

PRAKTICA

PHOTOGRAPHY

1990 No 3

THE JOURNAL FOR PRAKTICA CAMERA OWNERS

CARL ZEISS
JENA



Above: 'Low Tide, St. Ives', 1/125
sec f/16, 50mm Flektogon,
Ektachrome 64 film, Pentacon-Six
photograph by J. W. Booth.

The Pentacon-Six Story (2)

The second in a six-part series of articles by Dr Trevor Allin, tracing the history of the famous Pentacon-Six camera.

THE CHOICE of professionals and demanding amateurs throughout the world for a third of the 20th century, the Pentacon-Six and its predecessor, the Praktisix, have proved their worth from the tropics to the Arctic, and even in outer space.

The Praktisix

The Praktisix was first produced in 1956 by VEB Kameraerwerke Niedersiedlitz, East Germany, from 1959 part of the VEB Kamera- und Kinowerke Dresden, which in turn became part of Kombinat VEB Pentacon in 1968. It owed a lot in general style to the Relex-Korelle, which had first appeared in Dresden 21-years earlier, and to the Meister-Korelle, which had been manufactured in the GDR since 1950.

plus B, with X flash synchronisation. There were interchangeable finder attachments (waist level finder, magnifier, and (non-metering) pentaprism). The lower spool holder at each side swung out on a spring-loaded pivot to facilitate film loading.

The first Praktisix looked essentially the same as the one illustrated in figure 1, except that it did not have the 'pillar' on the top plate against which the film advance lever rests. It was produced in 1956 and 1957, and the camera in the picture appeared first in 1958, continuing in production until 1965.

Lenses & Accessories

There was a choice of three standard lenses available: a 2.8/80mm Jena Tessar (the 'Jena T' lens), a 3.5/80mm Meyer Primotar E, and a 2.8/80mm Jena Biometar (the 'Jena Bm' lens), the original inspiration for the Planar.

The superb portrait and short telephoto 2.8/180mm Zeiss Sonnar, famous since its creation for the Berlin Olympics in 1936, was available from the start, now with a fully-automatic diaphragm, and there were 300 and 400mm pre-set Telemegors from Meyer, to be joined shortly by the 2.8/65mm Carl Zeiss Jena Flektogon wide-angle lens, as well as a pentaprism (non-metering) and manual extension tubes. Soon many other lens manufacturers, among them Astro, Dallmeyer, Kilfitt and Novoflex, were offering lenses in the Praktisix breech-lock bayonet fitting, and auto-extension tubes and bellows were added to the range of accessories.

The 'British Journal of Photography' review of January 4th, 1963 quotes the following prices:

Praktisix with Jena T lens:	£139 10s 0d	(£139.50)
Ever-ready case	£5 19s 6d	(£5.97 ¹ .2p)
Pentaprism	£23 2s 5d	(£23.12)
Extension tubes	£8 11s 9d	(£8.59)



Above: The Praktisix camera as produced from 1958 to 1965. An earlier version manufactured in 1956 and 1957 was nearly identical, lacking only the pillar on the top-plate against which the lever wind rests. (Photograph courtesy of VEB Pentacon, Dresden.)

Totally unlike the vertical box shape of most medium-format cameras, the Korelle models and the Praktisix transported the film horizontally and were more reminiscent of 35mm single-lens reflex cameras. (The world's first 35mm single lens reflex camera, the Kine-Exakta, had of course been manufactured in Dresden in 1936.) The 'British Journal of Photography' review of December 10th, 1965 said: '... most users would find the Praktisix the quickest in action of all 6 x 6 SLRs, handling in this respect very similarly to a 35mm camera'.

The Praktisix was a medium format single lens reflex camera delivering 12 2/4 square (6x6cm) negatives on 120 rollfilm, with a horizontal-travel rubberised cloth focal plane shutter speeded from 1 second to 1/1000,

Right: The original (1964) version of the Praktisix II, along with the Praktikamat, featured on a GDR special issue stamp for the 1965 Spring Fair at Leipzig.



