

Letter from Werner Wurst  
on the history of the Ihagee Camera Works  
in Dresden.

When I began work in 1928 for the Ihagee Camera Works, this company had gained an esteemed position in the German camera industry and could look back on sixteen years of operation. The founder was the Dutchman, Johan Steenbergen, who sometime in May 1912 registered his company at the Dresden Commercial Registry Office as "Industrie-und-Handels Gesellschaft (I-H-G is said phonetically like "Ihagee" in German). The programme of work included the wholesaling of photographic articles (cameras and darkroom accessories) also the finishing of subcontracted, purchased camera parts and their assembly to make cameras. This first "Industrie-und-Handelsgesellschaft" was in several locations before moving to Friedrichstadt and Cotta, two suburbs west of Dresden. Because of the general rise in popularity of Amateur photography, the company did well so that shortly after the First World War (around 1918-19) the next step became possible: Johan Steenbergen hired several independent master carpenters so that cameras could be produced from the raw material wood to the finished product, all within the Company premises. They produced Plate Cameras, Tourist cameras, simple SLR cameras (Paff) as well as enlargers and attachments (Lumimax) The firm was now called "Ihagee Kamerawerk, Steenbergen and Co." Johan Steenbergen was the Sales Director and top Executive, his partner Hugo Frauenstein undertook the technical Management, Emil Englisch was the Plant Manager (Tool and Machinery supervision etc.) Otto Diebel later was the Sales Director and the carpentry experts Schubert and Koch stayed with their specialty and directed different plant areas. The quality of the products and the receptive World market gave the Ihagee Kamerawerks good production growth so that the available work space became too small. A new building was moved into sometime in 1923 in Striesen, an eastern suburb of Dresden which was also the neighbourhood of Ernemann and Ica. This building was enlarged in 1928-29 to about equal size to the present day building, it was totally destroyed during the big Air attack on Dresden in February 1945.

While most of the products after the first World War were the usual types of plate and later, roll film cameras, the first SLR model, the Paff, prepared an important precedent. The SLR was later to become the best seller and established a good reputation. A very decisive step in this development came when Ihagee Kamerawerk bought the manufacturing rights to the Patent-Klapp-Reflex from the Dutchman, William Brandsma of Amsterdam (my recollection is that the design of the focal plane shutter was also bought, but the designer's name is not known to me) The Ihagee-Patent-Klapp-Reflex was made in different sizes for the formats 6.5cm x 9cm to 10 x 15cm and became one of the best models on the World market. The principle of the SLR was used in the simple Box cameras, the Serien-Reflex and the Night Reflex.

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self-erecting camera, the Auto-Ultrix 6cm x 9cm, but against large competition  
only a relatively small market share was won. At the start of the thirties the trend  
to smaller formats was becoming decidedly strong. In 1931 there appeared the  
helical focus tube mount (Tubus) camera Kleinbild Ultrix, later named Parvola, and  
in 1932 the Self-erecting Kleinbild-Auto-Ultrix appeared, first in formats 3cm x 4cm  
and 4cm x 6.5cm, later in 4cm x 6.5cm only. Even with these models, big success  
did not come. During the bad Depression, 400 people were working but the company  
could not push through something that would sell. The situation of work was most  
critical: severe restrictions on all departments (even the advertising department),  
shortened work and lay-offs were the result. Only with the introduction of the  
Exakta 4cm x 6.5cm (1933) and the Kine-Exakta 24mm x 36mm (1936) was the Ihagee  
Kamera Werk able to stabilize the economic condition and gain world popularity.

So strongly did Miniature photography with perforated 35mm film develop, that the  
importance (stature) of the Exakta 4cm x 6.5cm was pushed back, and the Kine-Exakta  
became the basis for Ihagee-production through to 1970.

Factory history notes, that during the War (1942) a conversion into a limited company  
(Co. Ltd.), was done. The firm now was called "Ihagee Kamerawerk Aktiengesellschaft".  
This legal form remained after the war and was not changed, then the production  
properties (factory and machines) were given to VEB Pentacon Dresden on a contract  
basis. The Ihagee Kamerawerk has no more production program of its own. There  
was the previously mentioned total destruction of the traditional plant of Ihagee  
at Dresden-Striesen, 24 Schandauer Strasse. Post war production began in a partially  
destroyed, but repairable, former cigarette factory which eventually had 1000 persons  
employed in hospitable bright rooms.

During the Pre-War period, Ihagee had no single designer like Oskar Barnack at  
Leitz who could develop a new camera type on his own. At Ihagee, teamwork was  
considered the best idea for new designs. Johan Steenbergen had an excellent sense  
for the market and new trends. During the thirties, technician Karl Nuchterlein  
developed, through experience, into a talented designer. He was in charge of the  
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developed, through experience, into a talented designer. He was in charge of the development of the sensational Kine-Exakta, and of its systems, through to the registration of numerous Patents for it. His ideas were realized through the work of technicians and pattern makers like Otto Helfricht, Willy Teubner, Rudolf Groschupf, Hans Loose and others. Regrettably Karl Nuchterlein was drafted into the German army during the last year of the War and one day went missing in action.

The founder of the company, Johan Steenbergen was a salesman in the best sense. He told me that his aptitude for business began to show during his early school days. His shrewd but always honest business practices have to be thanked for preventing the collapse of the company during the bad times. Johan Steenbergen, later Consul of the Netherlands, was friendly with everybody. His personal thrift and lack of pretension showed up often in the management of the company. As an example, Ihagee in the late thirties with over 500 employees, didn't own a truck, and then finally got a very modest three wheeled truck. Johan Steenbergen himself went for many years without a car, and made his way from the factory to his home by the typical Dutch way, the bicycle. He was well acquainted with the old way of advertising, which he did himself, until I took over the advertising work in the mid-thirties. As a diplomat of an enemy state (Holland) he had an opportunity, with his wife whom he married at a relatively late age, during the war time to emigrate to the U.S.A. After the war, he was again Consul in a city in West Germany (I believe it was Emder). He died at an old age a few years ago. Also his German partners in Dresden are no longer alive.

While working at Ihagee in the mid-thirties, I attended the German Photo Trade School in Dresden, which led to my becoming the advertising manager for Ihagee Kamerawerk. Since 1946 I have voluntarily done the Exakta publicity work, from pamphlets to the large Textbook. I had the lucky job of making popular the first miniature SLR camera in the world, with all the publicity on this prominent Camera system coming from me. I am pleased, that in your country, a group of Friends-of-the-Exakta are following the history of this pioneering camera. I wish you in you collecting and research many successes.

Werner Wurst  
Dresden.

translated by Rand Scheid