



Help me buy a...

Sensor Cleaning Kit

If you're getting fed up with cloning out spots from your images it's time to clean your sensor, but what should you use? We try five kits



Even if you're careful where you change lenses and regularly use your Canon D-SLR's sensor cleaning system, eventually you will start to see specks appearing in images and you'll have to clone them out. The problem is that although current Canon D-SLRs have an excellent sensor cleaning mechanism built-in, it can only really deal with loose particles of dust or fibre. And even then it can't shift the dirt out of the

sensor housing, so it's prone to settling back onto the imaging surface. Stickier particles like pollen or small spots of lubricant also take a bit more shifting and there are two options: pay for a sensor cleaning service or invest in a sensor cleaning kit and do it yourself.

While it's nice to hand your camera over to an expert for cleaning, it will cost you between around £30 and £65, depending upon which camera you have. And that's

just for one clean; you could get another speck of dust on the sensor almost immediately and you'll have to pay out all over again. Even the most expensive kit in this test only costs £80 and it will allow you to clean your sensor several times, making it much better value for money.

There's lots of choice of kits, but which is the best buy? That was the question asked by reader Tony Hulbert. We showed him five kits to help him decide... ▶



THE READER

Name: **Tony Hulbert**
Camera: **Canon EOS 6D**

Tony only got into photography a couple of years ago, but he's really got the bug and is an active member of the Frome Wessex Camera Club. Tony is very careful about where he changes his lenses, but he knows that it won't be too long before he's going to have to clean his sensor and is keen to be prepared for that eventuality.



THE EXPERT

Name: **Angela Nicholson**
Camera: **Canon EOS 5D Mark III**

Angela is our head of testing and has seen a few dirty sensors in her time, so she's a dab hand at cleaning them. She's also used and tested a wide range of sensor cleaning products, making her the ideal person to take Tony through the process and help him select the best cleaning kit.





Dust Aid Platinum Kit

Web: www.cameraclean.co.uk
Price: £28.96 (\$43.80 + P&P)

Angela says "Part of the beauty of the Dust Aid Platinum kit is that it's very small and will slip easily into any kit bag, so if you find your camera's sensor is dirty when you're out you just need a dust-free area to clean it. It's a simple device consisting of a wand with a soft pad on the end, plus six adhesive silicone cleaning strips. Simply press the pad onto a freshly-peeled strip and dab it onto your sensor to remove loose dirt. Providing you don't rock or twist the pad on the sensor, it doesn't leave any residue."

Tony says "It seems a little bit strange pressing something onto a sticky-pad and then onto your camera's sensor, but it does seem to do a very good job of removing loose dirt, which is lifted out of the camera body. There was no residue left on the sensor, but we could clearly see the dirt we'd removed on a fresh sticky-pad after we pressed the used wand



onto it. It's also very quick and easy to use, but we discovered that there were still a few stubborn marks left behind on the sensor, so you may still need a swab and some cleaning solution to remove those completely."

PhotoPlus Verdict

- ✓ Compact and easy to stow in your kit bag; low-cost option; effectively removes loose dirt
- ✗ No loupe or light to aid you; you may still need to resort to swabs for more stubborn stains

Visible Dust SwabLight Kit

Web: www.visible-dust.com
Price: £38/\$40

Angela says "The SwabLight LED torch in this kit is inside a rubberised casing, that has slot into which a cleaning swab can be inserted. The result is that wherever you clean, the light always follows so you can see what you're doing. Plus, the grippy casing is much easier to hold than a spindly swab handle.

Visible Dust makes three types of Sensor Clean liquid; this kit includes a small (1.15ml) phial of the mid-strength one and only four Ultra MXD-100 Vswabs. That may not be an issue for occasional cleaning, but at £35/\$44 per dozen, extras don't come cheap."

Tony says "Sometimes the simplest ideas are the best, and this one really works well. It's small, easy to use, and the fluid that we had did a very good job, removing a mark that some of the other



swabs and fluids failed to shift. There's no loupe to magnify the dirt, but it has a torch, and I like the small size of this kit and the fact that the cleaning swab is made much easier to hold. It would be nice to have a bit more fluid and maybe a few more swabs, though."

PhotoPlus Verdict

- ✓ Easy to use; small; light shines where it's needed; gave the most thorough clean of all
- ✗ No loupe; only four swabs and 1.15ml of fluid supplied; replacements quite costly

LensPen SensorKlear Loupe Kit

Web: www.lenspen.com

Price: £40/\$60



Angela says "LensPen equipment is used by NASA, which is a pretty encouraging endorsement. The SensorKlear Loupe has LED illumination and focus is adjustable to cover sensor sizes from Micro Four Thirds up to full-frame, so you get a good view of any spots. It rests securely on the lens mount and there's an opening on the side to let you clean with the loupe in place.

