

FILM FIRST!

A CONTINUATION OF THE LONDON GALLEY WEST EXHIBITION PROJECT EXPLORING THE PRACTICAL USE OF VINTAGE CAMERAS. 2007



THE EXTENDED GALLERY

THE EXTENDED GALLERY

“When preparing for my exhibition at the London Gallery West venue I began to do a number of things I hadn’t done before, or at least not for a long time.

Starting with going through my own collection of cameras, loading them with film and beginning to take pictures again from an ‘amateur’ perspective, I began to make contact with other camera owners and collectors as I sought to collate enough items to stage the exhibition. As a result of being immersed in an environment of vintage cameras that went beyond my own collection in terms of quality, vintage and historical interest I became re-infected by the collector’s bug that had lain dormant for about 25 years.

Subsequent to the exhibition I have continued to collect cameras, concentrating mainly on trying to find good vernacular examples at car boot sales and in antique shops. The spare bedroom now groans under the weight of several boxes filled with various cameras. Collectors that I have both met and found on the internet have been invaluable in providing information to document these cameras and the companies that manufactured and sold them.

It is probably true for all collectors of historic items, not just of cameras, that as they touch and examine items in their collection they speak to them – communicate from across the span of time – about what they were in that time, how they were made, how they were handled, how they were used and how they were valued. An old camera tells you all of these things. Sometimes it tells even more – with old negatives and even an old unprocessed film still in the camera.

If the camera still works, so much the better. Operating the controls puts you in the same relation to the camera as the last user, fifteen, thirty, sixty or ninety years ago. The camera becomes a true time machine, backwards travel only of course. And if the camera can still take pictures then it should have the opportunity to do so, because that is what brings it back to life from its period of dormancy, storage and having been forgotten.

Many of the cameras I have come across were made for the obsolete 127 film format. I had given up hope that I could obtain this film, which I know Kodak discontinued about thirty years ago. But I found a supplier on the web so at last I can run these cameras. I have also been able to take pictures using the 126 instamatic film and intend to run some cameras using the 110 instamatic film in the future.

So, a project which I started for the exhibition with a booklet and display of pictures from some of the vintage cameras, is something I will continue here – an ‘Extended Gallery’.”

John Bunyan



Lowndes Park Pond, Chesham Sept.2006 Kodak Brownie 127 2nd model (1956)

“Kodak used bakelite as a principal fabricating material for their basic cameras extensively in the post-war period. The Brownie 127 is an extremely numerous model with a rounded shape designed for eye level use with a built in tunnel shaped central viewfinder. The basic design is just scaled down slightly from the larger 120 format roll-film bakelite brownies such as the ‘Cresta’.

Having obtained four of these cameras at various car boot sales at an average cost of £1 each I was surprised to find that they were all in serviceable condition. With a fixed focus single element meniscus lens, simple single speed rotary shutter, plastic shutter release and wind on knobs, there is not much to go wrong with them.

Releasing the base lock allows the entire cup shaped body section to be disengaged to reveal the skeletal inner chassis with the take-up spool and curved film plane. Positioning the film on the curve like this was an easy design mechanism to give good geometric correction from the lens without having to build it into the lens itself through a multi-element design which would have made the camera expensive. The lens and shutter assembly are part of the removed body section and the exposed sprung rotary shutter can be studied here and triggered by pressing the engaging lever. No simpler or more elegant a mechanism could have been designed and it works faultlessly, having been protected across the years by being behind the lens.

In use the viewfinder is clear but feels a long way off because of its recessed body position that stretches the whole depth of the chunky body. Despite quite a lot of pressure being necessary on the shutter release most of the pictures I took were free from camera shake. The view of the pond against the light shows that the lens is not entirely free from flare, which is probably age related. For the picture in the café I was able to use the camera on the table without being noticed as I shot the two boys looking out. A quiet shutter was a definite advantage here.”



Brown Sugar Café, Chesham, October 2006. Kodak Brownie 127 2nd Model (1956).



Stuart Period Building, Chesham Town Centre, October 2006. Kodak No.0 127 Box Brownie Model A.

“The cardboard, wood and black fabric No.2 Box Brownie camera must surely be the most numerous camera in the world. As a collector I have come across more of these than any other camera. Kodak produced many different types of box camera that are almost identical to the No.2 save for the fact that they support the numerous different roll-film sizes that were available in the early part of the twentieth century.

Smallest of these was the No.0 Box Brownie taking the 127 roll film. Identical to a No.2 Brownie, it is just scaled down in size. I found one of these for £1 at a car boot sale. Although the external metal trim to the viewfinders, wind on lever and catch are oxidised and rusted, the camera body, chassis, lens and shutter assemblies were intact and functional. The viewfinders were extremely dim due to the mirror surfaces having corroded but were just about useable in strong light.

The results reveal a surprisingly sharp lens and a shutter operation free from camera shake. Age has made the lens deliver extremely flat images with much compression of colours from a lens never designed to render colours on film. I never originally imagined however that it would be possible to trial the camera in modern times until I obtained some 127 colour negative roll-film.



Kodak Brownie 127



Kodak No.0 Box Brownie 127



Chesham Town Clock Tower (left) and Roof Detail (right). October 2006. Kodak No.0 127 Box Brownie Model A.



Pavement Scene, Chesham Town Centre. October 2006. Kodak No.0 127 Box Brownie Camera Model A.



Narrow Boat passing through Denham Deep Lock, Grand Union Canal, Uxbridge, Middlesex. October 2006. Contax II 35mm rangefinder camera (1936)

“As the owner of two vintage Leica cameras from 1933 I was well aware from an early age of the rivalry in technical innovation and manufacture between the Leitz company, manufacturers of the Leica, and Zeiss, who made the Contax. So, for thirty years I have wanted to get hold of a Contax and at a car boot sale last summer I found one.

Unfortunately the owner knew what he had got and it cost me £50 to walk away with what looked to be a completely original Contax II with case in excellent cosmetic condition. Opening it up and checking it out I found that the shutter – whilst very weak – was still working with no damage to the metal vertical drop blinds and that the famous f3.5 50mm Zeiss Tessar lens appeared to be in perfect order apart from a dent to the outer rim which evidently has not affected the focussing or alignment of the elements.

A slight change in the texture of the black fabric body covering on the right of the camera makes me suspect that this has been replaced. Age related wear of this covering was a common problem I found.

Loading the camera with film was, as with the Leica, not straightforward. Access to the back is however easy with the whole base-plate and back coming off in one piece. An original Contax take-up spool was in the camera and threading the film was easy enough. Stupidly I did not pay much attention to setting the frame counter and was not sure when shooting whether it ascended or descended. The result was that the film wind locked half way through the film. Since I had not checked how many shots I had taken I presumed I had shot the entire film and rewound it. I found that only two thirds of the film had been exposed when I got the prints back.

