

USA Variations

USA-Variationen

By Gary Cullen

Ihagee faced two problems exporting to the USA. Firstly, an American company owned the "Varex" name and secondly, they had to identify their cameras as being made in the Eastern Bloc.

The Argus Camera Company held a copyright for the Varex shutter they produced and would not allow Ihagee to use the name in America. U.S. Customs would not clear any cameras with the Varex name until it had been removed. The large number of variations in the modifications to change, remove, or cover the Varex name for the U.S. leads one to believe many companies were involved over a long period time. Some of the modifications are quite crude while others are very well done with polishing and re-chroming of the nameplate. Many of the cameras caught by customs were quite likely "gray market" imports to the U.S. All these variations are quite rare even in the U.S.

Early on, the Exakta Camera Company in New

York, the official Exakta importer into the U.S., had Ihagee produce new nameplates for use in the U.S. market with "V." and later "VX", "VXIIa", etc. in place of the Varex name. Varex continued to be used on European Exaktas.

Anything produced in the "Red Zone" of Europe was marked "MADE IN USSR OCCUPIED GERMANY" in order to warn unsuspecting U.S. citizens they were supporting a communist regime by purchasing the item. Apparently the "USSR" markings had little effect on sales by evidence of the large number of Exaktas sold in the U.S. Most commonly, the markings are either stamped in white ink on the bottom of the camera or etched lightly into the right top cover-plate. Less common variations: different color stamped inks -- yellow has been seen; "USSR Occupied Germany..." embossed into the bottom leather; engraving on the chromed bottom edge; engraving or stamping on viewfinders and accessories. The least common was engraving on the lens barrel.