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Author of Digital SLR Photography
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by Robert Correll



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When not writing, Robert enjoys family life, photography, playing the guitar, grilling, and recording music. Robert graduated from the United States Air Force Academy and resides in Indiana.

Dedication

To my family.

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Introduction

The story of the Sony A35/A55 begins with two other camera manufacturers, Konica and Minolta. These storied names in camera history merged in 2003, and then decided to leave the camera business in 2006 and focus on other, more business-oriented technologies. They transferred all their camera assets to Sony, which continued developing the Konica Minolta dSLR line under the Sony Alpha brand name. Since that time, Sony has established itself as a serious contender, offering both inexpensive entry-level dSLRs and full-frame professional models.

Today, Sony has upped the technological ante by introducing cameras, including the A35/A55, with translucent mirrors: *dSLT* (digital single-lens translucent) cameras. Traditional dSLRs, like their SLR forefathers, use a reflex mirror to bounce light coming into the lens up into the viewfinder so you can compose the scene and manually focus. Just before the shutter opens to take the photo, the mirror has to flip up out of the way. That's the loud "clunk" you hear when you take a picture with a dSLR and why the mirrors are called reflex mirrors. They move. The translucent mirror in the A35/A55 doesn't have to flip up out of the way when you take a picture. The light bounces off it *and* goes right through it, whether you're framing, focusing, or taking the picture. Having a stable, translucent mirror makes the camera quieter, faster, lighter, and more mechanically reliable.

One other unique feature of the A35/A55 is the electronic viewfinder. Instead of seeing light bounced off a mirror, through a prism, and out the viewfinder, you look at a high-contrast, high-resolution electronic display. The electronic viewfinder functions like its optical counterpart in many ways, but it has some major advantages. You can look at camera menus, view photo and movie playback, check shooting functions, turn on a histogram, and see other displays impossible for normal viewfinders.

About This Book

This book's purpose is to put the right information in your hands so you can take advantage of the technological prowess of your A35/A55. You don't need to know anything about photography before opening these pages. In classic *For Dummies* style, I explain everything in easy-to-understand language and use plenty of color photos to show off the cameras and make the photographic concepts easier to understand.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized into four parts. Each one has a particular focus. They flow from what you need to start out to more advanced subjects. You can read the book from start to finish and progress from beginner to advanced user — or you can jump to any section in any chapter and dig right in. Use the table of contents, the index, and the chapter cross-references to jump to sections with related information.

Here's a quick look at what you can find in each part.

Part I: Pictures Worth Keeping, Pronto

This part contains four chapters designed to familiarize you with your A35/A55 and get you started taking pictures and movies as quickly as possible. Chapter 1 is where you get to know your A35/A55. You'll see where all the buttons and dials are, what they do, and how to use them. You find steps for navigating the menu system, the shooting functions, and how to decode the viewfinder and LCD displays. Chapter 2 covers the necessary first settings. You read about the basic shooting modes, other important settings, how to use the flash, how to set picture quality, size, and aspect ratio, as well as which settings make the most sense for you. Chapter 3 is devoted to explaining, in practice, all of the basic shooting modes. Chapter 4 is all about making movies: how to configure the camera, which options are best for you, how to shoot and review them, and how to do some basic editing.

Part II: Playing with Pixels

In this part, you read about what to do after you take a photo. This includes playing back photos on your camera as well as transferring them to your computer. In Chapter 5, you'll see the ins and outs of photo playback. Review pictures, look at the settings you used, change the display to include more or less information, delete photos, rotate photos, set up a slide show, and show off your photos on an HDTV. Chapter 6 is where you read how to transfer what you've stored on your memory card from the camera to a computer. Once there, you can process, print, and share photos and movies.

Part III: Expressing Your Creativity

Part III explains the concepts you need to operate your camera in the more advanced modes, which allows you to make creative decisions on your own. You see how to make exposure and flash decisions in Chapter 7. Use the advanced exposure modes and decide what exposure settings you want to

use to create the photos you like. Change the metering mode, use the histogram, and use other advanced exposure tools on the A35/A55. You also read more about the flash. Chapter 8 is about working with focus and color. Explore the autofocus options, depth of field, and color issues such as setting the right white balance. You also see how to apply creative styles and choose a color space. Chapter 9 is a putting-it-all-together chapter. With this information you can take pictures in advanced exposure modes. Review good general settings, come up with a plan, then photograph portraits, landscapes, close-ups, and more.