The Contax camera differs in certain key respects to the Leica. It is bigger and heavier to start with and is built around a metal vertical drop blind shutter rather than the Leica's fabric horizontal travel one. The focussing rangefinder has a prism base of 4 inches compared to the Leica's 2 inches which gives a great deal of accuracy. The focus mechanism itself is complex with a thumbwheel on the top of the camera plate being geared to a focus train on the flange of the lens throat – on the body itself rather than within the lens.

This unusual arrangement works well enough by making the right hand responsible both for focussing and shooting – unlike the Leica where the lens is focussed with the left hand using a simple gripping knob on the lens itself. I had not expected to find a different arrangement in the Contax however and it leaves me perplexed as to how Zeiss were able to design all of their other lenses to use exactly the same focusing range – given that it is built, with its calibration, into the camera body.

The Contax does not feel anywhere near as natural to use as the Leica when actually shooting. Apertures are easy to set but the shutter markings are not clearly visible. I had decided to assume that the shutter was at least two stops (x4) slower than the marked speeds because of its weakness and checking the exposures on the processed negatives I found that to be a reliable instinct. Focussing however was not the dream that I expected the long-base rangefinder to make of it. This is mainly because when the right hand focuses using the thumb-wheel or operates the shutter release it moves forward onto the camera body and blocks the rangefinder prism. So the double image spot disappears from the viewfinder. – Hmm! – not really good design ergonomics. It is noticeable that in copies of the camera that Nikon made they moved the prism closer in to avoid the danger area.

Another danger area was the shutter. Before loading the camera I checked it and found that on the slower settings it had a tendency to open up when winding on the film fogging it in the process.

So I stuck to the faster speeds and, when I got the prints back everything I had shot had come out and they looked superb. Unlike the Leitz Elmar lens, the bloomed Zeiss Tessar gave brilliant contrast along with its sharpness. The focal plane shutter gave perfectly even coverage with no variation of exposure across the vertical axis that would have indicated a severe shutter fault. This camera is truly beautiful. Repairs for Contaxes are notoriously difficult to arrange but I have managed to get this camera fully repaired since taking these pictures and some more photographs since the repair are featured later.”



Zeiss Contax II 35mm Rangefinder Camera.



*Tea Rooms at Denham Deep Lock, Grand Union Canal, Uxbridge, Middlesex.
October 2006. Contax II 35mm Rangefinder Camera.*



*Dovecot, Tea Rooms, Denham Deep Lock, Grand Union Canal, Uxbridge, Middlesex.
October 2006. Contax II 35mm Rangefinder Camera.*



Wendover Arm of The Grand Union Canal in Late Afternoon November Sunlight. 2006. Kodak Retina 1a 35mm camera.

When organising the ‘Film First’ exhibition one of the other collectors contributing – John Steward – exhibited a Kodak Retina camera. I was struck at the time by the quality and design of this early ‘50s camera and resolved to try and obtain one myself. Eventually I purchased one for £45.

After the war, when Kodak were still reliant on their volume sales of various models of Brownie camera that were mass produced in America, Britain and France, they realised the threat posed by German high quality precision camera manufacturers Leitz and Zeiss. It was not so much that they were producing expensive quality cameras – which were not in themselves a threat to Kodak’s bulk market – but that they were doing so on the new miniature film format of 35mm. The trend towards smaller compact cameras had been set and Kodak could not follow this trend with cheaply manufactured Brownie cameras that could only produce adequate quality by using the larger roll film formats.

Utilising their precision manufacturing capabilities in post-war Germany, and in particular well designed and made German optics and shutters (mainly Schneider) they produced the Retina range of compact 35mm cameras which used Compur shutters built into the lens assemblies and scissor action struts on fold out bellows to bring the lens out to the focal point whilst retaining the camera’s compactness when closed.



The Kodak Retina 1a 35mm Camera



Fisherman at Tring Reservoir, November 2006. Kodak Retina 1a 35mm camera.



Feeding Swans at Ruislip Lido, October 2006. Kodak Retina 1a 35mm camera.

Thus the camera gives an impression of precision and quality manufacture when both looked at and used in the hand. The example I had purchased was in immaculate condition with a perfectly operating shutter and lever advanced film transport.

Not quite so easy to use in practice however. I found that the shutter release needed a lot of travel to actuate and annoyingly the firing got more difficult as the lens focus was set to nearer subjects. This was due to the shutter release guiding a pin which then fires the Compur shutter lever mounted on the lens surround. As the lens

moves further forward when close focussing the play on this linkage becomes greater to the extent that it becomes uncertain if the shutter will actually fire.

The results I got back from processing were – as a result – not all I hoped for. As expected lens sharpness and contrast were excellent from the Schneider optics. Exposure was one to two stops over for a lot of the time and camera shake was very much in evidence due, in part, to a lack of confidence using the shutter release. I suspect that the over exposure is due to the shutter speed ratings being out but, since the shutter timing mechanism – the Compur itself – seems to operate perfectly, I feel that a repair is not warranted. For future tests the use of faster speeds and careful operating of the shutter release should produce a higher rate of good pictures.”