The 'Hurricane' blower isn't especially powerful, but blows away loose particles. More stubborn specks can be lifted off using the SensorKlear II pen, but it isn't quite as effective as a swab/solution combo."



Tony says "It's helpful that the loupe can be focused and has a light as it gives a really nice clear view of any sensor marks. However, I found it awkward to clean the sensor with the loupe on the camera as the gap is fairly small and it's hard to get the SensorKlear II pen at the right



angle. The blower is good, but can just blow dust around the inside of the camera. Angela advised me to hold the camera upside down so that loosened dirt falls out – but you can't do that with a loupe in position."

PhotoPlusVerdict

- ✓ Good view of sensor; easy to use; fits a range of sensor sizes, if you have other cameras to clean
- ✗ Pen isn't as effective as swabs and fluid; awkward to use with the loupe in place

Green Clean Sensor Cleaning System

Web: www.green-clean.at

Price: £79/\$124



Angela says "Blowing compressed air at your sensor is a no-no because it can spray harmful

propellant onto your camera's innards, but Green Clean has added a vacuum attachment to safely suck dust and dirt out of your camera via a flexible pipe and plastic wand. We found it was reasonably powerful and you can see the muck accumulating in the collection area. Adhered dirt can then be removed using the cleaning swabs, which are supplied individually in sealed packs, with separate wet and dry wands to be used one after the other."



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you're stuck, plus it's a bit awkward to use. To be fair, though, it seemed like the air would last a long time. The swabs are also easy to use, but you have to use a wet one followed by

a dry one, which takes extra time. I also had to take extra care to make sure that all the streaks were removed." ▶

PhotoPlusVerdict

- ✓ Simple to set up; no liquids to apply; dust and dirt is sucked out from the camera body
- ✗ Relies on compressed air to work; can leave streaks; no loupe or light to aid you



Tony says "The vacuum system was easy to set up and it sucks dust off the sensor and gets it out of the camera altogether, which is good.



LET US HELP YOU!
We'll be helping a reader buy rain covers soon. If you need help with this – or have a suggestion for a future Help Me Buy – Email photoplus@futurenet.com with 'Help Me Buy' as the subject. Include your address and phone number!

Delkin SensorScope D-SLR Camera Cleaning System

Web: <http://delkin.com>
Price: £80/\$130

Angela says "This gadget-laden case packs a 4-LED SensorScope loupe providing 5x magnification, so you get a clear view of the marks on your sensor. The USB (or battery) powered SensorVac sucks dust away; a simple blower will shift as much dust, but this ensures it's extracted out of the camera chamber.

Any remaining dirt can be removed with swabs and solution, with three swab sizes to choose from. Finish up by giving your sensor a polish with the SensorPen, while the plush cleaning cloth will make your lenses sparkle."

Tony says "This is a comprehensive kit in a nice case with lots of cleaning tools, but I think it's a bit gimmicky and over-elaborate. I wasn't impressed by the SensorVac as the first time I used it I pulled the cap off and brush came with it, so I had to reattach it without touching the bristles.



I tried the swabs, which are first used wet with a couple of drops of solution and then dry, and it was hard to remove all the streaks. The SensorScope Loupe was good though, and it was easy to see where any marks were on the sensor."

PhotoPlus Verdict

- ✓ Lots of cleaning options; good loupe; plenty of cleaning swabs included
- ✗ Brush came off SensorVac; it proved hard to remove all streaks; a rather big and bulky kit

Keep it clean

CHANGING LENSES

Avoid changing lenses in dusty or windy environments – if you're at the beach go indoors – and hold your camera lens-mount-down so nothing can fall in...

CHECK AN IMAGE

To see exactly where dust spots are on your sensor, shoot a plain wall at a narrow aperture around f/22, then check the image at 100% view – but remember it will be flipped horizontally and vertically.

THE PERFECT VIEW

Choosing a kit with a loupe and light will really help you see where needs cleaning. Some designs also allow you to clean whilst the loupe rests on the lens mount.

WET OR DRY?

A simple air blower will puff dust away and is great for a quick clean, but specially designed swabs and solution will remove the most gunk from your sensor.

PLAN AHEAD

A basic blower will never run out of puff, but compressed air vacuums will. Also, if your preferred kit uses swabs, make sure plenty are included and replacements don't cost a fortune.

TONY'S VERDICT

"I'd never cleaned a sensor before, so I learned a lot during this session and tried a good range of products. While loupes enable you to see the sensor more clearly, I felt a couple of the kits were a little over-complicated – and overpriced – and prefer the simplicity of the Dust Aid and Visible Dust kits. My favourite is the Visible Dust EZ SwabLight Kit because it's easy to use and does a great job. The swab-holding light is a great idea. Plus, it's small enough to carry everywhere, so if my sensor gets any muck on it I can clean it wherever I feel the need! ■"

