Retro, Cool, Calm, Classic, Negative, etc. (others too, but we don't want to spoil all the fun of discovering them, do we, now?).

[IMG=83][IMG=84][IMG=85]

Last, but certainly not least, we'll have to come back to one issue we mentioned earlier on in our review, related to the lack of a button for locking the touchscreen display while shooting photos. When one has decided on the right settings and wants to take a photo of himself/herself with the help of the secondary display, there will be a tendency to accidentally press the screen, thus messing around the initial settings.

Image quality

The Samsung ST550 provides quite good-quality photos, although one should not really expect DSLR-grade shots from it, given the fact that, after all, this is a consumer-oriented camera. And, from our experience with the camera, it works very well when taking photos in

good lighting conditions, and especially well when shooting outside, in a sunny day (but, then again, this can be said about pretty much any digicam out there).

However, the ST550 also generates its fair share of noise, which might not become apparent at lower ISO settings, but when moving up to 400 and 800, it will really pop out and "scratch" our retinas. Obviously, things aren't much better at ISO 1600 and ISO 3200, which we wouldn't recommend using unless the photographer has run out of all other options.

Images taken with the ST550 are crisp and clear, although not particularly sharp (one might want to carry out some slight sharpness adjustments right from the camera's menus). The macro feature, on the other hand, is very well implemented, photographers being able to focus at some pretty small distances from the subject (around 5 cm away, to be precise). Also, we haven't been able to spot any significant chromatic aberrations, while the built-in flash worked really well, both indoors and at nighttime.

As a conclusion, the ST550 digital camera from Samsung will ultimately prove to be quite a good all-round performer as far as the photos it's able to take are concerned. It will manage to fare pretty well when used in dark clubs (using the flash becomes mandatory in such situations), but one will also be able to take some artistic shots, if you have at least some basic knowledge about photography and the importance of light conditions and environment when taking a photo. And as far as Internet photo-sharing services are concerned... well, absolutely no problems there - the quality of the photos will be sufficient.

P.S. The thumbnails point to the full-size photos, so you'll be able to easily study them for yourselves.

Recording videos

Similar to most other compact camcorders released on the market over the past couple of years, the Samsung ST550 offers users a video recording function, and a pretty advanced one too, much more effective than we initially believed (maybe because it hasn't been really pushed forward by the Korean company).

[IMG=86][IMG=87][IMG=88]

So, when selecting the video recording mode, one will be able to record videos at a maximum resolution of 1280 x 720 pixels (in simpler words, 720p), which, despite not being "Full HD" as many other cameras out there boast, manages to do a pretty good job. Two lower video recording settings are also available (640x480 pixels, or 320x240 pixels), while frame rates range between 60 and 15 fps. Unfortunately, the 60 fps option becomes available only when shooting at the lowest possible resolution.

[IMG=89][IMG=90][IMG=91]

One of the most interesting and innovative features offered by the ST550 digital camera from Samsung in terms of video recording is the possibility to actually pause and re-start the recording process, which allows users to apply some editing as they're shooting the video (such as some basic effects).

The quality of the recorded videos is pretty good, with an emphasis on the videos recorded during daytime, which, as far as we're concerned, are good enough to compete with those obtained with the help of Samsung's entry-level, YouTube-oriented camcorders.

Photo and video playback

Now that we're done talking about the photo and video shooting processes, it's time to move on to another important issue, namely the one related to the playback features. Now, given the fact that the ST550 comes equipped with a large-size, good quality display, reviewing photos and videos right on the camera will be a pleasure. However, users can easily do the same with the help of an HDTV or a computer, as you'll see as follows.

In-camera playback and editing

Let's face it, very few people use a digital camera's display for watching photos. Reviewing the shots after taking them, sure, but watching photos... well, not really. However, Samsung's engineers have provided the ST550 with all the necessary tools in order to enable a seamless playback process, including here a timer for the slideshow feature, various transition effects for the photos, and even the possibility to play some music in the background (all of these might not feel impressive on the camera, but they'll do wonders when hooking up the dual-view to an HDTV).

[IMG=92][IMG=93][IMG=94][IMG=95]

[IMG=96][IMG=97][IMG=98][IMG=99]

Also quite notable is the fact that users can easily add all sorts of effects right in the camera, some of the coolest (as far as we're concerned) being the extra noise (not that there's any need for it, especially if the photo is taken in poor lighting conditions) or the possibility to change people's faces.

[IMG=100][IMG=101][IMG=102][IMG=103]

[IMG=104][IMG=105][IMG=106][IMG=107]

Of course, video playback directly on the camera is possible, but there are less interesting features available here. This feature will prove to be extremely useful when, for example, one wants to output the respective video to a TV via an HDMI accessory (in fact, the camera even lets users choose the output signal type - 1080i, 720p or 480p, to be precise).