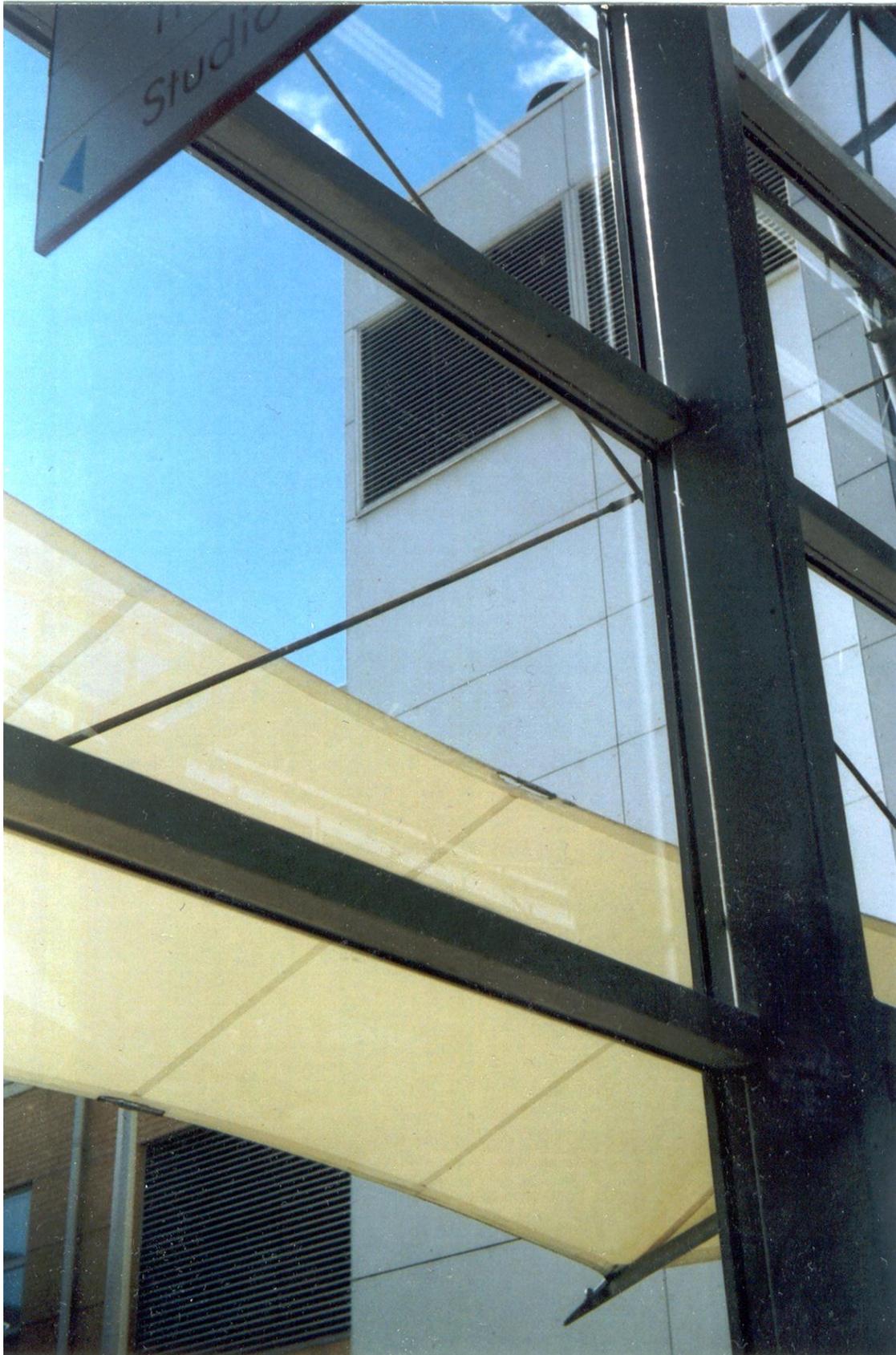
Rails at Northwick Park Station, Harrow, Middlesex. Ilford Sportsman 35mm camera.



Performance Courtyard at Harrow Campus of the University of Westminster. July 2006. Ilford Sportsman 35mm camera (1959).

“Picked up for about £10 the Sportsman was a popular model of ‘go anywhere’ medium quality 35mm camera of its time (late ‘50s) – in Britain at least. Ilford, as with Kodak, relied on German precision manufacturing capability, design and optical performance. Dacora built these cameras which were marketed in Britain under Ilford’s badge.

The camera is an attractive shape with a simple and clear central viewfinder and sits comfortably in the hand with the front panel shutter release in a naturally accessible position. After setting the fiddly shutter, focus and aperture settings on the lens surround, actual shooting feels easy and confident.”



Detail of Window, Harrow Campus, University of Westminster. Ilford Sportsman 35mm Camera

“Unfortunately, despite the seductively easy practical operation of the camera, the shutter failed to fire intermittently. About 8 to 9 frames on a 24 exposure film failed to expose due no doubt to some age related sluggishness in the leaf shutter. Still it was possible to obtain some excellent views around the Campus at Harrow with the slightly soft lens exhibiting a manageable response to flare and reflections.”



The Ilford Sportsman 35mm Camera



Steam Traction Engine and Owner, Prestwood Steam Rally, July 2006. Aires 35Y 35mm Rangefinder Camera with 35mm Wide Angle Lens (c.1965).

“In a car boot sale, in a leather fitted case was a 35mm rangefinder camera of a make – obviously Japanese – that I had not heard of before: Aires. What caught my attention was that it was a system camera with three interchangeable lenses. Not many of these, based on a Compur rather than a focal plane shutter configuration, have been developed and this one looked complete. I was later told by a dealer that it was very similar to a Nikon design.

Apart from some black fabric missing off the body it looked in excellent condition. The stall holder wanted £35 for it but I realised that the shutter was jammed. So I offered £10. He laughed and said he could sell the lenses separately for more than that. I pointed out that the complex bayonet lens fitting was unique so he had no hope of doing so. We settled on £15. A bargain, I thought, if I could get the shutter working. I couldn't and a complete repair cost me £85. However the repairer also replaced the missing body fabric and the returned camera was as good as new.



Aires 35Y camera and interchangeable lenses.

Simple the camera isn't. It is fully precision engineered with optics at the leading edge of their specification for the time. The common Compur shutter is built into the body just behind the lens throat. In order to accommodate this the bayonet lens fitting was extremely complex. The viewfinder had 3 frames for the lenses

marked in it and the body sported a coupled split image rangefinder and Selenium cell exposure meter. In use the camera operates fine although, particularly with the long lens and lens hoods, part of the picture in the viewfinder is blocked. As expected changing lenses takes time and requires either extra hands or a flat surface to work on.