Here are the 'vital statistics' for all the lenses produced in East Germany for the Praktisix and the Pentacon-Six:

modification of the film loading system which re-introduced the 'feet' on the base of the camera which can be locked out by pulling and twisting to facilitate

Lens Name	Max aperture & focal length	Type	Angle of view deg.	Focusing range m	Front ring thread for screw-in attachments	Length mm	Weight g
Zeiss Flektogon	f/4/50	FAD	78	0.5-inf	M 86×1	87	480
Zeiss Flektogon	f/2.8/65	FAD	64	0.75-inf	M 86×1	89	480
Zeiss Biometar	f/2.8/80	FAD	54	1.0-inf	M 58×0.75	51	260
Zeiss Biometar	f/2.8/120	FAD	41	1.3-inf	M 67×0.75	87	550
Zeiss Sonnar	f/2.8/180	FAD	24.5	1.7-inf	M 86×1	122	1100
Zeiss Sonnar	f/4/300	FAD	15.5	4.0-inf	M 86×1	224	2070
Pentacon	f/4/300	Pre-set	16	3.6-inf	M 95×1	189	2180
Pentacon	f/5.6/500	Pre-set	10	6.0-inf	M 118×1	370	3500
Zeiss Spiegelobjektiv	f/5.6/1000	Mirror	5	16.0-inf	built-in	512	14000

FAD = fully automatic diaphragm

Carl Zeiss Jena lenses are sometimes marked 'aus Jena'; Pentacon lenses were previously known as 'Meyer Telemegor' lenses. In recent years all these lenses except the 65mm Flektogon and the 1,000mm mirror lens have been produced with multi-coating. An earlier version of the 50mm Flektogon weighed 620g. The latest version of the Zeiss 180mm and 300mm Sonnars incorporate a connector for a special adaptor which transfers the aperture set to the electric metering on Praktica VLC and PLC 35mm cameras, and the 300mm lens has been reduced in length and weight to 204mm and 1550g.

The Praktisix II & IIA

In 1964 the Praktisix II appeared. There were two main differences: the shutter dial clicked into position for each shutter speed, and there were also other improvements to the shutter and film transport. The prices were the same as for the previous model two years earlier. Geoffrey Crawley said in his 'BJ' review of December 10th, 1965: 'The Praktisix is essentially a camera which almost every photographer would wish to use. First and foremost it handles like a somewhat overgrown 35mm camera as regards convenience, ease and rapidity of use.'

In 1965 the Praktisix II was featured on a stamp, along with a Praktica mat, the first European TTL metering SLR. See fig 2.

In 1966 the Praktisix IIA appeared. This incorporated a flash connection lock and some technical design changes not visible to the user. Most obvious was a

insertion and removal of spools. This system, which had last been seen on the Reflex Korelle, was also incorporated in some late production numbers of the Praktisix II in 1965, as can be seen in the photo in fig 3.

It would appear that a version of the Praktisix was announced that would take 220 film, giving 24 6×6cm exposures. However, when this advance came, it was combined with other improvements, and heralded by a new name for the camera.

The Pentacon-Six

1967 saw the arrival of the revised model with the new name Pentacon-Six. It incorporated a modified frame pitch control for 120 and 220 roll film, using a roller with fine serrated teeth to measure film advance, instead of being based on the rotation of the take-up spool. For the first time, the frame counter – now

Below: The later version of the Praktisix II, produced in 1965, showing the pull-and-twist knobs on the base-plate that were part of the re-designed loading system. (Photograph courtesy of VEB Pentacon, Dresden.)



Below: The Pentacon-Six as manufactured between 1967 and 1976. (Camera kindly loaned by Tom Page of Wickford Cameras, London, who are Pentacon-Six repair and service specialists.)





Above: The Pentacon-Six with the non-metering pentaprism. The pentaprism on the short-lived Japanese 'Norita 66' medium format SLR looked very similar to this.



visible under a perspex window – reset itself automatically when the camera back was opened.

