

READERS' REPORT NO.9

Exaktas



(Based on 39 Owners of 60 Cameras)
Compiled by Miriam Solon

NOTE: While there have been many Exakta 35mm cameras since the original Exakta I in 1936 (Exakta II in 1949; Exakta V, 1951; Exakta VX, 1952; etc., etc.), all have been very similar in operation and performance, with the big change coming in 1951 with the V, which was the first camera allowing interchangeable finders and thus the eye-level pentaprism. Because of the similarity, we have lumped all Exakta cameras together for our survey. This survey does not include the new Exakta 1000 RTL.

1. HOW DO YOU RATE THE EXAKTA OVER-ALL?

Excellent (22), Good (16), Fair (1), Poor (0)

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF YEARS OWNED?

1 year (11), 2 (5), 3 (5), 4 (3), 5 (2), 6-10 (7), 11-15 (7), 16-25 (7)

3. WHICH NORMAL LENS?

50mm f/2 Pancolar	(17)
50mm f/2.8 Tessar	(7)
58mm f/2 Biotar	(6)
50mm f/1.9 Xenon	(6)
50mm f/3.5 Tessar	(5)
55mm f/1.9 Steinheil	(3)
50mm f/1.9 Steinheil	(2)
50mm f/3.5 Primotar	(1)
50mm f/2.9 Trioplan	(1)
50mm f/2.8 Domiplan	(1)
50mm f/2.8 Travenar	(1)
50mm f/1.5 Angenieux	(1)
50mm f/2.8 Unspecified	(1)
50mm Unspecified	(1)

4. WHAT ARE THE FEATURES YOU LIKE?

(13) Range of slow shutter speeds.
(12) Interchangeable viewfinders, wide range of accessories.
(8) Durability.
(7) Built-in film cutting knife.
(4) Interchangeable lenses, ease of changing lenses, self-timing device, ease of double exposure.
(3) Quick focusing, versatility.
(2) Ease of removing prism for cleaning, excellent optics, bright viewing screen, film advance lever, quality construction, current low price, wind warning in viewfinder, excellent workmanship and durability of carrying case, convenience of left-hand operation, especially when using two cameras.
(1) Waist-level finder, hinged door, absence of through-the-lens metering, bayonet lens mount, reflex viewing, nonobsolescence,

interchangeability of all components for specialized work, shutter lock, compactness, accuracy, dependability, solid feel, close focusing of Pancolar lens, ease of loading, cassette-to-cassette winding, external auto diaphragm, looks, Examat meter, freedom from repairs.

5. WHAT FEATURES DON'T YOU LIKE?

(7) Lack of behind-the-lens metering system, noisiness of shutter, lack of instant-return mirror.
(6) Necessity for keeping button depressed throughout entire rewind.
(4) Awkwardness of loading, poor construction, long-throw advance lever.
(3) Left-hand wind.
(2) Vibrating at 1/30 sec. hand held, rotating shutter-speed knob, weight, accessories becoming increasingly hard to find.
(1) Slow to use, weak camera back, lack of automation, lack of motor drive, 1/60 sec. too slow for electronic action shots, preset lens, difficulty of using on tripod because of base screw, split-image viewfinder, protruding knobs on underside of camera, totally cumbersome film advance; sluggish focusing of lens, especially in cold weather; no manual override for double exposure, prefer two speed selecting knobs, poor service from U.S. distributor, fragile thumb wind, body shape awkward to grasp, inaccurate framing, odd flash contacts, lack of shutter speeds between 1/5-1/8 and 1/25-1/30 sec.; prefer old, "noisy," slow-speed shutter to quieter new one—the buzzing warned people away from the camera during long-time exposures; film pressure plate can scratch film.

6. DID THE CAMERA EVER NEED REPAIR?

No (24) Yes (15)

If so, what went wrong with it?

(5) Shutter erratic.
(3) Shutter sticky.
(2) Pressure plate needed adjustment.
(1) Film takeup jammed, rewind shaft broke, exposure counter failed, light leak developed, flash contact broke, transport mechanism tore film sprockets, sync speeds required adjustment, screw holding lens catch worked loose.

7. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO ALL OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU BUY AN EXAKTA?

Yes (29) No (9) Not Sure (1)

8. ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS?

Favorable

The Exakta system is expansive, versatile, and made for the careful photographer; for close-ups, bellows, and general picture taking, the Exakta is great; due to competition, this camera is forced to sell below its actual value; it is beautifully simple and cheap for close-up work, though I hope the new model is better constructed; a good camera for the

price, it has a lot of extra features; an Exakta is for a serious photographer, not a snap-shooter; recent developments have made other makes competitive, but I cannot forget that my Exakta, purchased for copy work in connection with illustrated lectures, has performed faultlessly under very trying circumstances without need of any repairs; though I perhaps have learned to adapt my techniques to it and minimize its faults, having lived with various models for 18 years, I can swear to it as a workhorse—it's not fancy, but it sure stands up to wear and tear, and unless they come out with a model put together with tin and spit, I'll add the new Exakta to my "loved ones"; the things writers have cited to "degrade" Exakta in many publications are the very things that I like, e.g., left-handed operation and lack of return mirror; fresh from the camera store, the cloth shutter had a burnt hole in it, but Camera Specialty fixed it immediately at no charge—when you've got a company that gives good service and a dependable product, why change?