Part IV: The Part of Tens

Always a favorite, The Part of Tens concludes the book with two chapters of essential nonessential information. In Chapter 10, you read about how to spruce up your JPEG photos. This isn't mandatory. You can always use the photos as they come out of your camera. However, they aren't always perfect. Some photos can use a little help: remove red-eye, sharpen, or correct brightness and contrast. Chapter 11 concludes the book with a list of interesting features that you might want to check out on a rainy day. These include picture effects for the A35, GPS for the A55, and options like changing the file or folder-naming scheme for both.

Icons Used in This Book

If this isn't your first *For Dummies* book, you may be familiar with the large, round art (aka *icons*) that decorate its margins. If not, here's your very own icon-decoder ring:



Danger is lurking. Pay attention and proceed with caution. You know, as though you were about to open a hatch you shouldn't (Locke) or be so foolish as to be a minor character lecturing people about the dangers of dynamite while wrapping an old stick of it in a shirt on a deserted island (so long, Artz).



This icon should trigger an immediate data download for storage in your brain's long-term memory. The information is something important that rises above the level of a cute tip but not quite to the danger of a warning. As Spock would say, *Remember*.



Here lies helpful information that's likely to make your life easier. It may save you time, effort, or sanity. (Your mileage may vary.) I love tips. If I could, I would make every paragraph a tip.



Some of the information in this book is pretty technical. If it's not necessary for you to understand, it's marked with this icon. Use the information to impress your family and friends. Or skip it completely.

Conventions Used in This Book

I should point out a few other details that will help you use this book:



- ✓ **Margin art:** Small versions of some buttons, onscreen symbols, menu graphics, and other modes or settings appear in the margin next to relevant material. They will look like what you see to the left.
- ✓ **Software menu commands:** In sections that cover software, a series of words connected by an arrow indicates commands you choose from the program menus. For example, if a step tells you, “Choose File→Print,” click the File menu and then click the Print command on the menu.

eCheat Sheet

You can find an electronic version of the famous *For Dummies* Cheat Sheet at <http://www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/sonyalphasltA35A55>. The Cheat Sheet contains a quick reference to all the buttons, dials, switches, and exposure modes on your camera. Log on, print it out, and tape it to the wall above your desk or bed. If you need to, carry it with you when you're out shooting.

Where to Go from Here

Knowing how to operate a sophisticated camera like the A35/A55 can seem like a daunting task. The camera has quite a few buttons, features, displays, functions, modes, and procedures. In the beginning, you may be assaulted with negative thoughts. (“I will never master this!”) Not only that, but you also want to take great photos. That, after all, is the point of photography.

Don't panic!

Put the camera in Auto or Auto+ mode and concentrate on feeling the camera in your hands. Take pictures. Take lots of pictures! Become *comfortable* with it. If you don't want to use the flash (and it keeps trying to pop up), put the camera in Flash Off mode. Then take more pictures!

The hands-on experience that you accumulate will sink in. I know, because I know. If you practice and don't give up, you'll thirst for more. I've put all the information you need to get started in the book, and more — information that you can grow with as you progress from your current skill level to accomplished photographer. Slap on the back. Graduation ceremony at 11.

Occasionally, we have updates to our technology books. If this book does have technical updates, they will be posted at www.dummies.com/go/sonyalphaA3555updates.

Part I

Pictures Worth Keeping, Pronto

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant

Mona suffered from a rare disorder known as Bluritis, which mostly just affected her appearance in photographs.

©RICH TENNANT

shoot - shutter speed still seems too slow.



Very simply, this part gets you up and running.

It explains all the buttons, bells, and whistles, on your A35/A55. See how to set up the camera, navigate the menus, select shooting modes, choose functions, and decide on photo quality and size. Read all about the basic shooting modes so you can start taking amazing photos right off the bat. See how to use scenes, how to Sweep Shoot your way to panoramas, and how to use the super-fast photo-taking mode. The last chapter covers how to shoot movies in full HD.