The overall appearance was also improved with superior quality silver chrome finish and other styling improvements, including the addition of film type and speed reminder dials set in the shutter-speed knob and the advance lever respectively. A pin in the top plate locked the waist-level finder or magnifier head into place, and a fresnel viewfinder lens was available as an option. This increased viewfinder brightness four-fold (equivalent to two extra stops on the objective lens).

The 'BJ' review of the Pentacon-Six on March 22nd, 1968 says: *'It should be emphasised that the Pentacon-Six is a new camera, and the decision to give it a new name must be accounted entirely valid, although the same die-casting is used. The design has been tightened up; the camera now ranks fully professional in layout and mechanism.'*

The Wallace Heaton 'Blue Book' for 1968-69 lists the

following Pentacon-Six items:

Pentacon Six with		
2.8/80 Biometar	£199 14s 10d	(£199.74)
Ever-ready case	£9 19s 9d	(£9.98)
50mm f/4 Flektogon	£129 3s 9d	(£129.18)
65mm f/2.8 Flektogon	£129 3s 9d	(£129.18)
120mm f/2.8 Biometar	£99 7s 6d	(£99.37½p)
180mm f/2.8 Sonnar	£116 5s 5d	(£116.27)
300mm f/4 Sonnar	£214 13s 0d	(£214.65)

This compared with £266 6s 6d (£266.32½) for a Hasselblad 500C (first introduced 11 years earlier, two years after the first Praktisix) with the standard f/2.8 80mm Planar lens and one back for 120 film. The f/4 50mm Distagon and f/5.6 120mm Planar were listed in the same catalogue at £327 18s 9d (£327.94) each. The Rolleiflex SL66 with f/2.8 80mm Zeiss Planar was £575 1s 0d (£575.05), and the 35mm Minolta SRT-101 was only £20 cheaper than the Pentacon-Six, at £179 19s 6d (£179.97½) with a f/1.4 58mm lens. No wonder the catalogue described the Pentacon-Six as 'Very good value'!

The Pentacon-Six TL

In 1968 VEB Pentacon Dresden launched a TTL metering pentaprism, and the camera was re-named the Pentacon-Six TL. This CdS meter gives centre-weighted readings and works at full or working aperture. The breech-lock ring on the body throat is black, the standard lens is now multi-coated, and there are changes in the cosmetic finish of the focusing and aperture rings, as will be seen in the illustration. All the other Carl Zeiss Jena and Pentacon lenses for the Pentacon Six were similarly upgraded (except for the 65mm Flektogon, which ceased to be produced). One UK review of the 80mm Biometar lens concluded: *'It is doubtful whether any other 2¼ standard lens regardless of price out performs this optic.'*

Continued on page 102

Left: The Pentacon-Six TL, first produced in 1968. (Photograph courtesy of VEB Pentacon, Dresden.) **Below:** My Pentacon-Six really looks quite small, attached to the Carl Zeiss 1000mm mirror lens at the Carl Zeiss museum in Jena. To give a further indication of scale, my wife is holding the standard 80mm Biometar lens in her right hand.



A MAYTIME BOOST . . .

(Continued from page 88)

lighting, and does require some increase in exposure (which an auto camera compensates for) and is one of the most useful and natural items the photographer has to improve his or her pictures.

Most people shoot on colour print film these days, taking advantage of a superb new range of films which give a combination of fine grain, extreme sharpness and strong, accurate colouring unknown a few years back. In a way it does not matter which film you choose – they all give good results. The ISO100 emulsions have the best technical quality and most saturated colours, but this does vary from make to make. Kodak's Gold and Agfa's XRG 100 aim for a strong but neutral quality, whereas Fuji's Super HR100 provides brighter colours (though not as garish as their previous film tended to be). Konica's SRG100 is brighter still, with rather high contrast, but comes closest to matching the brilliance of a colour transparency. A similar result, though with slightly less contrast and a warmer quality, is to be had from Kodak's new Ektar 125. Their evolutionary Ektar 25 (there's a film for a fast standard lens!) combines

amazingly fine grain and extreme sharpness with the utmost colour fidelity and richness. Really one to try.

