



OUR EIGHT CONTENDERS

- 1 Tamron 18-200mm £160
f/3.5-6.3 XR Di II Macro
- 2 Sigma 18-125mm £235
f/3.8-5.6 DC OS HSM
- 3 Sigma 18-200mm £285
f/3.5-6.3 DC OS
- 4 Tamron 18-250mm £380
f/3.5-6.3 Di II Macro
- 5 Canon EF-S 18-135mm £385
f/3.5-5.6 IS
- 6 Sigma 18-250mm £395
f/3.5-6.3 DC OS HSM
- 7 Tamron 18-270mm £450
f/3.5-6.3 Di II VC Macro
- 8 Canon EF-S 18-200mm £485
f/3.5-5.6 IS



Superzoom lenses



Matthew Richards
Technical contributor

Nothing beats a superzoom for sheer versatility. **Matthew Richards** puts these portable, do-it-all lenses to the test

Canon-compatible kit on test

PhotoPlus SUPER TEST

Nobody really enjoys changing lenses on D-SLRs. Apart from the chore of carrying extra lenses and swapping them over, there's the risk of your camera ingesting dust in the process. This inevitably winds up on the sensor, giving you dots before the eyes when viewing your pictures.

As a result of their sheer versatility and practicality, superzoom lenses have grown in popularity, offering everything from wide-angle to lengthy telephoto capabilities

in one convenient package. In fact, this breed of lens has now become so popular that there are no less than eight models available to fit Canon cameras with smaller than full-frame sensors. Unlike our last test (in issue 19), we've included every superzoom lens on the market that's specifically made for cameras such as the 1000D, 450D, 500D, 50D and 7D. While the zoom range is rather more 'super' on some lenses than others, all of them offer an equivalent 29mm

focal length at the wide-angle end and at least 200mm at the telephoto extremity, delivering a generous 7x zoom range.

Some go much further, with a monstrous zoom range of up to 15x and also feature image stabilisation, which makes sharp results much easier to achieve – especially at longer telephoto settings. Prices vary considerably too, starting at £160 and rising to nearly £500, so let's take a closer look at exactly what you get for your money. ►



Sigma 18-125mm f/3.8-5.6 DC OS HSM

www.sigma-imaging-uk.com

While it's tempting to write this lens off because its mediocre 7x zoom range is the smallest in the group, that would be missing a trick. You still get a respectable 200mm effective focal length at the telephoto end and there are some big attractions, including Sigma's fast and near-silent HSM (HyperSonic Motor) autofocus system, which proved deadly accurate in our tests, wrapped in a compact and lightweight package of very good build quality. As well as looking the part, our test sample didn't suffer from any zoom creep, which made a refreshing change.

The lens also features Sigma's latest generation of OS (Optical Stabilizer), which works every bit as well as the IS technology built into competing Canon lenses, and rather better than the system built into the older Sigma 18-200mm lens in the group. Other plus points include excellent sharpness and contrast, the lens producing punchy image quality throughout the zoom range, even at its largest apertures, while distortions are less noticeable than with most other lenses on test.

If you're not too fussed about the lack of outright telephoto reach, then this Sigma offers excellent performance at a reasonable price.



Sigma 18-200mm f/3.5-6.3 DC OS

www.sigma-imaging-uk.com

Sigma was the first independent lens manufacturer to deliver stabilised lenses for Canon cameras, and this 18-200mm was one of the original models to feature OS (Optical Stabilization) when it was launched more than two years ago. At the time, stabilisation was pretty much on a par with Canon's, delivering a 3-stop advantage, but it's now looking a bit long in the tooth compared with the latest technology from Canon, Tamron and Sigma itself.

The 18-200mm OS is fairly inexpensive for a stabilised lens with such a generous zoom range. You don't get Sigma's advanced HSM autofocus, as featured on the other Sigma lenses in the group but, then again, all of the other Canon and Tamron lenses on test only feature basic autofocus motors anyway. Optical quality is more of a disappointment, with poor sharpness throughout the zoom range and noticeable colour fringing.

While this Sigma is £200 cheaper than the competing Canon 18-200mm IS lens, and comes complete with a petal-shaped lens hood, it can't match most lenses for performance. For anybody on a tight budget, the Sigma 18-125mm OS has a lot more going for it.



PhotoPlus Verdict

- ✓ Good build quality and impressive optics are backed up by highly effective image stabilisation
- ✗ Limited telephoto reach, with the smallest zoom range out of the other lenses on test

90%

PhotoPlus Verdict

- ✓ Inexpensive for a stabilised lens with this zoom range and comes with a petal-shaped lens hood
- ✗ Outright image quality is below par and you don't get Sigma's advanced HSM autofocus

79%



18mm

PhotoPlus
BEST
ON TEST
AWARD



250mm



Sigma 18-250mm f/3.5-6.3 DC OS HSM

www.sigma-imaging-uk.com

Sigma's new 18-250mm OS lens is an almost direct equivalent of Tamron's 18-270mm VC, offering a mammoth zoom range complete with advanced optical image stabilisation. They're practically the same size, although the Sigma is a little heavier and feels more solidly built. It's also more refined, with ultra-quiet HSM autofocus that proved fast and accurate in our tests. The Sigma also wins out in the handling stakes, as its zoom function is wonderfully smooth throughout the range and, despite this, our review sample exhibited no zoom creep – a difficult balance to achieve in a superzoom lens.