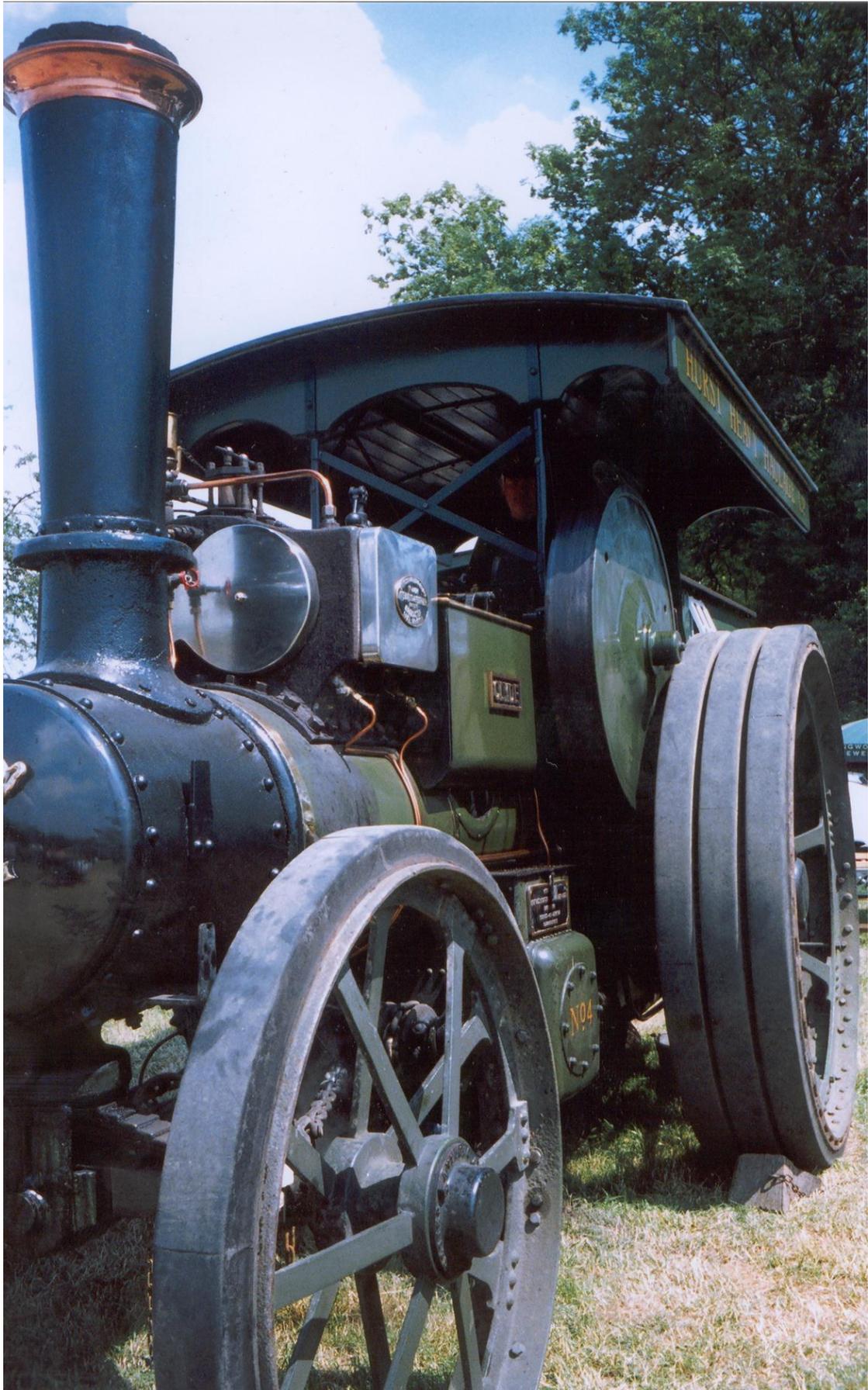
The results are fine with some flare occurring from the multi element optics. Contrast and sharpness are generally good though for all 3 lenses.”



Steam Organ Detail at Prestwood Steam Rally July 2006. Aires 35Y 35mm Rangefinder Camera with 45mm Standard Lens.



Steam Driven Merry-Go-Round, Prestwood Steam Rally, July 2006. Aires 35Y 35mm Rangefinder Camera with 100mm Tele Lens.



Steam traction Engine at Prestwood Steam Rally, July 2006. Aires 35Y 35mm Rangefinder Camera with 35mm Wide Angle Lens.



Northwick Park Hospital Furnace Chimneys. Northwick Park, Middlesex. September 2006. Voigtlander Vito BL 35mm camera 1960.

“The German company Voigtlander is the oldest manufacturer of cameras in the world and is still manufacturing to date. Their post war 35mm cameras were of excellent quality and precision, having to be since they were in competition not only with Leitz and Zeiss but with the West German manufactured precision cameras of Kodak – the Retinas.

This small Vito BL of around 1960 is a beautifully weighted and balanced eye level camera of chrome and black finish with a built in selenium celled exposure meter and, as can be seen from these two photographs of Northwick Park, an excellent 50mm Colour Skopar lens with good sharpness and astonishing contrast. Incidentally this particular view is now no longer available as one of the incinerator chimneys has since been demolished.

Peculiarities of the camera design concern a descending frame counter which is recessed into the front panel of the camera just above the lens and, from the front view, reads upside down. It reads the correct way if the camera is tilted back towards the user when worn with a strap. The counter is unusually set from underneath the camera which also has a folding door which releases the back plate for loading a film cassette.



The Voigtlander Vito BL 35mm Camera



Harrow Campus Halls of Residence, September 2006. Voigtlander Vito BL 35mm camera 1960.

Minor faults with this example concern a bit of play on the front lens element focussing (not significant in practice) and the non working exposure meter. I used a Weston V meter to estimate exposure – as with most of the camera testing - and found

the scale focussing to be accurate for close-up shots that I tried as well as for distance focus.

As with many 35mm cameras of the late '50s and early '60s the setting of shutter speeds, aperture and focus round a crowded lens barrel is awkward and made unnecessarily complicated through the use of the EV system. Once these have been pre-set however, the lever film wind, positive shutter release and excellent viewfinder make this a very easy camera to use with confidence. Further use of this camera should prove very worthwhile."



Three Girls. c.1970 Photograph probably taken by F Bride, Scartho, Grimsby, Lincs. Agilux Agifold 120 / 620 folding bellows camera (1951).

"Aeronautical and General Instruments (AGI) was a British company founded in 1936 and, during the war years, made aerial reconnaissance and other optical instrumentation for the war effort. After the war they continued making high quality precision cameras for the British market under the label Agilux. There are many Zeiss and Agfa medium format cameras of the horizontal eye level folding bellows configuration of the post war vintage in existence and I have some in my collection. John Steward exhibited an Agifold camera for the exhibition and I was impressed with its build quality and unique design. When one came up for sale I grabbed it.

By any standards it is an impressive camera being significantly larger than comparable Agfa Isolettes or Zeiss Ikon. This is because it has larger chambers for the housing of either 120 or 620 film rolls since the difference between the two spools

is handled by sprung play on the spool grips inside the chambers. The two formats are interchangeable as I found out inadvertently when I loaded a 120 film in for recent shooting but forgot to change over the previous 620 take-up spool.