The ISO200 colour print films all tend to produce prints with less saturated, more subtle colouring and are very good all-rounders. Of the ISO400 emulsions Fuji's HR400 is outstanding, almost matching in every way results from an ISO100 film. Kodak's Ektar 1000 brings a new technical, contrast and colour quality to this enticing speed.

I still gain great satisfaction from taking black-and-white photos and would strongly recommend this medium to anyone. Pentacon Club members need look no further than our 'in house' Orwo films. NP22 gives a superb combination of fine grain, sharpness and strong tonal quality and needs nothing more exotic than ID-11 or Aculux developer to give of its best. For extra speed NP27 (ISO400) is a remarkably fine film. Grain is hardly noticeable in 10 x 8 enlargements, again with excellent sharpness and a most pleasing tonal range, contrast being somewhat lower than that from the slower film.

At their price these films are quite unbeatable so, if you have not tried monochrome before have a go this Maytime – one of the best months in the year for shooting black-and-white.

THE PENTACON-SIX STORY

(Continued from page 95)

In the same year, a slightly modified version of the camera (the Pentacon-Six m) was used in a joint USSR-GDR Manned space mission, with its standard lens and the 50mm Flektogon and 180mm Sonnar. Since then, Pentacon and Praktica cameras have been included in the permanent equipment for Soviet space flights, and thousands of photos have been taken from orbit with them, by cosmonauts from the Soviet Union, France and other nations.

Although imports to the UK ceased in the mid 70s, this camera is still being produced in Dresden, and the Pentacon-Six lives on, as the reliable and cherished tool of professionals and demanding amateurs throughout the world. It has also inspired copies. In the next issue, we shall look at a Russian copy whose lightweight lenses from 30mm to 250mm fit the Pentacon-Six.

The author wishes to acknowledge with thanks the assistance of Stein Falchenberg of Teamwork in the writing of Parts 1 and 2 of this series.

HERE 'n' THERE

(Continued from page 97)

So what happened to those less-obviously colour subjects that unwittingly I shot in mono? For some extraordinary reason, frames deliberately shot for their colourfulness were rendered, in Orwo NP-27, with attractive 3-D effect! An old rickety door hanging precariously in a battered brickwork 'frame' by rusted hinges emerged from the Aculux FX-24 developer almost in stereoscopic sharpness.

Another subject I had imagined captured in glorious colour (!) which the poor Jenaflex AM-1 – willing as it always is – couldn't provide, was the mystery of the Hilton hand. I found a delicious old church (15th C, perpendicular, though preceded by two earlier Saxon and Norman buildings, judging by traces on the site) at Hilton, a hamlet some 10 miles south-west of the Springhead Trust acres. Arrived there, I shuffled myself a few yards up somebody's obliging drive into a semi-cleared piece of ground, overhung by blossom, from beneath which I prepared myself to shoot a splendid colour (yes, honestly this time) picture of the

church on the hill. But car wheels with brakes being vigorously applied brought into view an important Somebody who was very interested to know what I was doing; so persuading me that one shot was enough. I shambled forth I hope with dignity, taking a dive up a convenient cut-through which brought me out not in the church grounds, as I expected, but with my hot breath almost fanning The Sign. Well, that's what I called it. The pointing finger must have had a message for me, I swear. No, I won't swear, on second thoughts. Somebody Up There might hear me.

What a lovely, totally unexpected setpiece to find. No explanation. Just a lost glove pointing me to the skies. Well . . . it makes an intriguing finale!

FAREWELL ERIC

Eric Sykes' *Here and There* feature concludes with this column. He has greatly enjoyed the privilege of compiling it for a number of years, and as long as sight remains, will read every page of this friendly magazine avidly, as he has done for many years!