



Short history of Ihagee

The Ihagee company was founded in Dresden, Germany in 1912 by Johan Steenbergen, a young man from Meppel, The Netherlands. Originally, the company was named Industrie- und Handelsgesellschaft; later, the abbreviation IHG

was written as it is pronounced (in German): eehahgay and incorporated in the official name. Actually, the company has changed its name and structure several times; here with Ihagee I mean all these companies.

Ihagee has produced many camera types, some rather common but also some interesting models. In particular the Patent Klappreflex was unusual. It was a single lens bellows reflex that folded (the klapp) in a special way (the patent). It also produced bellows and macro extension rings, microscope adapters, flash equipment and enlargers. Lenses were always supplied by other companies.

World fame came with the Exakta. In 1933 it was a compact single lens reflex for roll film; this model is now called the Standard-Exakta (Vest Pocket Exakta in English speaking countries). In 1936 the Kine-Exakta was the world's first single lens reflex that used the now standard cine film and the 24x36 mm picture size.

Steenbergen had a Jewish wife and, although she was an American citizen, he considered it wise to leave Germany and go to the USA in 1942. He never saw Dresden and his company again.

In February 1945 Dresden, a very beautiful city, was heavily bombed *because* it was so beautiful. The allies hoped this would demoralise the Germans so much that they would end the war. That didn't happen but the Ihagee factory was destroyed. Only a few machines and some parts, stored elsewhere, were recovered a few months later.

After the war, Ihagee produced only Exakta and later Exa models. The 1950 Exakta was the world's first miniature camera with exchangeable viewfinders. The Exakta has been produced, in many upgraded models, from 1936 till 1969. The oldest lenses fit the newest model and vice versa.

East Germany could not keep up with the technological development in the western world and Japan. Besides that, the East German government was unhappy with a company that had a foreign owner and could not be nationalised. So they let it decline; in the end it was just a sign on the wall of Pentacon, the Praktica factory.

Steenbergen, living in Germany again, first in military service, later as consul of the Netherlands, has tried to get his company back, tried to get royalties, tried to have his Exakta produced in the West, all with no success. To put more pressure on Ihagee, he moved the seat of the company to West Germany. This actually created a new company. Ihagee West, as we usually call it, started many law suits against Ihagee East (the original in Dresden). One of the results was that the Exakta had to be called "Elbaflex" in West Germany and Ihagee "aus Dresden". Ihagee West has also produced its own camera, the Exakta Real, which was

unreliable and a failure. Later some Japanese cameras were imported with the name Exakta on them. Ihagee West was closed down in 1976. Johan Steenbergen died in 1967.

More about the history of Ihagee can be found in:

- Richard Hummel's book Spiegelreflexkameras aus Dresden (in German; ISDN 3-930846-01-2 or 3-89506-127-1)
- The Steenbergen biographies (short and full; see Main Index)
- The Videofilm "Exakta, Glanz und Elend einer legendären camera" (Exakta, Glory and Misery of a legendary camera) made by
Dr. Gunther Eiselt, Jüngstrasse 22, D01277 Dresden, Germany.
 - German VHS version available.
 - English subtitled VHS, NTSC and DVD versions available from 2001.05.01
 - and on this site.