The top viewfinder of the Agifold is of prominent chrome finish with a built in non-coupled rangefinder. This is adjusted by a vertical wheel to the side of the viewfinder from which the distance is read off and translated to the front focussing element of the lens. Unfortunately it is inaccurate and after the first two or three shots I abandoned it and set the focus distance by estimation. Above the viewfinder is a slit with an extinction exposure meter built in which is used with the camera away from the eye line. A dial on the right of the camera is used to set film speed and translate the numbers from this meter into an exposure reading. Having no confidence in this device I set my exposures using my trusted Weston V. One frame only proved to be exposed on the roll of 620 film I found in the camera and that is shown above. Despite age related fogging of the film the spontaneity and vitality of this innocent picture shouts across the span of at least 30 years. The name in faded biro inside the camera case read 'F Bride, Scartho, Grimsby, Lincs.'. I telephoned the only remaining Mr Bride in Scartho and he confirmed that the camera would have been owned by his uncle, now unfortunately dead, who was a local chemist and keen amateur photographer. The three girls in the picture however were not relatives."



Detail of Narrow Boat on Grand Union Canal at Marsworth, Tring. December 2006. Agifold 120 camera.



Reeds on edge of Marsworth Reservoir, Tring. December 2006. Agifold 120 camera.

“Out and about the basic design of the Agifold seems relatively conducive to productive picture taking. Up at Marsworth Reservoir the weak late afternoon December sun proved something of a problem however. With a larger format camera I felt that it would be best to use a shutter speed of 1/100th second to avoid camera shake. With the light levels available that only left an aperture of f5.6 for focus and depth of field. Incorporating close and mid distance items in a landscape picture was thus problematic, given the reduced depth of field available for larger film formats.

Whilst the picture above benefits from the low slanting sunlight which defines the nearer reeds they do not match the mid distance reeds at the selected focus point. I still like the picture however.”



Fisherman at Dusk, Marsworth Reservoir, Tring. December 2006. Agifold 120 Camera.

“Annoyingly in the picture above the fisherman are out of focus as a result of my following the Agifold’s rangefinder setting. I have decided to include the picture however because of its strong composition. The distant electric cables traversing the sky in the frame give depth and draw the viewpoint towards the horizon.”



The Agifold Dual format 120 / 620 Rangefinder Camera



Dinghy Racing at Nene Valley Park, Peterborough. 26th August 2006. Olympus Pen EE2 35mm ½ frame camera.

“When I mounted the original camera exhibition one lecturer submitted a superb ½ frame camera – the Pen FT made by Olympus – one of the few manufacturers to support the ½ frame 35mm concept. With a reflex through the lens viewfinder built flush into the body of the camera and interchangeable objective lenses the camera looks and handles like an absolute dream. I was immensely jealous of the owner and resolved to try and get an Olympus ½ frame of my own if one showed up.

In Leominster later in the year I came across a Pen EE2 for £20. This particular Olympus example was not a sophisticated SLR like the FT but a direct vision viewfinder camera of diminutive proportions clearly based on the same basic design as the legendary Trip 35. In beautiful condition with a chrome and grey finish and the characteristic lenticular selenium exposure metering cell surrounding the lens the camera looks and feels like a piece of jewellery.



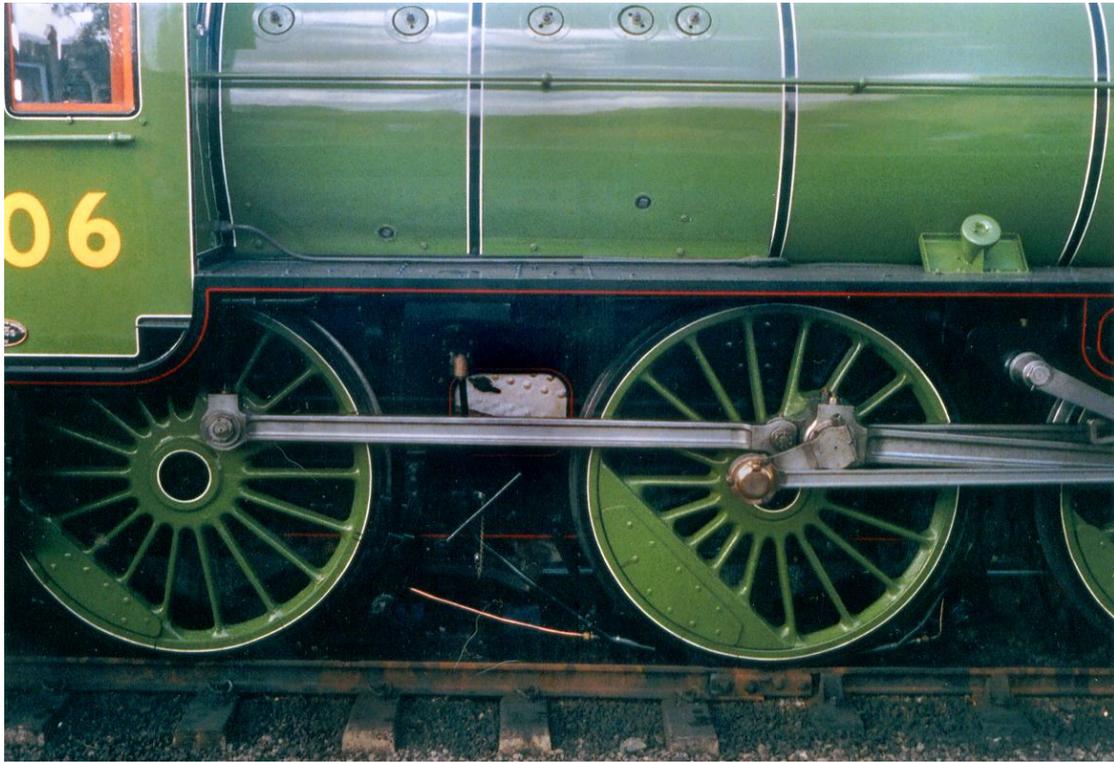
The Olympus Pen EE2 Half Frame 35mm Camera

With fixed focus lens and fully auto shutter and aperture I thought it an ideal camera to take on a short summer break to Peterborough, where I didn't want to be slowed down by having to set a manual camera.

And so it proved. Point and shoot photography was a relaxing change from the focus and exposure adjustment hassles of other camera tests. With 72 shots to a film I didn't have to worry about carrying extra film either."



*Volunteer Train Driver, Nene Valley Steam Railway, Peterborough, August 2006.
Olympus Pen EE2 1/2 frame 35mm camera.*



Train Detail, Nene Valley Railway, Peterborough, August 2006. Olympus Pen EE2 1/2 frame 35mm Camera.



Turntable, Nene Valley Railway, Peterborough, August 2006. Olympus Pen EE2 1/2 frame 35mm camera.

“With 1/2 frame format cameras 2 exposures are taken in the space on the film normally occupied by a single full 35mm frame. Processing labs are not geared to processing the pictures individually and I banked on my usual lab producing good quality double pictures size 6 x 9 inches from the pairs of frames. This worked fine unless there were significant exposure variations between adjacent frames. Luckily the lab was prepared to select these cases and produce two sets of prints for the varying frames.”