For sharpness, contrast and overall image quality, there's almost nothing to choose between the two range-topping Sigma and Tamron lenses. Shooting at maximum apertures throughout the zoom range, the Sigma proved much sharper than either of the Canon lenses and gave punchier colour performance. As the Sigma costs nearly £100 less than the Canon 18-200mm and £55 less than the Tamron, that's no mean feat. A final bonus is that the zoom ring operates in the same direction as on Canon lenses, while it's reversed on Tamrons, making the Sigma more intuitive for Canon users.



PhotoPlus
Target Price
£395







PhotoPlus Verdict

- ✓ Great image quality, handling and stabilisation and the zoom ring is intuitive for Canon users
- ✗ As with the competition, maximum f/6.3 is a bit on the slow side at the telephoto end

95%



Superzoom lenses at a glance

								
	Canon	Canon	Sigma	Sigma	Sigma	Tamron	Tamron	Tamron
Model name	EF-S 18-135mm IS	EF-S 18-200mm IS	18-125mm DC OSHSM	18-200mm DC OS	18-250mm DC OSHSM	18-200mm XR Di II Macro	18-250mm Di II Macro	18-270mm Di II VC Macro
Max aperture	f/3.5 to f/5.6	f/3.5 to f/5.6	f/3.5 to f/5.6	f/3.5 to f/5.6	f/3.5 to f/6.3	f/3.5 to f/6.3	f/3.5 to f/6.3	f/3.5 to f/6.3
Compatible SLRs	Small sensor (1)	Small sensor (1)	Small sensor (2)	Small sensor (2)	Small sensor (2)	Small sensor (2)	Small sensor (2)	Small sensor (2)
Effective zoom range, 450D	29-216mm	29-320mm	29-200mm	29-320mm	29-400mm	29-320mm	29-400mm	29-432mm
Image stabiliser	Yes (4-stops)	Yes (4-stops)	Yes (4-stops)	Yes (3-stops)	Yes (4-stops)	No	No	Yes (4-stops)
Max magnification	0.21x	0.24x	0.26x	0.26x	0.29x	0.26x	0.29x	0.29x
Minimum focus	45cm	45cm	35cm	45cm	45cm	45cm	45cm	49cm
Autofocus motor type	Micro motor	Micro motor	Hypersonic	Micro motor	Hypersonic	Micro motor	Micro motor	Micro motor
Zoom lock switch	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Focus distance scale	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Filter size	67mm	72mm	67mm	72mm	72mm	62mm	62mm	72mm
Lens hood	EW-73B, £25	EW-78D, £30	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Dimensions	76x101mm	79x102mm	74x89mm	79x100mm	79x101mm	73x84mm	73x84mm	80x101mm
Weight	455g	595g	490g	610g	630g	423g	430g	560g
RRP	£530	£700	£320	£440	£560	£300	£500	£600
Target price	£385	£485	£235	£285	£395	£160	£380	£450
Verdict	80%	83%	90%	79%	95%	76%	85%	92%

Compatibility: Small Sensor (1) 1000D, 300/350/400/450/500D, 20/30/40/50D, 7D Small Sensor (2) D30, D60, 1000D, 300/350/400/450/500D, 10/20/30/40/50D, 7D



PhotoPlus Verdict

Manufacturers of superzoom lenses have really upped their game over the past couple of years, so the performance of older best-selling models like the Sigma 18-200mm OS and Tamron 18-200mm now looks lacklustre. More surprisingly, while Canon's EF-S 18-135mm IS and EF-S 18-200mm IS are quite recent designs, they're expensive, relatively light on features and offer mediocre performance.

On a tight budget, we'd rather sacrifice extra telephoto focal length

than compromise on image quality, so the Sigma 18-125mm OS is our best value choice. It's the second-cheapest lens in the group but packs impressive optics and lots of advanced features. For best of breed, it's a straight contest between the Sigma 18-250mm OS and the Tamron 18-270mm VC. There's nothing to choose between them in terms of optical quality, but the Sigma offers refined, ultra-quiet HSM autofocus and a smoother zoom mechanism. It's also £55 cheaper, making it our overall winner. ■



Five things we learned in this test

- 1 Optical image stabilisation is a lifesaver for handheld telephoto shooting.
- 2 It's best to apply the 'zoom lock' while walking about with your camera.
- 3 Superzoom lenses aren't great for wide-angle architectural shots.
- 4 Tilting the lens when zooming in or out puts less strain on the zoom ring.
- 5 Be wary of 'Macro' labels on superzooms – none have true macro potential.