

First tests

Fotospeed's fantastic four From £17.99

Fotospeed offers a comprehensive range of inkjet papers compatible with dyes and pigment inks, and we decided to take a closer look at popular offerings in its Photo Quality paper collection. It features attractively priced products for day-to-day use.

For my test prints I used a selection of known files, after making my own ICC profiles using an X-rite i1 Studio outfit. Prints were checked under daylight-quality LED lighting.

Fotospeed offers free generic profiles for most popular printers, although not for the Epson SC-

P800 printer with Epson inks, the combination I used here. It also offers a free custom profile service on its own branded products (see the website for details). *WC*

• Fotospeed.com



PF Lustre Duo 280

Papers coated to accept ink on both sides are fairly rare, but there is a need for them (for instance, to make your own greetings cards, photo book or for a portfolio book). Whatever the purpose, the key thing is that there is no show-through, ie the image on one side is not visible through the other. To test it properly I printed tonally rich images on both sides so there was plenty of ink and any show-through would be obvious.

Just a word on set-up – you need to consider what you are printing and how images will be viewed. For my purpose (an A4 upright album for flip-over viewing) I had one image the right way round and then inverted the next one.

I did my first print and immediately flipped it over and did the second one. Common sense would dictate I should allow some drying time – even though Fotospeed says the paper is instant dry. I just wanted to see if there would be any issues using the material this way. There aren't – no smudging or scuffing of the first image.

If you hold a Duo print up to the light, yes, you can see the print on the other side, but once in my album no problem at all.

Print quality is first rate, and the smooth sheen rather than high gloss is lovely, and it's resilient to handling, too.



Photo Smooth Pearl 290

If value for money is what you want there is a clear reason for trying Photo Smooth Pearl 290. Buy a box of 50 sheets of A4 and it works out at 49p per sheet – box sizes in this size are 50, 100 and 500 sheets. There is also a very wide range of sheet (and roll) sizes on offer, too, so ideal for outputting family shots, proof prints, or even photographic flyers or business cards.

The paper is 290gsm, so a decent weight for most purposes, and the finish offers a smooth, fine lustre. Texture is fine, and gives decent resistance to general handling.

I was delighted with the paper's output quality, with prints showing natural but lively colours, solid blacks and clean whites. Delicate hues and saturated primaries were handled equally skilfully so there's not much to grumble about. If I had to nit-pick I'd say other papers give richer blacks but generally, I really liked what I saw.



Metallic Gloss 275

I can appreciate why Fotospeed called this paper Metallic Gloss – I'm not convinced it's the right name, but then I don't have an alternative. It is definitely gloss and there is a sheen on the printed surface that does have a mirror-like shimmer, but is it metallic? You decide.

Anyway, whatever it's called this is a lovely material with a whippy, plastic feel and a base on the creamy/yellow side of neutral. The difference is very clear when compared directly with its three companions in this test. Indeed, you can see its creamy look even viewed in isolation.

Regardless of its base, the paper performs well, delivering accurate, saturated results with a touch of vibrancy and an impressive level of contrast without being over-the-top or aggressive. Blacks were neutral and solid, too. Pastel hues were well rendered, with perhaps slightly more zip than other papers.



Matt Ultra 240

The odd one out in our Fotospeed overview is this material, the only matt finish paper here and at 240gsm, the lightest, too. Oh, and it is also the cheapest – an A3 sheet costs 67p. Therefore, it's ideally suited as a proofing paper before you output onto your favoured top-end fine art paper, which probably costs several times more. That said, it is a very fine material in its own right.

It has a clean white base and the finish is a very smooth matt. My test printer, an Epson SC-P800, has a matt black ink tank which helps to get the most from the material, so I used that for final prints. But I also used the photo black ink option when I was proofing before outputting onto a glossy finish paper. Either way, I was more than content with the paper's capable rendering of my test shots.

Like most matt papers, blacks lack that bottomless pit look that you can get with the leading gloss baryta papers – but they were still rich, while highlights remained nicely clean, too. Colour accuracy rates highly and I liked the way the primaries, secondaries and the delicate pastels were rendered. Saturation was not at the levels I would expect from a non-matt paper but they certainly were not disappointing, just more restrained, as expected.



Specs

- ▶ **Price**
A4 25 sheets £25.99 (£1.04p per sheet), A3 25 sheets £52.99 (£2.12p per sheet)
- ▶ **Availability**
A4, A3
- ▶ **Weight**
280 gsm
- ▶ **Features**
Bright white base, double sided finish, wide colour gamut, instant dry, pigment and dye inks compatible

Verdict

PF Lustre Duo 280 serves a need and does so very well indeed. It is nicely priced, too, if you consider that you have two printing surfaces per sheet. Just make sure you get your set-up right and the printer is clean, however, to avoid wastage.

Pros Double sided, print quality, surface
Cons Nothing

Specs

- ▶ **Price**
A4 50 sheets £24.49 (49p per sheet), A3 50 sheets £43.99 (88p per sheet)
- ▶ **Availability**
6x4in, 5x7in, 8x10in, A4, A3, A3+, A2, panoramic (210x594mm); rolls – 17in, 24in, 36in, 44in and 60in
- ▶ **Weight**
290 gsm
- ▶ **Features**
Neutral white base, wide colour gamut, instant dry, pigment and dye inks compatible

Verdict

Photo Smooth Pearl 290 is a lovely paper and capable of a performance that belies its price. Add the extensive size range and I can see why this paper is so popular.

Pros Value for money, extensive size range, good output
Cons Very small thing – blacks aren't the deepest

Specs

- ▶ **Price**
A4 25 sheets £26.99 (£1.08p per sheet), A3 25 sheets £52 (£2.08p per sheet)
- ▶ **Availability**
A4, A3, A3+, A2, panoramic; rolls – 17in, 24in and 44in
- ▶ **Weight**
275 gsm
- ▶ **Features**
Neutral white base, gloss, wide colour gamut, instant dry, pigment and dye inks compatible

Verdict

Fotospeed's Metallic Gloss 275 paper is a slightly unusual paper and while it won't appeal to everyone I can see it having a great many fans, especially among commercial photographers.

Pros Gives good, punchy but controlled results, the 'metallic' finish does work well
Cons Creamy base and finish won't appeal to everyone, relatively expensive

Specs

- ▶ **Price**
A4 50 sheets £17.99 (36p per sheet), A3 50 sheets £33.49 (67p per sheet)
- ▶ **Availability**
A5, 6x4in, 5x7in, 8x10in, A4, A3, A3+, A2; rolls – 17in, 24in, 36in, 44in and 60in
- ▶ **Weight**
240 gsm
- ▶ **Features**
Bright white base, matt finish, wide colour gamut, pigment and dye inks compatible

Verdict

The flat smooth finish of Matt Ultra 240 is very tactile while its printing attributes suit images with a more delicate colour palette. I shouldn't forget to mention the material's low price.

Pros Extensive size range, attractive price, great for finished prints as well as proofing
Cons Like most matt papers, lacks depth and punch, lightweight at 240gsm