Train Detail, Nene Valley Railway, Peterborough. August 2006. Olympus Pen EE2 1/2 frame 35mm camera.



Shops, Amersham Old Town, Bucks. Zeiss Ikon Baby Box Tengor 127 format ½ frame camera. February 2007.

“Baby is the word for the somewhat over-named Zeiss Ikon Baby Box Tengor. A small vertical profile metal box camera from 1930 it is well engineered and a surprisingly handsome camera from the famous German Zeiss factory. For it’s age the front lens appears free from blemishes and patina, surrounded in the design by a strong protective circular metal flange.

Two red frame viewing windows on the back panel identify the camera as a half frame model. Pictures taken by a full-frame 127 format roll film camera such as the Kodak No.0 Brownie give eight pictures 6 ½ cm x 4cm – the roll width. The ½ frame Box Tengor uses the full roll width but divides the lengthways dimension by over half giving 16 pictures 4 x 3cm on the same film. Since the film’s paper backing was only ever marked up for the eight frames 2 windows allow each frame number to be positioned twice for the doubled frames.



The Zeiss Ikon Baby Box Tengor

The camera has a sports type wire frame viewfinder which is recessed into the body for storage. In this position it disables the shutter release preventing accidental exposures – an advanced and sophisticated feature for a camera of this age and

configuration. The shutter release and mechanics of the camera are in good basic order despite the camera's age although the weak hinged spring on the flip-up sports finder eyepiece has broken making accurate view-finding difficult. As a result the framing of the pictures featured here was a little hit and miss."



Graveyard, St Mary's Church, Amersham Old Town, Bucks. Zeiss Ikon Baby Box Tengor 127 format 1/2 frame camera. February 2007.

"Close examination of the shutter operation revealed a very slight secondary exposure on the shutter release return so, when using the camera, I covered the front before releasing the lever. Unfortunately the rear two frame viewing windows let in a little light if I let the daylight rest on the back of the camera for too long. Luckily this has not affected many exposures, and not the ones I have chosen to show.

Being so small the camera went largely un-noticed as I wandered around Amersham and I took advantage of this in some further pictures I shot in Chesham.”



Old Market Building, Amersham Old Town, Bucks. Zeiss Ikon Baby Box Tengor 127 format 1/2 frame roll film camera. February 2007



Sun Houses, Amersham, Bucks. Zeiss Ikon Baby Box Tengor 127 format 1/2 frame roll film camera. February 2007.



High Street, Chesham, Buckinghamshire. April 2007. Zeiss Ikon Baby Box Tengor 127 format 1/2 frame camera.



Street Houses, Chesham, Buckinghamshire. April 2007. Zeiss Ikon Baby Box Tengor 127 format 1/2 frame camera.



High Street, Chesham, Buckinghamshire. April 2007. Zeiss Ikon Baby Box Tengor 127 format 1/2 frame camera.

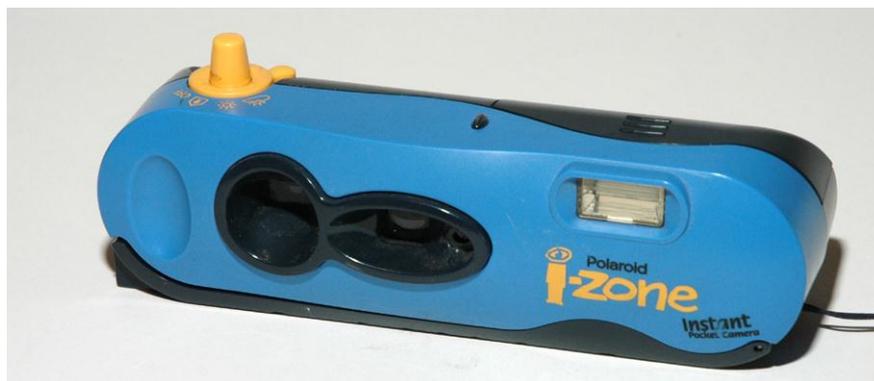


Boats and Decking at Bury Lake, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. June 2007. Polaroid Izone Instant Camera. (original picture size: 38mm x 23mm)

