

Flashtrax multimedia

By Peter Rowlands

There's a saying in the computer world that you only become interested in backing up data after you've lost something vital into which you had devoted a lot of time and effort. As a result I've always been a paranoid backup freak.

When I go away on a photo trip I try to have backups for literally everything - battery chargers, power supplies, cameras, flashguns etc etc. My principle is that if I have two of everything I probably won't get put out of action if something fails.

But in my armoury of photo attire I have a weak link in that, if my laptop computer was to fail, I would have no way of downloading images to view and assess.

With this in mind I researched a solution to this problem and discovered a very neat, small and light hard drive which is designed to either replace a laptop or act as a backup.

The Flashtrax I was sent for review had a whopping 80gig hard drive and a 3.5" screen for viewing images. That's more than enough memory to store thousands of RAW image files and a screen big enough to assess composition, exposure and focus. In addition there is an AV out socket for viewing images on either PAL or NTSC televisions.

Using the Flashtrax is a breeze. Take the CompactFlash card out of your camera, plug it into the Flashtrax and press the "Copy" button. The images are then automatically downloaded complete with all the filenames and photo data.

In practice what I did was download images to

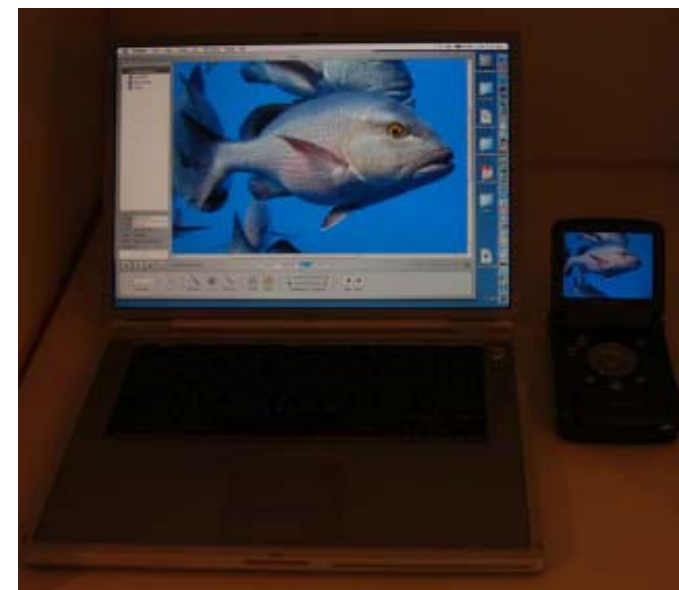


my laptop and then do a backup onto the Flashtrax. If I then wanted to be truly 'belt and braces' I could burn a CD from my laptop. The result was a feeling of total control over my backup paranoia.

The Flashtrax measures in at just 143x92x32mm (5.63x3.62x1.26 in) and weighs a mere 340g (12oz) so is highly portable and comes with a Rechargeable Li-Ion battery (2200 mAh capacity). I always used the Flashtrax with the provided power supply but I understand you could download between 3 and 6 gig of images before needing to recharge the battery.

The FlashTrax directly reads CompactFlash (CF) and IBM microdrive cards and SD/MMC, SmartMedia, Memory Stick or Memory Stick Pro cards with an optional adaptor.

As if this little miracle device was not clever enough it can also play MP3 and WAV audio files, video files and when plugged into your laptop via the USB2.0 socket it automatically mounts on your desktop and acts like any other hard drive so you can also backup your data files or even do a



The 3.5" Flashtrax screen compared to a 15" laptop.

complete backup of your laptop. Versatile indeed!

The FlashTrax system requirements are Windows ME, 2000 and XP or Mac OS8.6+ and any OS10.

From my point of view the FlashTrax has been the perfect addition to my survival arsenal. Its image backup reassurance was the initial attraction but the ability to kill time in airports listening to music or video together with a laptop data backup capability has made it a much used and valued item.

Such versatility does not come cheap compared to normal portable hard drives but I think you're getting a lot of performance for your money. There are 3 models available 80gig, 40gig and 20gig priced at \$699 (£440), \$499 (£330) and \$399 (£260) respectively.

For further details visit www.smartdisk.com