Sony’s A7R V camera is a technical triumph, so why is using it such a pain?

There’s only so much that really needs to be said about Sony’s A7R V mirrorless camera. Sony made so many right decisions with this new model, that it’s easily one of the best cameras money can buy right now. The new AI autofocus system is an excellent jump forward. The improved built-in image stabilization is excellent for hand-holding slower shots. The new articulating display is so good it should just be copied by all other manufacturers as soon as possible. And the 61-megapixel sensor yields some of the best image quality you can get today without jumping to medium format — trusting your computer and storage are up to the task of processing these beefy files.

But while Sony has made some recent strides to offer quality-of-life improvements like a better menu system in recent cameras (which is only marginally better, if I’m being candid), why are its latest cameras still stuck with such bad ergonomics?

I know what you’re thinking: “Oh he’s just reaching to find something to complain about.” But camera ergonomics, physical handling, and grip quality are important. They really, really matter, especially for anyone in situations where they’re going to use a camera continuously for many hours. I know this first-hand from photographing weddings, where I use a camera (usually two) for anywhere from nine to 12 hours straight. And I know this exceptionally well with regards to the A7R V, because its body is nearly identical to one of my personal cameras, the Sony A7 IV.

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It’s time Sony completely rethinks the grips on all of its cameras. They need to be slightly taller, and they desperately need to be made of a higher quality, softer grip material. We can knock Canon and Nikon all we want for being so late to the mirrorless party and taking forever to get their acts together, but goddamn, these legacy camera brands know a thing or two about the grips that go on cameras. My old Nikon D700 and D3 cameras were easy to hold and use all day, even if they were much larger and heavier than what we’re using today. Even the Canon EOS R that I owned for a while, which is a much cheaper camera than the A7R V, has a grip that’s miles ahead of anything Sony is currently making. It’s roomy enough for your whole hand and soft enough that it has a tiny bit of give when you squeeze.

Still one of the best cameras money can buy right now, just with this unfortunate downside

As full-size cameras become more and more technically capable, with automated or assisted features that were inconceivable years ago, the human interface cannot be forgotten or left on the wayside. Nearly every time I use the A7R V, I am blown away by how exceptional a picture-taking device it is. The way its improved autofocus identifies subjects and continues tracking even when they turn away or get temporarily obstructed is really a small triumph. It’s something that is greatly appreciated in my line of photography – whether I’m

photographing a bride or capturing some silly snaps of my weirdo house cats — because it gives me confidence that I'm going to get the shot tack-sharp as soon as my subject turns around.

But we can't forget that these devices must be designed for humans. Just like every camera has a diopter control to allow the viewfinder to be adjusted to our squishy, inefficient eyeballs, all cameras need a grip that's going to be comfortable to hold and not feel like a torture device after extended use. Sony, if you can make a camera that can automatically distinguish between birds and bees, you should be more than capable of building one that doesn't feel crappy to hold.

Photography by Antonio G. Di Benedetto / The Verge

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