"Amateur Photographer" Camera Test

by Neville Maude

Exakta Varex IIb

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E XAKTA single-lens reflex cameras have been established for a long time. Perhaps they started with the Paff Reflex in 1920, certainly the Ihagee Reflex was available in 1926 and the standard V.P. Exakta in 1931. The Kine Exakta model I appeared in 1936, and the latest model looks much the same—a sincere tribute to the soundness of the original conception. However, this does not mean the Exakta is old-fashioned since there has been steady development right up to the present day.

In one way the camera has suffered from its long history. Since the old models last so well, and even 20-year-old ones are still desirable cameras, some have been "repaired" by itinerant mechanics who are not properly trained. This is bad for any camera and particularly for the precision Exakta. Properly serviced by reliable people, or even left completely untouched, the camera goes on indefinitely through the years. There are no weak points or teething troubles; these were eliminated a long time ago. Some people have remarked



that the design looks untidy, with moving parts exposed. An answer to this is that Ihagee are not ashamed of those parts and do not need to hide them! There are some cameras with tidy top-plates which look very shoddy underneath the curtain of chrome. Another point is that the Exakta has been a prestige and luxury camera for so long that people The Exakta is easy to hold and has a practical, functional appearance without false streamlining. Metal parts are chrome, bright and satin while the body has a black leather-finish.

have failed to notice that even the top model is within their reach by today's standards.

An important feature of the camera is versatility. There is the choice of waist or eye-level finders and a range of focussing screens, the most popular incorporating a split-image rangefinder. The lens mount takes the well-known bayonet fitting and a wide range of lenses can be used (normal range 20 to 400mm) and there is a huge system of accessories for close-up, stereo, microscopic, scientific, medical, and industrial use.

Perhaps the most unique feature of the Varex is the shutter, with speeds from 1/1000th to 12 seconds. On test this proved remarkably accurate all over this extended range and the negatives were evenly exposed. Two knobs are used, one for 1/1000th to 1/30 with B & T, the other $\frac{1}{8}$ th to 12 seconds. The gap between is no great drawback and the long automatic time exposures can prove useful. Delayed action (about 13sec) is provided for speeds between $\frac{1}{4}$ and 6 seconds. Long exposures and delayed action need to be tensioned in addition to the usual shutter wind, and lenses with automatic diaphragms should be set in the "normal" or non-automatic position since otherwise the diaphragm will open too early.

The lens tested was the six element Pancolar f/2 from Jena, a relative of the Biogon, and results were excellent. Central sharpness was acceptable on 20in prints even at full aperture while the trace of flare at the edge cleared up considerably at f/2.8 and completely at f/4 (this kind of blur would be less noticeable in night pictures, which is when one wants f/2). Central sharpness reached its top level between f/4 and f/5.6, remaining constant thereafter.

This is a very compact lens, as light and small (with mount) as some f/2.8 types. There are click stops at each half aperture and it is worth mentioning that on the model tested the iris changed down all the way—on some automatic irises the last half, or even full, stop is fictitious though this is seldom realized. There was rather less distortion than with most wide-aperture lenses of S.L.R.s., despite the fact that focal length was 50mm instead of the somewhat more common 55 or 58mm (the actual figures for "ship length" were 10.5 centre, 11.0 edge). Other standard lenses are the 50mm f/2.8 Tessar (too well known for comment to be needed) and the comparatively inexpensive Domiplan. The latter is a Meyer lens, 4 elements, giving good central sharpness with some improvement down to f/5.6 and edges continuing to improve down to f/11.

The camera proved pleasant to handle. The way the lens stopped down to its taking aperture with the first pressure gives a good idea of depth-of-field though the " closing-down " pointers on the scales are also excellent. Body shape fits well into the hand, the tripod bush is perfectly placed for balance, and there is now a crank rewind. The usual Exakta feature of optional cassette-to-cassette working is retained, though the popular take-up spool is also supplied, and there is the

LENS PERFORMANCE

The first two pictures show the entire field of view with ship at centre and edge. according to the finder. The others are same-size reproductions of parts of 20 inch prints, from negatives taken at various apertures. Several series were taken but only one set to f/4 can be shown. The film was Pan F, developed in Unitel.

FIELD OF VIEW



CENTRE

















1/4

14

neat little knife to cut off any desired exposures. Synchronization is by three separate sockets, for FP bulbs, M types, and X (the latter at 1/60sec).

There is little one would wish to alter on this camera, despite the age of the original conception. An instant-return mirror would be a good idea and also the missing speed of 1/15th (the latter being more from an intellectual desire to see a completed geometrical series than a practical need). Against these small points are set a well-proven design, a most comprehensive system of lenses and accessories (lacking only a motor drive for the Press lads), and good solid quality for the price, as lens and shutter performance show. There are unique features on this excellent model and at a future date we hope to publish the results of tests on the more interesting lenses in the series.



SHUTTER TEST

Shutter tests were made by Bowens of Gerrard Street on modern electronic equipment in accordance with the relevant British Standards. The milliseconds column indicates the test figure obtained; the fraction is the nearest practical one. Figures indicate the effective exposure received by the film; they do not show total opening times or any other figure save effective exposure.

Indicated	Measured	Nearest Fraction
1/1000	0.9ms	1/1100
1/500	1.8ms	1/550
1/250	3.8ms	1/270
1/125	7.7ms	1/130
1/60	17ms	1/60
1/30	31ms	1/32
1/8	135ms	1/8
1/4	290ms	. 1/4
1/2	480ms	1/2
1	950ms	I I
2	1,700ms	12
2 3 4 6	2,700ms	21
4	3,700ms	31
6	5,600ms	51
8	7,700ms	71
10	9,600ms	93
12	11,200ms	111

FACTS IN BRIEF
WEIGHT with Pancolar lens, about 2 lb £ s
SIZE overall, about 5% x 4 x 3% in
PRICE with reflex head and Domiplan F.A.D 60 12 (
PRICE with reflex head, distance meter, and Tessar F.A.D 76
PRICE with pentaprism and Tessar F.A.D 80 1
PRICE with pentaprism, distance meter, and Pancolar F.A.D 96 15
ER CASE 33
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