



Real People Reviews by Daniel M. East

Product: Digital Sho Pro/Roc Pro/Gem Airbrush Pro/Gem Pro

Manufacturer/Vendor/Developer: by Kodak

MSRP: \$99 each

Review date: September 28, 2004

PULL QUOTE: "great value and results from the Kodak Digital plug-in family"

DESCRIPTION (What's it do? What's it got?): When I was first introduced to the company that originally developed these plug-ins for Photoshop, "Applied Science Fiction" was just a great booth with a catchy name and impressive products. It seems logical that now-digital photo giants, Kodak [in their Austin Development Center] would acquire their technologies. It all started with DigitalIce, which was originally incorporated into OEM bundles for high-end film scanners (Nikon 4000, e.g.) and now as branded software. What these next generation of products do, in a nutshell, is make it possible to correct, enhance and embellish images. This can bring new life to old photos when scanned, improve the appearance of a not-so-spectacular digital image, correct lighting and balance, as well as a number of other things to enhance your digital images. The key, in my opinion, like with most corrective plug-ins, is to avoid over use of the effect for the most natural appearance.

MIN. SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

OS 8.6, 9.x, OS X PowerMAC G3 or better with 128 MB RAM or more for larger images
Monitor display resolution set for 800 x 600 or higher

The ease at which one can make visible corrections in images is remarkable. The results are excellent once you realize that the key in the success of these titles is to add enough of the enhancement until you can see the changes you want, but then to back off slightly to achieve the best results. The preview windows are easy to view, but don't quite convey the extent of the applied changes.

SHOpro does what even Photoshop CS' highlight tools won't by giving a very simple, but surprisingly accurate, balance to images where shadows and reflected light can "fool" a light meter or where overall corrective adjustment might fall short.



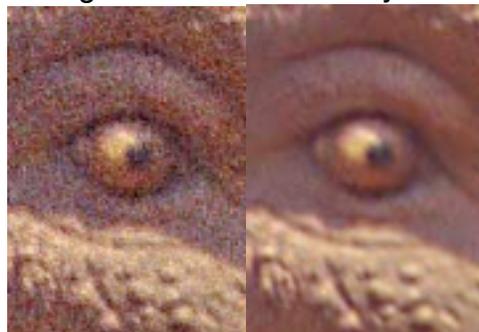
RocPro brings color correction to a new level with the ability to bring new life to aged and faded images, underexposed or overexposed originals. It works just as well with scanned images and allows the user to determine the optimal correction.



Gem Airbrush Pro is the one you must keep a handle on in terms of overuse. It is truly stunning when you see the degree to which it is able to reduce visible blemishes, wrinkles and artifacts in your images; however, I'd recommend keeping your blends flexible so that you don't end up with a clay-looking effect.



GemPro offers the ability to reduce grain and noise effectively, but seems to be the weaker link in the chain. Again, the key is in the blending of this effect in the Gem window, and best results are achieved when backing off a little from the "eyeball" of the preview.



Without question, the ease of use and exceptional results make these products a great value. If the price is a little much, check out the non-Pro versions at \$49 each, which also provide very good results - especially if you are working with lower resolution images and/or web-only applications. Another nice thing is that, in many cases, the default settings in each title * do a terrific job with little tweaking needed if you are just learning Photoshop.

My only wish for these products would be a little QT video for training so that consumers might have a better handle on the "finesse" required to get the best results. Yes, anyone can use these products and use them well, but it would help to have a little demonstration to get people rolling.

Unlike creative plug-ins, these are more tools than effects. While companies like PowerTouche and Nik Multimedia offer some great creative products with a few corrections, Kodak/ASF's are more specific to the need to bring new life into images that need repair or adjustment.

If you are using Photoshop for your digital images from either camera and/or scanner and find yourself constantly looking for the right clarity, balance and retouching, don't miss the great value and results from the Kodak Digital plug-in family.

As someone with a history in pro-photography and pro-processing from both the "old school" and new, I was impressed by the effectiveness, interface, and utility of these products. It is worth downloading the demo versions just to be amazed by the new life you can breathe into old faded images (most of which might just be on Kodak's own photo papers). Once the user finds the sweet spot in each of these tools, the results will speak for themselves.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5 out of 5 stars EXCELLENT

For more information, visit: www.asf.com/

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