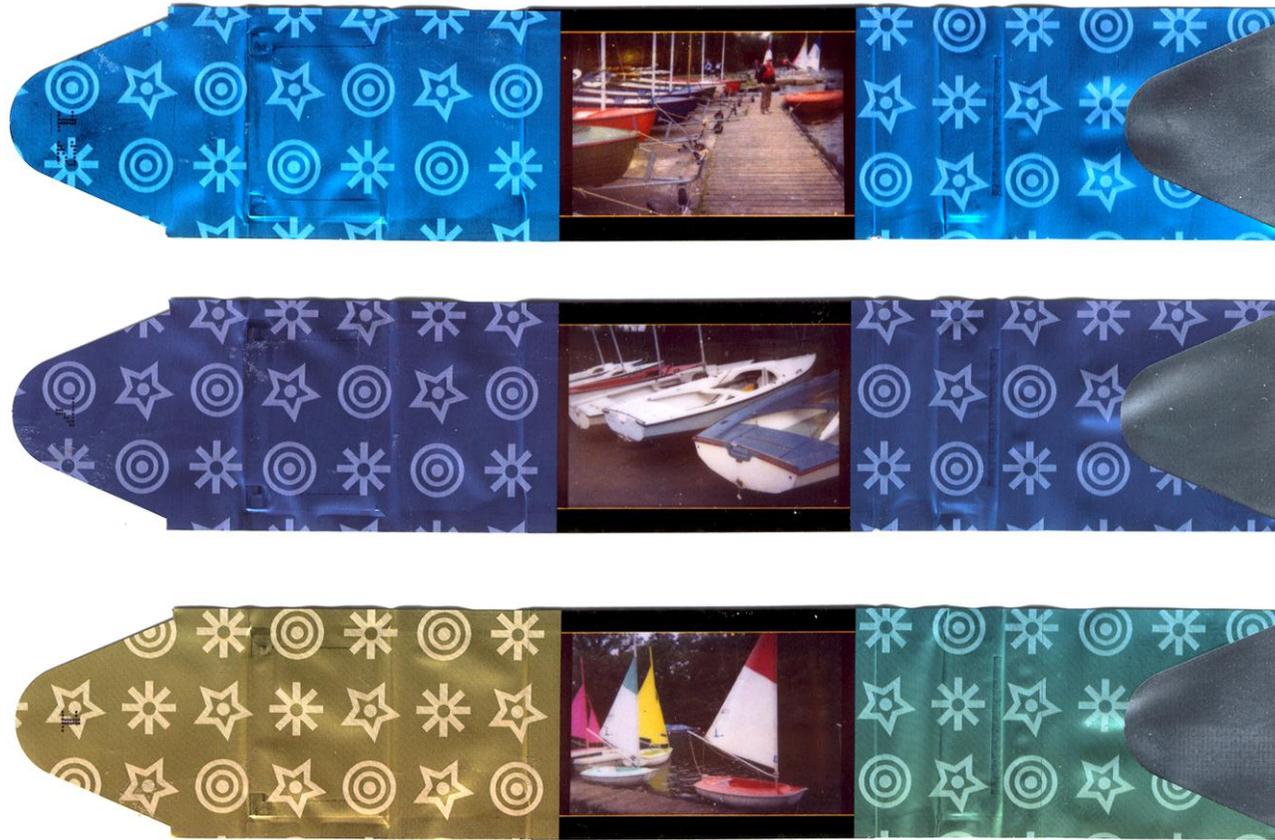


Sailing Boats at Bury Lake, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, June 2007. Polaroid Izone Instant Camera (picture size: 38mm x 23mm)

“In 1976 Nick Roeg directed a science fiction film starring David Bowie called ‘The Man Who Fell To Earth’. The plot of the film concerns an Alien (Bowie) who is sent to Earth from his home planet to build spaceships to ferry the remaining survivors of his race to Earth for its water – their home planet suffering from drought. To finance the enterprise he needs to make a great deal of money on Earth and to this end his home planet furnishes him with examples of their more advanced technology with which he can file patents.



The Polaroid Izone Camera producing direct miniature prints.



Examples at actual size of the Instant Photographs complete with their decorous carriage tapes as they are drawn from the Izone camera and, after about two minutes processing time. June 2007.

One of the most impressive of the inventions that Dave Bowie demonstrates in the film is what appears to be a conventional 35mm camera and cassette film but, immediately after exposure, the fully processed print film is drawn direct from the camera cassette. Pure science fiction obviously. It could never happen.



*'Pico' Sailing Hulls in Storage, Bury lake, Rickmansworth, Herts.
June 2007. Polaroid Izone Instant Picture Camera (original picture
size: 23mm x 38mm)*

Well, of course, The Land Corporation – Polaroid – had already made it happen, in a manner of speaking with firstly their peel-off black and white and colour print films, and then from 1970 their encapsulated colour print film which did not need to be timed for processing, or have a removable layer.

But conventional size prints required large bulky cameras to produce these with direct optics. So Polaroid cameras throughout the remainder of the 20th Century remained larger and bulkier than the compact cameras being developed for the APS film format (Kodak) and ultimately for digital cameras.

With the threat of digital technology looming Polaroid cultivated a niche market – the party scene – a traditional environment for using instant cameras – where a compact pocket camera producing tiny prints that could be made into lockets, key ring fobs and the like, would be a successful novelty.



'Wayfairer' Class Dinghies at Bury Lake, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. June 2007. Polaroid Izone Instant Picture camera (print size: 23mm x 37mm).

The 'Izone' camera itself is an all plastic long camera the size and shape of a small pencil case in a fetching colour combination of blue, yellow and black. With built in flash and a prominent shutter release which incorporates the flash, high and low ambient light settings, the camera is easy to use. The 12 exposure print pack comes in a container literally the size of a matchbox and loads easily. Pulling the leader strip out from the camera loads the first frame. The only minor annoyance in use was the shutter release which was designed to return to lock after each shot – presumably to prompt the user to pull out their print before taking more shots.

That any picture at all emerges from such a tiny camera is remarkable and critical evaluation of the resulting prints indicates that the subject brightness range that can adequately be reproduced is limited. Highlights easily burn out and shadow areas quickly descend into a murky deep puce that passes for the print's maximum black.

Having said that the results are still not bad and after expanding the print range after scanning on a computer the colour reproduction emerges as accurate with good saturation. Remembering that this is a print the size of a 35mm negative, and not a negative itself, it becomes too much to expect that definition will hold once the prints are enlarged to fill a page. Even so a significant amount of detail is evident.”



Dinghy Sails in Storage, Bury Lake, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, June 2007. Polaroid Izone Instant camera. (print size: 23mm x 37mm).



An Access Class Sailing Dingy being prepared for sailing. Bury lake, Rickmansworth. Kodak 126 Instamatic 50 camera.

“Just about anywhere in the country I should imagine you could go to a Sunday car boot sale and pick your choice of Instamatic cameras ranging in price from 50p up to £1.

This immaculate Instamatic 50 in a fitted leatherette case cost me 50p. It is an early example of the 126 Instamatic format that Kodak introduced from 1963, revolutionising amateur photography by introducing a drop-in film cartridge that did not need threading or rewinding prior to removal. At a stroke even the clumsiest of users could successfully and quickly load a film into their camera and start shooting. The cameras that Kodak produced to support this format were generally very simple in design with the minimum of controls. The type 50 is no exception having no other settings than a shutter speed switch for bright or cloudy weather conditions, a wind on lever and a shutter release. The top of the camera sports the first type of flash coupling that was used before the rotating flashcube was developed a few years later.

In use the camera is obviously very straightforward. The only unnerving aspect is the fierce shutter release panel. I was wary of camera movement affecting image sharpness but in the event all the pictures turned out shake free – even the one I shot direct from a boat.



An Access Class Dinghy under sail, Bury Lake, Rickmansworth. June 2007. Kodak 126 Instamatic 50 Camera.

When anyone saw me with the camera there were exclamations of recognition and a story or two about the times when they had owned one. In the 70s they were perhaps as ubiquitous as the box brownie had been 30 years earlier. The difference being that the stories about them come from the people who had them rather than people who remember their parents or grandparents using them. Films are no longer available in the 126 format except from a specialist supplier on the web.



The Kodak instamatic 50 126 Cartridge Camera



View of Bury Lake from an Access Class Dingy on the water. Rickmansworth. June 2007. Kodak 126 Instamatic 50 camera.



Armillary in the Juliet Dye Reading Courtyard, Queens Building, Harrow Campus of the University of Westminster. June 2007. Kodak 126 format Instamatic 50 camera.



Detail of Juliet Dye Reading Courtyard, Queens Building, Harrow Campus of the University of Westminster. June 2007. Kodak 126 format Instamatic 50 camera.

