STANDOUT FEATURE
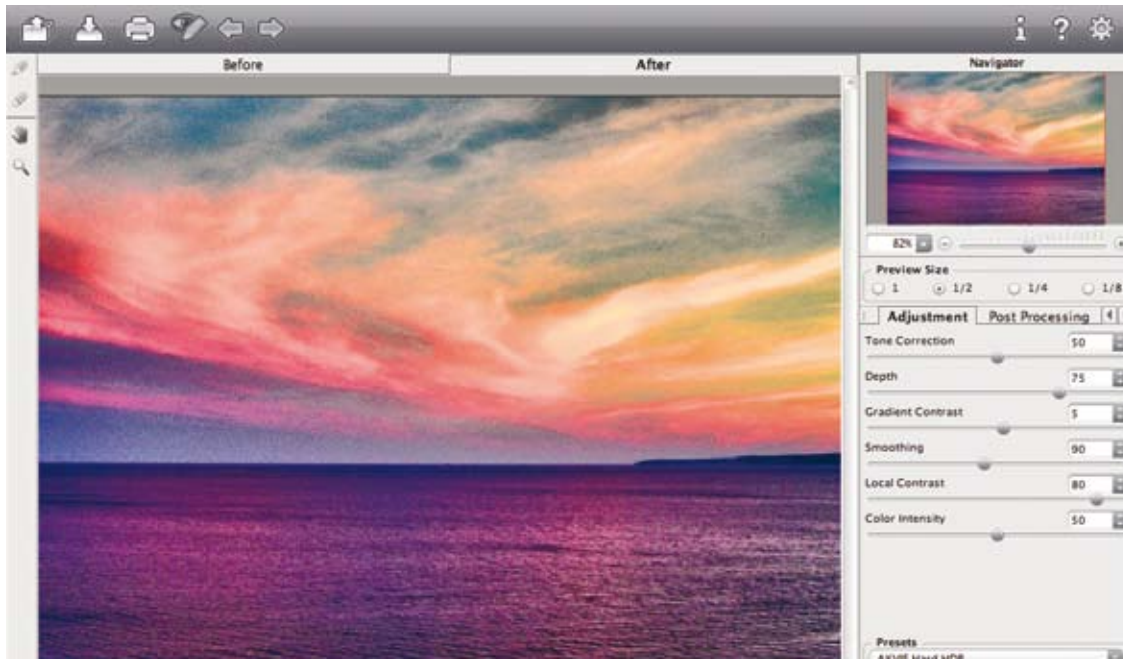What's great about all AKVIS software is that the company offers a free trial that is not limited in functionality. We recommend that you use this and see how HDRFactory compares to any programs that you already own before buying to evaluate how much you need it.

It is possible to go for more creative results rather than realism. Here we have pushed the saturation as we want the image on a canvas

AKVIS HDRFACTORY 1.0 FROM £50

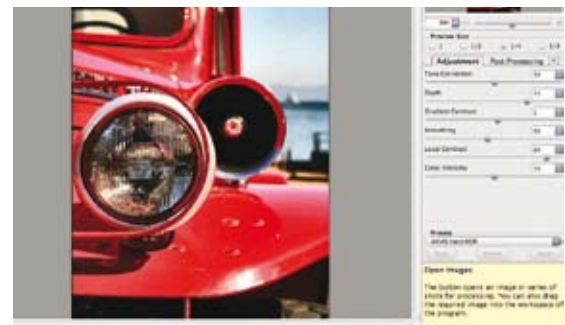Create HDR images to form multiple or single exposures   **WEBSITE:** http://akvis.com

HDRFactory is the first version of an HDR creation program from image-editing company AKVIS. It is available as both a plugin for many popular image editors or as a standalone program. We decided to test the standalone version to see how it compared to our usual Photoshop CS5-based HDR workflow.

HDRFactory works in one of two ways. Its most useful application is that it will merge different exposures, but it can also replicate HDR effects from a single image. The effect can be left realistic, giving a perfectly exposed result, or a more creative, stylised result can be made. Built into the software is a deghosting tool for getting rid of artefacts created by the merging process, and there are various controls for altering the colour, saturation and brightness.

The program does a good job of merging different exposures and it is relatively easy to create a good, well-exposed version of your shot. We had a lot of fun pushing the values to the extreme, but this can look unrealistic. In the end, we settled for more minor tweaks to come out with a merged photo that

The program comes with just two additional presets, but you can easily create and save your own

In the bottom-right of the interface, there is a selection of tool tips depending on where your mouse is

> ## "It's relatively easy to create a good, well-exposed version of your shot with HDRFactory"
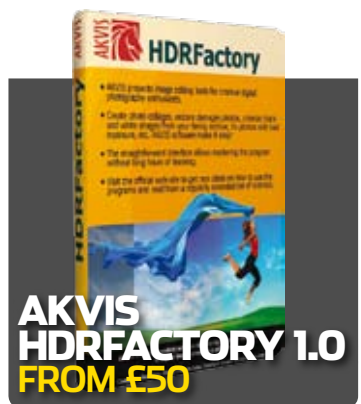
didn't look as though it had been through heavy post-production.

Results from a single image are more hit and miss. It is harder to get a realistic effect as you are essentially playing with values that are not present in the photo. However, if you are looking for a more creative finish, then it is certainly more than up to the job.

HDRFactory could also be used for general photo correction without applying the HDR effect, which makes it a good investment if you don't have an image-editing program already.

And that's what it comes down to with this piece of software. We still preferred the results from Photomerge and HDR Toning in Photoshop CS5, but that's a pricey bit of kit and should be better. For those who don't have access to these enhancements, then HDRFactory is a low-cost and effective solution for simple HDR effects.

AKVIS HDRFACTORY 1.0
FROM £50

MIN REQUIREMENTS Pentium III or Intel/G4, 1GB RAM, 100MB HDD

OPERATING SYSTEM Windows 7, Vista, XP; Mac OS X 10.4-10.6

For those who don't have the latest HDR technology in Photoshop, this makes a great standalone program   **OVERALL:** ★★★★☆