Unfavorable

Exakta is a well-built camera but has not kept up with our fast moving pace; my main gripe is the poor service and representation of the camera store and poor quality control at the factory—my Exakta had to be cleaned prior to use; I feel that a person might be getting more for his money by buying one of the more popular Japanese varieties which have overcome most of the objectionable characteristics of the Exakta and still remain comparable price-wise with accessories more readily available.

Suggestions

Wish an interchangeable back could be developed so that different types of film could be switched quickly without respooling; at present price levels it is an excellent buy, but workmanship and finish are apt to be uneven—would recommend that better quality control be exercised with a consequent price increase.

Past versus present models

It was a great camera in the past; the quality of workmanship deteriorated between the VX and VXIIB, but both have done everything required of them; later models tend to be less expensively constructed inside, but do work at least as well; the Exakta image has undergone a large change over recent years—the former do-it-all Cadillac of SLR's has now changed to a still versatile, most-for-your-money Volkswagen. (I wasn't exactly happy about the price reduction even though I purchased my second and better Exakta for around a hundred dollars, for I fell in love with the overweight, slightly old-fashioned piece of machinery.)

9. OTHER LENSES OWNED?

Acall 35mm f/3.5	(1)
Angenieux 24mm f/3.5	(1)
Angenieux 28mm f/3.5	(1)
Angenieux 35mm f/2.5	(1)
Angenieux 90mm f/1.8	(1)
Angenieux 135mm f/3.5	(2)
Enna-Werke 35mm f/2.5 Lithagon	(1)
Hanimex 400mm f/6	(1)
Isco 24mm f/4 Westrogon	(1)
Isco 180mm f/2.8	(1)
Juplen 35mm f/2.5	(1)
Kilfitt 40mm f/2.8 Macro Kilar	(2)
Kilfitt 300mm f/5.6 Tele Kilar	(2)
Komura 105mm f/2	(1)
Komura 105mm f/2.5	(1)
Komura 400mm f/6.3	(1)
Lentar 180mm f/3.5	(1)
Lentar 300mm f/5.5	(1)
Lentar 500mm f/8 Mirror	(1)
Meyer 35mm f/4.5 Primagon	(1)
Meyer 80mm f/2.8	(1)
Meyer 180mm f/3.5	(1)

Continued on page 139

Readers' Report: Exaktas

Continued from page 99

Meyer 400mm f/5.5 Tele Megor	(1)
Piesker 135mm f/3.5 Votar	(1)
Piesker 400mm f/5.5 Tele Votar	(1)
Samigon Fisheye	(1)
Schacht 85mm f/2.8 Travenar	(1)
Schacht 135mm f/3.5 Travenar	(1)
Schneider 35mm f/2.8	(1)
Schneider 135mm f/3.5 Tele-Xenar	(2)
Schneider 150mm f/5.5 Tele-Xenar	(1)
Schneider 360mm f/5.6	(1)
Sigma 135mm f/3.5	(2)
Spiratone 35mm f/3.5 Macrostar	(1)
Spiratone 150mm f/4.5	
Short Mount	(1)
Spiratone 200mm f/4.5	(1)
Spiratone 400mm f/6.3	(2)
Spiratone 400mm f/6.8	(1)
Steinheil 28mm	(1)
Steinheil 35mm f/2.8 Quinaron	(4)
Steinheil 100mm f/3.5	(1)
Steinheil 135mm f/2.8 Tele Quinar	(2)
Steinheil 135mm f/3.5	(2)
Steinheil 200mm f/4.5	(2)
Steinheil 300mm f/4.5	(1)
Sun 135mm f/2.8	(1)
Taikanar 300mm f/5.6	(1)
Tamron 225-135mm Converto	(1)
Tamron 400mm f/6.9	(1)
Unitel 135mm f/3.2	(1)
Vivitar 28mm f/2.5	(2)
Vivitar 35mm f/2.8	(2)
Vivitar 35mm f/3.5	(1)
Vivitar 135mm f/2.8	(1)
Vivitar 135mm f/3.5	(1)
Vivitar 200mm f/3.5	(2)
Vivitar 200mm f/3.5 T4	(1)
Vivitar 400mm f/5.6	(1)
Vivitar 85-205 f/3.8	(1)
Zeiss Jena 25mm f/4 Flektogon	(2)
Zeiss Jena 35mm f/2.8 Flektogon	(2)
Zeiss Biometer 80mm f/2.8	(2)
Zeiss 135mm f/4 Triotar	(2)
Zeiss 180mm f/2.8 Sonnar	(2)

Our Analysis

You might think that an ancient design like the Exakta would elicit many disgruntled comments. Far from it. Few camera owners were as pleased and loyal as Exakta owners. The unique features—long, slow shutter speeds, built-in knife for cutting off pieces of film, interchangeable finders and screen, huge list of accessories—pleased them mightily. The lack of modern amenities—rapid-return mirror, behind-the-lens metering built on—displeased some but not many. Rugged, dependable, sort of like a loyal dog was the general feeling.