The lens on the Instamatic 50 camera – as with most instamatics – is a simple focus free one of about f11 and about 45mm giving a slightly wider than normal view on a film format sitting between 35mm and 127 in size. As such it places most of the field in focus from about 8ft to infinity. The lens has developed a slight patina with age making it flare slightly in against-the-light shots but in most circumstances – as can be seen from the variety of these pictures – it performs very well rendering foreground and distance elements of the subject in excellent detail.”



Air Conditioning Vent and Architectural detail of the Juliet Dye Reading Courtyard, Queens Building, Harrow Campus of The University of Westminster. June 2007. Kodak 126 format Instamatic 50 camera.



Chesham High St., Buckinghamshire, March 2007. Topcon RE2 Single Lens Reflex 35mm Camera with 135mm f3.5 lens and 2x converter (270mm).

“I had picked up the Topcon when purchasing some cine equipment locally. Not immediately interested in the camera, and realising the shutter was jammed, I offered £25 for the camera with its 3 lenses and x2 teleconverter. Luckily I was able to get the shutter freed by a local camera repairer and as a result thought about running a film or two through it.

From 1965 the Topcon is an extremely well built and heavy duty SLR from an independent Japanese manufacturer – no longer producing cameras although the name is still present on scientific instrumentation.. A bulky squared off camera it has a ‘quality-plus’ feel to its manufacture and represents the higher end of the Japanese camera industry that, in its early days, was competing head-on with established German manufacturers. The camera body itself had some wear evident on the pentaprism housing and the slow speeds below 1/60th on the front body mounted dial had become disengaged. Also the 35mm wide angle lens in the kit had faulty focussing and aperture operation. Using this camera with its longer focus optics none of the above faults mattered. These shots were at high shutter speed with the 135mm lens combined with the x2 converter giving a working focal length of 270mm.



‘The Backs’ car park in Chesham, Buckinghamshire, March 2007. Topcon RE2 Single Lens Reflex 35mm Camera with 135mm lens and 2x converter (270mm).

I had not done much photography with telephoto optics and I found working with this choice of lens gave me conflicting feelings of distance and divorce from the subjects, and at the same time a sense of liberation and editorial control of the visual scenes and occurrences that sprung repeatedly into the viewfinder. Telephoto optics are, by definition, excellent at defining differential focus and I have taken advantage of the fact in the hanging basket shot.”



The Topcon RE2 SLR 35mm Camera with additional lenses.



Chesham High Street, Buckinghamshire. March 2007. Topcon RE2 35mm Single Lens Reflex camera with 135mm lens with x2 converter (270mm).



Chesham High Street, Buckinghamshire. March 2007. Topcon RE2 35mm Single Lens Reflex camera with 135mm lens with x2 converter (270mm).



Serpent Sculpture at Llandrindodd Lake, Powys, Wales. April 2007. Contax II 35mm Rangefinder camera with 50mm Tessar lens.

“The first set of pictures I shot on the Contax camera were impressive enough with the Tessar lens exhibiting superb resolution and contrast right from the start. I had hopes however of getting the camera repaired and having had it returned by one engineer who knew a problem when he saw it, I tried it with Axco in Finchley.

Undaunted the repair man took it in with relish, waxing nostalgic about the days when he repaired them in quantity. The repair and service rendered the camera virtually as good as new with the lens rim dent removed to the point of complete invisibility and a shutter sounding as sweet as the day it left the factory in Germany. An expensive repair – yes – but worth every penny.



Elan Valley Reservoir, Powys, Wales. April 2007. Contax II 35mm Camera.



Elan Valley, Powys, Wales. April 2007. Contax II 35mm Rangefinder camera with 50mm Carl Zeiss Tessar Lens.



Headstone Park, Harrow, Middlesex. March 2007. Contax II 35mm Rangefinder camera with 50mm Tessar Lens.

Having worked out the film loading and frame counter I ran off three more films on it over the next month, gradually getting used to the unusual shutter setting and focus controls. The pictures of Headstone Park and Manor were expertly printed courtesy of the Metropolitan Police who decided to impound the camera – but that’s another story.



Headstone Manor – Rear View, Headstone Park, Harrow, Middlesex. March 2007. Contax II 35mm Camera. 50mm Lens.



Parkland at Llandrindodd Lake, Powys, Wales. April 2007. Contax II 35mm Rangefinder Camera with 50mm Zeiss Tessar Lens.



Llanarchaeron House Home Farm, Aberaeron, Ceridigion, Wales. Contax II 35mm Rangefinder Camera with 50mm Zeiss Tessar lens.



Display of Reclaimed Fenders at Caravan Park, Rhosilli, Gower Peninsula, Wales. Voigtlander Bessa T 35mm rangefinder camera. April 2007.

“I cannot pretend that the Voigtlander Bessa T rangefinder camera, with its superb 35mm Color Skopar interchangeable lens and dedicated viewfinder, is anything other than a brand new camera – a £300 indulgence at the local camera shop that I could not resist – definitely not a vintage model.

The reason why I bought it, and have decided to finish this volume with recent pictures from it, is because the camera is perhaps the last in the line of precision mechanical film-based 35mm rangefinder cameras that will ever be produced. As such it is a direct descendant of the Leica Cameras produced from 1931. I believe that Leitz are still producing such cameras – to bespoke order if not in production runs but every other camera company – if they are still in business – have gone totally digital.

Well – a modern top range Leica is out of my budget range but this Voigtlander I could just afford if not actually justify. The camera is silver and black and – despite bearing the Voigtlander name is actually produced for the company by the Japanese Cosina factory.



The Voigtlander Bessa T 35mm Rangefinder Camera.



Worm's Head Footpath, Rhosilli, Gower Peninsula, Wales. April 2007. Voigtländer Bessa T 35mm Rangefinder Camera with 35mm f3.5 Skopar lens.

The build quality is faultless with a beautifully operating vertical run focal plane shutter. A 2 inch coupled rangefinder is built into the body but there is no viewfinder. Viewfinders are purchased with individual lenses and fitted onto the accessory shoe, standing proud of the camera body. The lens flange is milled for Leica M series bayonet lenses but accepts an adapter for lenses with the older Leica

Screw mount – which the 35mm Skopar happens to have. Apart from a plastic hinged back the only other concession to technology made in the camera is a very simple and effective through the lens CdS metering system that displays the correct exposure on 3 small LEDs mounted on the camera back.



Rhosilli Beach, Gower, Wales. April 2007. Voigtlander Bessa T 35mm Rangefinder Camera.



Causeway at Worm's Head Peninsula, Rhosilli, Gower, Wales. April 2007. Voigtlander Bessa T 35mm Rangefinder Camera.



Shipwreck, Rhosilli Beach, Gower, Wales. April 2007. Voigtlander Bessa T 35mm Rangefinder Camera.

