Fujitsu ScanSnap SV600 scanner review

This scanner-camera boasts an A3 coverage with no need for a flatbed, but will it meet your linework needs?

We first came across the Fujitsu ScanSnap SV600 in an unusual way, noticing its use in creating a massive online collection of historical watercolour paintings.

What also stood out was the scanner's reach. Not being your normal A4-suited flatbed scanner, the SV600 is a document camera that can capture anything below its lens to the size of A3 dimensions.

What this means for artists and designers is that you can theoretically capture a large piece without needing to 'stitch' images together using photo-editing software – and without spending thousands on a larger kind of flatbed scanner.

If you often find yourself needing to capture A3 pieces you've drawn in ink for digitisation, then read on to see how useful the ScanSnap SV600 might be for you.

What's in the box?

Aside from the scanner itself, you're provided with a mat marked in paper sizes, power cables and a DVD which you'll probably throw away on unboxing (just hook the scanner to your device by USB and then download the required Mac and Windows-friendly software from the Fujitsu site).

Installation is easy enough, although after doing so you might find yourself being asked to install an update as soon as you've restarted your device, meaning another wait and reboot.

The device can scan to email, printer and mobile, but trying to sync the SV600 with the ScanSnap app on our iPhone was a fruitless endeavour. Despite many attempts, the app just couldn’t detect our device.

How does linework look with the ScanSnap SV600?

First thing’s first – if you’re looking to simply scan a seamless A3 size sheet, then the SV600 works… well, seamlessly. But if you’re looking for a certain fidelity in capturing your linework, then look elsewhere.

Playing around with some sketches left over in the *Digital Arts* office by picture book artist Oliver Jeffers, it’s clear to see how problematic the device’s low resolution is. We’re talking a DPI range of 285-218 horizontal, and less for vertical scanning. That means your pencil and ink designs come through looking washed out.

Sketch by Oliver Jeffers

It isn’t too noticeable when scanning from books or magazine – e.g. anything with gloss and already well-produced – but even there’ll you find trouble.

If you’re a design studio looking to scan in printed materials from a project, or an artist looking to play about with an original image in digital form as template for your next piece, then you’re probably going to have to hold pages down in order to keep things flat looking.

That of course means your fingers get in the way, so accurate is the camera’s reach, but the Point Retouch tool which is offered in the SV600 to edit your scans can be an unpredictable beast.

In some cases it wipes fingers clean, leaving no trace behind like magic — but in others we noted a red mark left behind following finger wipe, blotching the edge of spreads. See the mark circled in orange below, and notice how there's no mark on the opposite side, demonstrating the software's lack of consistency.

Annoyingly, there appears to be no obvious way to select such marks for deletion. Nor is there an Undo option either, so it seems you'll have to exit the Retouch screen without saving and then start editing all over again.

Also awkward is that the Point Retouch tool isn't automatically checked out of the box, which is a shame as it's a little blink and you'll miss it. This problem extends to

much of the interface – for example, it takes a while to figure out how you can delete a scan from the thumbnail selection prior to exporting your images as saved files.

You can crop your images easily enough before saving your PDF/JPEG output, though. The cropping frame in the SV600 interface is similar to Photoshop's Lasso tools, sticking to edges like a magnetic string of sorts. It's mostly easy to use, but we have noticed more sophisticated and intuitive cropping in simple iPhone apps like TinyScanner.

A nice scan of two pages from *The Flight of Dragons* by Peter Dickinson, illustrated by Wayne Anderson

While we're on the subject of intuition, it must be said that the choice of two buttons – Start and Stop – makes this a very easy tool to use. No fuss, no muss.

Ensuring less fuss (in theory) is the SV600’s page detection function, which kicks in each time you turn the page. Alas though, it never seemed to work for us.

Scanning bits and pieces

The SV600’s other detection capabilities though are in good health. Though designed for bigger materials, it scans smaller pieces like this pocket-sized book almost perfectly first try (a little too much has been left at the top thus exposing the mat, and a little cropped off of the bottom, too, meaning another take was needed).

Edgars Folks’s book cover for *š!* #15
The SV600 can also ‘read’ an array of objects beneath its lens

and output each one as a separate image. That means you can lay out a selection of photos or clippings on the mat and have each one digitised individually.

A side-effect of this is that on the odd occasion, book pages with more than one image on them get sliced up in output – annoying should you be looking to simply scan a page, but maybe useful if you were looking to break down a page into individual components.

Two snags though if this is the case – it doesn't do this all the time, especially if images are of the same kind of colour or within similarly shaded borders, and, as you might expect, resulting images come out in poor resolution (like this below example from the dragon mythology book we played around with for our review). Note that you can change the settings to ensure no 'splicing' ever occurs, but the option isn't laid out on a plate for you.

Is the ScanSnap SV600 good for creatives?

It’s hard to recommend the ScanSnap SV600 to anyone besides an archivist; although it seems like the perfect solution to artists wanting to easily (or more cheaply) scan in A3 works, it’s ultimately stymied by its low resolution. The specs mean low fidelity with your linework, and non-gloss colours coming out rather grainy.

Riso print by Chris Hampton
Should be wanting to snap a sketch that covers across two pages of a book as opposed to one large spread, then expect to faff around a bit cropping your fingers out if getting your hands involved. The faff comes from this not being the most user-friendly of devices, with an interface that could do with some more shortcuts for customisation.

As it stands, the SV600 isn’t exactly good to use straight out of the box, and while that may fly with librarians and archivists, it won’t really go down well with designers and artists, unfortunately.

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