

# Ink kit easy on the pocket unless you go print mad

## Hands on Peter Moon

**C**olour printing is a wonderful thing. A decent inkjet printer and heavyweight glossy photo paper can produce photographs in sharp, bright colour — impressive at home or as a business tool. The problem is the prohibitive cost of ink. Thanks to a Melbourne outfit called Rihac, we've solved that problem.

Our printer is Canon's PIXMA IP5200. At around \$200, its output is outstanding. The A4 snap of last year's New Year lobster — a tradition in the Hands on household — is a vibrant display of red shell, white meat and various lettuce greens. But the cost of this extravagant delight pales beside the price of the ink that printed the picture.

A set of Canon ink cartridges for the IP5200 will set you back \$100 to \$125. There's some debate whether the cartridges provide 10 millilitres of useable ink, or as much as 14ml. Splitting the difference, Canon's factory inks cost almost \$1800 a litre.

Having almost chewed through a set in six weeks, we were heading for an annual bill of more than a grand. Surely there was a cheaper way?

Hours of research later we had established that there were plenty of no-name solutions, and Canon's advice to steer clear was often sage. Product after product yielded poor results and even damaged the printer. But some did get good reviews from users. And then there was Rihac, from Braybrook in Melbourne's west. Users just loved them.

So we invested \$149 in a Continuous Ink Supply System, or CISS. Fatalistically, we reasoned that

if the exercise was a disaster we'd burned a couple of hundred dollars.

The kit comprises an external ink reservoir with six chambers, linked by silicon tubing to replicas of Canon's print cartridges. Problem is that the factory cartridges have a wee computer chip that Rihac can't reproduce. Copyright and all that. So Rihac's manual walks you through the distinctly nerve-racking process of razor blading the chips from your Canon cartridge and attaching them to the imposters.

The recommended method is to use a soldering iron to melt tiny plastic lugs. With our middle-aged eyesight and un-dexterity, we were sure we'd foul up this step. But somehow we made it through.

The reservoir sits beside the printer and the tubing snakes in, leaving the cover partly open. A dab of Blu-Tak on the sensor switch

ensures the printer doesn't think the cover is permanently open. Then you go through a turgid sequence of messages in the Canon printer software, assuring it that you don't want to be told when it thinks the ink supply has expired. After a none too invigorating installation experience, we prayed the unit worked as advertised.

It did. We had seven to 10 times the ink capacity of a factory cartridge, with refills that cost \$50 a full set. You need to manually refill the external tanks with a syringe, but that's simple. Cost per litre of the ink? Around \$100 a litre, or 6 per cent of the original.

We haven't, in fact, saved 94 per cent of our projected ink spend, because we now print with gay abandon, where once we would have scrooged. We have dozens and dozens of bright, clear large-sized

prints that we would have held back on if every month meant another hundred bucks in ink. If Canon's ink quality is better, the difference isn't material to our eyes, and if the printer died tomorrow we'd be hundreds of dollars ahead.

We should explain our choice of printer. Good quality, good speed and it can print directly onto printable CDs and DVDs, using a special tray adapter. As a business tool, a professional-looking CD is a boon.

CISS isn't for the faint-hearted. Installation could certainly go haywire. But once that stream is forded, high-resolution colour printing ceases to be a luxury.

See [www.rihac.com.au](http://www.rihac.com.au) for more information.

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