



THE PRAKTISIX

Geoffrey Crawley

CURIOSLY the rise in popularity of the single-lens-reflex 35 mm camera has not been echoed by a similar rise in the numbers of 6 × 6 cm S.L.R. cameras. Those in current production can be counted on the fingers of two hands, and of these only a few have gained any acceptance into general professional usage. It was probably the introduction of the pentaprism S.L.R. which transformed the 35 mm reflex, and perhaps interchangeability of finders as found on the Praktisix and other modern 6 × 6 cm S.L.R. cameras may readjust the position. The fact remains that for the camera price only of one of the more expensive 6 × 6

plate. The design of the thumb grip is not very imaginative—a milled non-rotating post 7 mm in diameter at the end of the lever—but since the sweep of the wind action is 270° the ordinary thumb shaped lever might not be really suitable. Film loading is done by winding on until the arrows on the 120 backing paper line with a white dot on the side of the gate. The back is then closed. Next a small glossy chromed button, flush with the camera body just under the lever wind, is pushed and the counter zeroes to a red dot. The lever is then given four full sweeps, releasing the shutter each time, and the number 1 will then appear in the counter win-

and also assists greatly the preservation of film flatness. The edges of the pressure plate are grooved in the opposite sense to the studs of the register rails probably to act as air-vents. Thought has obviously been given to the problem of holding the film in register, and from results the means taken seem to be successful. Another feature of the back is the film-speed reminder dial, which is set from the inside of the camera, so there is no possibility of it becoming accidentally displaced.

The mechanism in the camera dark chamber does not protrude and is well blacked against flare except for the flash synchronisation terminal, which is



reflexes one can outfit very fully with 35 mm S.L.R. equipment. For this reason the Praktisix, without being inexpensive, is of particular interest as an economic proposition.

General features

The dimensions of the Praktisix are 165 mm width, 120 mm length lens set to Infinity, and 117 mm in height, its weight with Jena T lens being 1275 gm. (45 oz.). The appearance of the camera is not particularly elegant but it is well balanced. At first sight one has the impression that one of the Praktina or 'tica range of 35 mm cameras has overgrown, and in essence this is true, in that the Praktisix attempts to reproduce the features of the smaller format cameras. In fact the camera handles lightly and easily in a way its appearance may not suggest. The body is finished in a matt fairly coarse-grained silver chrome and covered in coarse grained black material. The camera is, by present-day standards of complication, a simple one—it is a purist's piece of equipment, providing the basic essentials. There is no exposure meter or cross coupling of speeds and apertures or an instant return mirror, for example.

The film transport is by lever wind situated on the right end of the top-

plate which is situated near the hub of the lever-wind. After all twelve shots are gone, an 'E' appears and the film is then wound off in small turns of the wind if preferred to full ones which mean releasing the shutter each time so long as the lever is not allowed to return fully, where it will lock and can only be released by firing the shutter.

The camera back is opened in the usual way by a sliding catch on the left-hand side. When closing the back, it is inadvisable to slam it to as is professional practice with some side-catch cameras. On the Praktisix it is possible for the light tightening flange to become caught if the back is roughly closed. There is naturally no difficulty with normal usage. The film spools are inserted rapidly and without any trouble. The lower spool pivot on both sides of the camera is attached to a spring and this is simply pulled outwards while the spool is pushed home on the top pivot, and then released. The film register rails are rather unusual in that they are not continuous but consist of 10 offset diamond shaped studs top and bottom. In practice the film was found to lie perfectly flat in the Praktisix. The straight run across from spool to spool ensures that there is no kinking in the film when the camera is left for a time,

so far forward that it could hardly be a source of reflections.

The shutter

The Praktisix shutter is a focal-plane type made of rubberised fabric traversing from right to left. It works as close to the film plane as most 35 mm camera focal plane shutters do—3 mm. The shutter speeds are from 1 second to 1/1000th with 'B', and a flash setting, at about 1/20th, they are set by a continuously rotating dial on the left end of the top-plate. This dial is large, 32 mm in diameter and the figures are plainly marked, reading off against a red index arrow on the right. Synchronisation is X type, giving a shutter speed of 1/15th second for short-burning bulbs and 1/15th for long-burning. The flash contacts worked perfectly over a long period of use.

Tests on the shutter of the earlier model of the Praktisix and that of the current model were made after a period of several months' regular use. The figures which are given in the accompanying table are extremely favourable and are reassuring about the performance of the improved shutter.