Getting to Know Your Camera

In This Chapter

- ▶ Using lenses
- ▶ Working with batteries and memory cards
- ▶ Dialing in the viewfinder
- ▶ Figuring out the displays
- ▶ Taking care of your baby

If you bought a new microwave, you'd need to bone up on some important information to operate it. If you're going to make popcorn, you need to know things like how to program the clock, what buttons to push, and how to read the display. Photography is similar. In fact, half of photography is knowing how to operate your camera.

And the A35 and A55 are complicated cameras. They have lots of buttons, displays, dials, and knobs. You must know how to attach and remove lenses, insert and remove the battery and memory card, and work the menus and shooting functions. Whether you're upgrading from a point-and-shoot camera or cross-grading from an older digital SLR, this chapter has the information you need to start making full use of your microwave.

Comparing the A35 to the A55

Despite being very similar, the cameras have several key differences. I note them here and explain them more fully where appropriate.

- ✓ **LCD monitor:** The A55 sports a fancy tilt/swivel monitor, shown in Figure 1-1, but the A35's monitor is fixed into the body of the camera. The A55's tilt/swivel LCD is covered in this chapter. After that, I treat it as a transparent part of the camera.





Figure 1-1: The A55 can twist and shout.

- ✓ **Continuous Advance modes:** Compared to digital SLR cameras in the same general categories, both of these cameras shoot very fast. However, the A35's ultra fast mode is called the Tele-zoom Continuous Priority Advance AE mode, which can shoot up to 7 frames per second. The A55's fast mode is called the Continuous Priority Advance AE mode. It suffers from none of the restrictions as the A35. The photos are full-size and you can record both JPEG and Raw files (with a speed hit, however). These modes are covered more fully in Chapter 3.
- ✓ **Global Positioning System (GPS):** The A55 has a built-in GPS system (see Figure 1-2) that provides you with positioning data that you can

embed in the photos. The system relies on the GPS system of satellites that orbit overhead. As such, it works best when you're outside and have a clear line of sight to the heavens. GPS is covered in Chapter 11.

- ✓ **Picture effects:** The A35 has a range of cool picture effects, which are creative filters and processing options such as Pop Color, Retro Color, and Toy Camera. They're with the Scene Selection mode and I cover them in Chapter 11.
- ✓ **Built-in level:** The A55 has a built-in electronic level. This convenient feature tells you if you're lined up with the horizon or not. Aside from warning you that you're tilting, the level also give you a graphical indication if you're pointing the camera up or down.
- ✓ **The Menu and Movie buttons:** The A55 has the Menu and Movie labels printed to the upper left of the buttons. The A35 Menu and Movie labels are printed beneath the buttons, as they were on the A33. Yes, that's pretty picky. This isn't covered elsewhere.



Figure 1-2: That there's a cool-looking GPS symbol.

Know Thy Camera

You need to know your camera: what all the controls are, where they are, and how to work them.

Top controls

The top of the camera (see Figure 1-3) is where the really important controls are located that you may need to access repeatedly or at a moment's notice. The mode dial dominates the top left, while the power switch and shutter button take precedence on the top right.



Figure 1-3: Topside.

Power switch

This one's pretty obvious.



The camera is initially set to enter Power Save mode after 1 minute. Wake it up by pressing the shutter button halfway. Unlike traditional dSLRs, you can't look through the electronic viewfinder and see anything when the power is off.

Mode dial



Aside from the shutter button, the mode dial is probably the most important control on the camera. It's how you select an *exposure mode*. Exposure modes determine how the camera operates and whether it is automatic or manual. Different modes (discussed in Chapter 2) have different creative and practical goals.

Shutter button

The shutter button does more than just take pictures:

- ✓ Press the shutter fully in to take a photo.
- ✓ Press it halfway to start autofocus and metering. It is critical that the camera have time to focus and determine the lighting conditions so that the photo is sharp, clear, and properly lit.



Don't punch at the shutter button.

Finder/LCD button

The A35/A55 is smart enough to know when you're looking through the viewfinder or at the LCD monitor, and they switch the display to the appropriate device. Actually, it uses the eyepiece sensors to sense when your noggin blocks the light and changes to Viewfinder mode.



