

Conclusion - Pros

- Excellent image quality when stopped down
- Essentially no lateral chromatic aberration

Conclusion - Cons

- Distinctly soft at wider apertures
- Bokeh chromatic aberration, most visible at wide apertures
- Broad blue-coloured halation at wide apertures
- Vignetting at wide apertures on full frame (essentially disappears by F2.8)

Overall conclusion

Anyone reading this review shortly after that of the [Canon EF 50mm F.4 USM](#) will surely be experiencing an uncanny sense of déjà vu; the two lenses' characteristics and performance are remarkably similar, as we might expect from designs of similar vintage and optical formula from two of the leading camera manufacturers. Once again we see a lens which is outclassed at wider apertures by the brand new [Sigma 50mm F1.4 EX DG HSM](#), but which rapidly draws level on stopping down, and in its sweet spot (particularly F5.6-F8) offers truly impeccable image quality. The results of our studio tests demonstrate that in this region it is wholly untroubled by the 12Mp sensor of the D3, and has plenty in reserve for the inevitable arrival of FX cameras with double the resolution; indeed it is sufficiently sharp in the centre to out-resolve the D300's 12Mp DX sensor, which would be equivalent to 28Mp on FX. And all this comes in a lens which is small, light, unobtrusive, and distinctly affordable.

Of course, we also see much the same weaknesses with the Nikon as with the Canon, if only because they are issues common to 50mm F1.4s with 'normal' barrel sizes and spherical elements only. Sharpness wide open is nothing to write home about (due to spherical aberration), and this is particularly problematic on DX; however it does improve quickly on stopping down, and that fast maximum aperture at least allows you to get the shot in marginal conditions (it's also worth considering that with the remarkable high-ISO performance of modern DSLRs, you'll rarely need to shoot wide open anyway). The lens also displays considerable vignetting on FX when using wide apertures, although again this diminishes rapidly on stopping down, and it also suffers from slight barrel distortion on FX, which could be visually disturbing in some circumstances. If these are important factors, the new Sigma will likely be the better buy, with its aspheric element and oversized lens barrel - but of course these improvements command a considerable price premium.

Of course, any conclusion with regard to this lens would be remiss to point out that it won't autofocus on the entry-level D40/D40x/D60 bodies, and owners of these cameras will need to buy the Sigma to gain functional AF (although ultimately this is a camera, rather than lens design decision). And then there's the much lower-priced 50mm 1:1.8 also in the range, which (in contrast to the Canon) isn't enormously different in build quality and also relies on the camera body for AF; we'll be reviewing this lens fully in due course, but here the buying decision will likely boil down to whether the additional two-thirds of a stop of light are really worth the additional price of the F1.4 lens to each individual user.

So in summary, we have a lens which offers a great deal for the money, but is naturally not without its faults. It's an ideal partner to full-frame DSLRs, especially the D700, but also works well on DX as a short portrait lens. It offers the usual advantages of a prime, *i.e.* a bright maximum aperture for low light and shallow depth-of-field work, coupled with truly excellent image quality when stopped down; in both regards it offers users capabilities which simply aren't available from zooms. So despite its age, this old favourite still has much to offer for the modern photographer.

Detail	Rating (out of 10)
Build quality	8.5
Ergonomics & handling	8.0
Features	8.0
Image quality	8.0
Value	8.5

Highly Recommended



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Samples Gallery

There are 20 images in the samples gallery. All pictures are shot in RAW and processed using Adobe Camera RAW to bypass the test cameras' automatic chromatic aberration correction in JPEG. Please do not reproduce any of these images on a website or any newsletter / magazine without prior permission (see our [copyright page](#)). We make the originals available for private users to download to their own machines for personal examination or printing (in conjunction with this review), we do so in good faith, please don't abuse it.

Unless **otherwise** noted images taken with no particular settings at full resolution. To provide the fairest impression of the lens itself, images are shot in RAW and converted using Adobe Camera Raw at default settings (to bypass the test cameras' automatic JPEG chromatic aberration correction). A reduced size image (within 1024 x 1024 bounds) is provided to be more easily viewed in your browser. As always the original untouched image is available by clicking on this reduced image.