Reflex screen

The Praktisix is normally fitted with a viewing screen consisting of a rectangular plano-convex condenser ground

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on its flat surface. The condenser gives a bright image to the corners with a less critical eye centring than a fresnel lens, this advantage offsetting the slight field curvature it gives. This screen can be replaced if required by a flat ground glass screen or a screen incorporating a split-image range-finder. The hood for the viewfinder is self-erecting at the touch of a catch on the back, it is a straightforward hood with a large front flap containing the sportsfinder flap. The rear sight for the sportsfinder slides up from the back of the viewfinder hood. A magnifier is also provided, which pulls down from the back of the sportsfinder and in fact must be pulled

As an alternative to waist-level viewing, the viewfinder hood can be removed by pushing it firmly forward and lifting it up, and a pentaprism hood placed in position. This locks on with its own spring-loaded catches, one at each side. The dimensions of the pentaprism eye-level finder in place on the camera are 75 mm length \times 68 mm width \times 52 mm height and the weight is 340 gm, 12 oz. The bulk and weight of the camera are markedly increased when the pentaprism is fitted, and the feel becomes a little top weighted. However, there is no denying the utility of the accessory, and there is less distortion than on some other accessory

able for the Praktisix; 1:2.8/80 mm Jena T, the 1:2.8/80 mm Jena Bm, and the 1:3.5/80 mm Meyer Primotar E. The review model was fitted with the first of these lenses and was inscribed Tessar 2.8/80 mm. However there are certain unusual features about the lens which belie this description. The diaphragm is immediately in front of the fourth, rear, glass of the lens and in fact there seem to be no cemented components. Uncemented four glass triplet derivatives with the diaphragm in this position are of course well known, but no drawing of the construction of this lens seems to be available. At all events the performance is quite excellent. The contrast of the lens seems poised between the brilliance of the modern Tessar and the more medium contrast of some compound lenses. Generalisations are particularly dangerous in this field, and that statement can be easily countered with examples to the contrary; for example the Xenars in the first type and the Takumars in the second.

The 'Tessar' in the Praktisix has a crisp flare-free central field at full aperture, and stopping down to $f/4$ crispens the image noticeably and extends sharpness well towards the edges. At between $f/5.6$ and $f/8$ the field is covered perfectly for all practical purposes, although further stopping down to $f/11$ improves crispness at the corners. There is no fall-off down to $f/22$. The field is sufficiently flat for exacting work and illumination perfect to the corners at $f/4$, for ordinary purposes it is even enough at full aperture. The diameter of the front glass is normal for the focal length—30 mm, and that of the rear glass is 25 mm. The lens can record really microscopic detail, and the writer was able to take enlargements from the central area to 500X linear without break up. Results in colour photography were excellent, giving clean cut images with fine gradation of hues. The overall dimensions of the lens are 77 mm diameter \times 50 mm length set to infinity and 55 mm set to 1 metre and the weight 225 gm, 8 oz.

The Jena T and Jena B lenses are semi-automatic. On winding on, the diaphragm opens to full aperture and then closes as the shutter is released. There are eight leaves to the diaphragm which is tripped by the release of pressure on a small spring-loaded metal stud as the shutter is fired. The actuating movement is exerted by a lever in the camera throat placed at '8 o'clock', not the more usual '6'. Both these lenses have linear click half-stop aperture scales, and a spring-loaded preview lever for assessing depth of field prior to exposure. The wide-angle

TRUE SHUTTER SPEEDS

Nominal Speed		Start of Travel	Centre of Travel	End of Travel
Fractions	Millisecond			
1 sec.	1,000	1005	1010	1009
$\frac{1}{2}$	500	508	512	510
$\frac{1}{3}$	250	246	254	250
$\frac{1}{4}$	125	117	118	128
1-15	66	56	52	60
1-30	33	28	29	30
1-60	16.5	14	14.1	14.5
1-125	8	7	7.1	7.5
1-250	4	3.85	3.84	4.1
1-500	2	1.99	1.99	2.05
1-1,000	1	1.02	1.02	1.08

SHUTTER TESTED AT 20° C

down to allow the latter to be used. The magnifier covers the whole field and naturally the lens can be varied in power to suit individual eyesight. As is usual nowadays, the viewing screen has a safety factor on all sides, in this case about three inches all round at six feet less than the actual filmed area of the subject is shown. The mirror is long and wide and there is a minimum of cut-off with long focus lenses; it flips up on to a felt pad and there is very little shutter and mirror noise considering the size of the components needed in a 6 \times 6 focal-plane S.L.R. Jar at the moment of exposure is also at a minimum for the format; the writer found it particularly helpful to relax the hands at the wrist as the shutter release is depressed to avoid a reaction movement as the mirror flips up. The shutter release, which has a safety lock, is on the right of the camera front angled comfortably to the finger. The release works remarkably sweetly and is quite comparable in this respect to that on many 35 mm cameras. The button is threaded for standard cable release. A lever well down on the front of the camera gives a delay variable from 6 to 12 seconds.

eye-level finders, but the image brightness tends to fall off to the corners. In practice the finder is easy to use in all but very poor light. The shaping and styling have a certain oriental appearance.