Connecting to a computer

Connecting the ST550 to a computer is a very fast and easy process, carried out via the USB cable provided in the package. However, the cool things only begin to happen after one has connected the camera, more precisely, when the built-in Samsung Intelli-Studio software starts up.

[IMG=108][IMG=109][IMG=110][IMG=111]

[IMG=112][IMG=113][IMG=114][IMG=115]

Intelli-Studio is a photo management and editing software that resides within the camera's memory (no install on the computer is required). The application can be used for various purposes, including downloading and managing photos on PC, as well as editing content (the video editing features were particularly interesting).

[IMG=116][IMG=117][IMG=118][IMG=119]

After one is done with the download process, they'll be able to easily upload the photos onto the Internet, directly to their favorite content sharing sites (either photo sharing, like Flickr, or video sharing, such as YouTube). The software is yet another of those advanced and, frankly, quite surprising features the ST550 has to offer, and we strongly believe that providing such built-in management applications will become a serious trend in the future.

Battery life

A digital camera's battery life and recharging methods are some major issues; unfortunately, this was one of the relatively few areas where the Samsung ST550 didn't really manage to rise up to our expectations.

[IMG=120][IMG=121][IMG=122][IMG=123]

So, first of all, Samsung's engineers went for a rather unusual approach in terms of the recharging process. The built-in Li-Ion battery is not taken out of the device and then placed in a separate, external charger, but remains in place, the whole charging process being carried out via the proprietary universal connector (somewhat similar to the case of a mobile phone, just to give you a short example).

[IMG=131][IMG=132][IMG=133]

This might not seem like a big issue, but it is because it makes it a bit difficult for users to have several batteries at hand for very long photography sessions (but not impossible).

Anyway, while the recharge process (carried out either via USB from a computer or via the AC power adapter) takes a fairly short amount of time to complete, the battery life one can enjoy after the completion of the respective process is far from fantastic. So, we're practically dealing with only a couple of hours of battery life, the camera giving out after taking around 100-120 photos or shooting 2/3 longer videos.

[IMG=124][IMG=125][IMG=126][IMG=127]

Now, while we can more or less accept this not particularly impressive battery life, things are completely different in terms of battery life indication. We're not sure what's happening in this department, but the indicator behaves in quite an unusual manner, pretty much all of the time. What we mean here is that, after shooting a video and taking a couple of photos, the indicator went from full battery to almost empty. Then, after switching off the device for a day or so, it came back to almost full.

[IMG=128][IMG=129][IMG=130]

Plus, this situation even occurred when using the device for longer periods of time during the same day. In other words, the battery life indicator is quite far from what we'd call reliable and can lead users into misjudging just how much juice the thing's got left. To sum things up, this is probably the single negative thing about this camera.

[[BREAK=Conclusions]]

The good

- secondary display, placed on the front side;
- elegant, sleek and stylish design;
- uses MicroSD/MicroSDHC memory cards for storage;
- touch screen with haptic feedback;
- very responsive touch screen;
- quick battery recharge process;
- very versatile universal connector;
- multiple photo shooting options;
- very accurate smile detection;
- advanced and innovative video shooting capabilities;
- good-quality photos and videos in most situations;
- numerous in-camera slideshow features;
- built-in content management and editing software.

The bad

- fingerprint-friendly finishing;
- less than spectacular battery life;
- serious problems with accurate battery indication;
- presence of noise even at low ISO levels (200-400);
- lack of a dedicated button for blocking the rear display while in use.

Overall impressions

To be honest, when we first started using Samsung's DualView ST550 digital camera, we really thought that this thing would prove to be an interesting solution mostly for young people and especially for those who simply love taking self-portraits as often as possible (some using the mirrors in clubs' bathrooms in order to do so).

However, as we spent more time with our new toy from Samsung, we came to realize that the camera was capable of delivering a lot more functions and cater to the needs of a very, very wide array of consumers (in other words, apart from professional photographers, pretty much everyone can find something cool about the ST550).

[IMG=134][IMG=135][IMG=136]

There's plenty of good things to be said about the DualView digital camera, whether we're talking about its trademark secondary display, the very large number of shooting modes and options users are provided with, the high-quality haptic touch screen display, the quality of the video recording, etc.; on the other hand, there are some not so pleasant things to be pointed out too, such as the battery-related problems, the noise at low ISO levels, etc.

Overall, the ST550 marked a serious shift in the way most consumers (and even manufacturers) imagined a digital camera, and it's quite likely that, on the long run, it will only represent the first of a large family of successful DualView products.

Sales package

- AC adapter;
- USB cable;
- Battery;
- Strap;
- User's manual.