Press the Finder/LCD button to switch between the viewfinder and LCD monitor. If you use the viewfinder a lot and don't want the LCD monitor on, disable auto switching from Custom menu 1 and use this button to switch back and forth.

D-Range button

This button accesses the A35/A55's contrast compensation system called D-Range Optimizer. Fully covered in Chapter 7, D-Range prevents a loss of data in very bright or dark areas of a scene. You can change the D-Range only in the advanced modes: P, A, S, or M modes (covered in Chapter 7). If you have an A35, you can change the function of the D-Range button from Recording menu 3.

Auto-lock accessory shoe

The accessory shoe (otherwise known as a *hot shoe* because it can make an electrical connection between it and the device attached to it) is where you mount an external flash and other accessories. Slide the accessory on the shoe until it snaps in place. The flash has a release button that you press to remove.

Image sensor position mark

This mark tells you exactly where the image sensor is in the camera body. If you ever set up a shot that requires you to know the precise distance between the focal plane on the sensor and the subject (maybe you're taking a photography class, or maybe you plan to set up a shot at the same distance later), use this mark as a reference point.

Speaker and microphones

Audio comes out of the speaker when you play a movie with sound. The camera also beeps when it establishes autofocus and as the self-timer counts down. Your A35/A55 has two built-in microphones that let you record stereo audio for your movies without having to attach an external stereo microphone (although you can do that).



The mics are close enough to your face that, should you be looking through the viewfinder while recording a movie, they will record your every breath. Figure 1-4 shows the left microphone; both are shown in Figure 1-3.

Rear controls

The rear of the camera, shown in Figure 1-5, has quite a few important controls, not to mention the viewfinder and LCD monitor. Get to know everything well. Many of the controls are dual use. They have a shooting function as well as a playback or menu function.



Figure 1-4: One of the two microphones.

Menu button

Press the Menu button to activate the camera's menu system. This is how you configure the camera and change many of its settings. Menus are covered in this chapter and used throughout the book.



Figure 1-5: Get a load of all that.

Movie button

Rather than have a movie mode, the A35/A55 has a Movie button. Press it to start recording. Press it again to stop recording. It's that simple. Chapter 4 covers shooting movies in more depth.

Exposure/zoom out/image index button



This button has three functions. The first is to adjust exposure compensation in P, A, and S modes; see Chapter 7. The second is to zoom out during photo playback, and the third is to display the Image Index during playback. The latter two functions are covered in Chapter 5.

AE lock/zoom in button

This button locks the auto exposure settings after you've metered the scene, which is helpful when there's a big lighting difference between your subject and the background. For more information, turn to Chapter 7. You can also use this button to zoom in when playing back photos.

Electronic viewfinder

The electronic viewfinder is a versatile piece of equipment. Although you look through it the same way you do traditional digital SLRs', it has many more uses. Eyepiece sensors, just below, detect whether you're looking through the viewfinder.

Diopter-adjustment dial

A small but important dial is nestled in the bottom-right corner of the viewfinder, as pointed out in Figure 1-6. It goes by the super-technical sounding name of *diopter-adjustment dial*. Use this dial to adjust the viewfinder to your eyesight. You'll find instructions on how to do this later in the chapter.



Diopter-adjustment dial

Figure 1-6: Turn the knob to improve your view.

LCD monitor

The LCD monitor has as many functions as the electronic viewfinder. Sony's use of Live view (where you frame the shot based on what you see on the monitor as opposed to looking through the viewfinder) is the best in the business. You can shoot, review, and control the camera from here. The A55 has a tilt/swivel LCD monitor, as I mentioned earlier. It turns, tilts, and swivels.

Light sensor (A55)

The A55's LCD monitor frame has a built-in light sensor that adjusts monitor brightness according to the surrounding light level. You can also adjust the monitor's brightness manually.



Figure 1-7: The sensor helps the monitor stay bright.

Function/image rotation button

The Function (or Fn) button is one you'll use when shooting. It groups a lot of shooting settings together, like autofocus mode, metering mode, and ISO. Press it to gain access to them. The type of functions that you have access to depend on whether you're shooting in an automatic (see Chapter 3) or an advanced mode (see Chapters 7 and 8).