The lens flange on the Praktisix, like the tripod bush pedestal, is part of the camera body casting, thus ensuring absolute rigidity and freedom from distortion with weighty lenses. The lens fitting is a triple bayonet type, the lens having a locating stud which slides into a groove on the camera flange. The lens is locked by turning a milled collar on is locked by turning a milled collar the bayonet tabs on the lens mount. Thus there is no rotation and concomitant friction between the locating surfaces. The distance from lens flange to film plane is 75 mm, and the diameter of the throat is 60 mm. This large diameter is particularly useful in allowing the adaptation of a wide variety of lenses and specialised purpose units. The bayonet fitting is extremely simple to make, particularly as the locking collar is on the camera. The distance between the forward lip of the mirror and the lens flange as the former flips past the optical axis is 18 mm, and at the top of its travel 10 mm.

There are three standard lenses avail-

1: 2.8, 65 mm Flektogon for the Praktisix also has this feature. The other standard lens, the Meyer Primotar, has two index marks on a front ring. The red one opens up the lens with the shutter cocked, and the black one, when set to the required diaphragm setting, gives a preview. With this lens the full open diaphragm position is slightly wider in aperture than $f/3.5$ in order to brighten the viewing screen, but the lens shuts down to $f/3.5$ as the shutter is fired. The other interchangeable lenses have manually preset diaphragms. In addition to the Praktisix lenses, the camera lends itself admirably to the Novoflex system as it has a focal plane shutter.

The standard lenses focus down to one metre, and close-up work can be undertaken with a bellows extension unit or extension tubes. Five tubes are available for the Praktisix. The first two, of 9 mm length each, are always used, tube B locks into the camera bayonet fitting and bears a screw thread on its other end; tube A has a male screw thread on one end and has the camera bayonet fitting on the other, to

allow insertion of the lens. In between these two any number of screw threaded tubes can be fitted to give the desired extension, or screw adaptors can readily be made for special set-ups. These latter can also naturally be screwed directly into tube B. The other three rings are of 8, 16 and 32 mm length respectively. One set of the five tubes gives extensions of 18 to 74 mm with a reproduction range of 0.22 to 1.02 and a subject to film plane (not marked on the camera body) distance range of 534–320 mm with the 80 mm lenses, the field covered at these extremes being 267×267 mm and 59×59 mm. In addition a special screw-thread tube Z is available which can be used in conjunction with the others, to trip the automatic diaphragm and shutter through a double cable release. Tube Z is 20 mm long and must be used with tubes A and B, giving a minimum extension of 38 mm.

Although larger than a 35 mm camera the Praktisix handles in the same way: the single stroke lever wind transports the film and cocks the shutter with an easy movement and it was

difficult to realise that roll-film with backing paper was being advanced. The shutter release, so often a jerky item on roll-film reflexes, could hardly be improved upon. The difficulties of making a really efficient roll film focal plane reflex are considerable but the Praktisix seems to have gone far to solve them. It is a fully professional piece of apparatus, and it is a basic camera without frills. Less of a thoroughbred in appearance than its more expensive colleagues, it is very workmanlike and easily adaptable.

The ever-ready case is stout but the over-flap does not detach, which seems a pity from the utility and weight point of view, alteration would be a simple matter. The Praktisix is made by the VEB Kamera- und Kinowerke, Dresden, East Germany, and is distributed in this country by J. J. Silber Ltd., 11 Northburgh Street, London, E.C.1. With Jena T lens it costs £139 10s 0d, the ever-ready case being £5 19s 6d extra. The set of extension tubes costs £8 11s 9d and the pentaprism £23 2s 5d.

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Commercial Photography in Sweden

books, for which purpose there is, adjacent to the studio, large and luxuriously equipped kitchens for the preparation and testing of recipes. The studio also maintains a library of cookery books from all over the world, which now contains over 1,000 volumes. Extracts from the 'England and Scotland' section of a Wezäta publication 'European Cooking' are enlightening:

'There is a general consensus of opinion that British Food is not very exciting and does not carry much weight in the higher realms of gastronomy. This is not so. The British pride themselves on their "glorious beef and mutton, heavenly fish, unbeatable game, and fabulous fruit". . . . The Englishmen's appreciation of cooking is also displayed in the humorous or poetic names of many dishes, such as "Topsy Cake", "Bubble and Squeak", "Petticoat Tails", "Maids of Honour", and many others.'

For so large a studio the Wezäta laboratories are surprisingly modest. Colour transparencies are processed in the studio darkrooms, but there is little black-and-white printing, and processing of colour negatives and colour printing is contracted out to Fargkopian

AB, a processing laboratory in a nearby building, of which Sixten Sandell is also the owner. This laboratory produces about 1,000 colour prints a year for Wezäta and other customers, and includes an Agfacolor school which accepts students in groups of 10, at the rate of 5 groups a year.

The photographers and studios referred to above are those met and seen during an all too brief visit to Sweden. They are some of the best or most important professional photographers in that country, but of course, there are many other Swedish photographers about whom one would like to write. Included amongst these would certainly be the friendly, enthusiastic, international industrial photographer Karl Gullers, whose colour photographs were exhibited in London early in 1962—and reported in the 'B.J.' on 30th March, 1962. There would also be included Kerstin Bernhard, previously a fashion photographer and a photo-journalist, a Past-President of the Stockholm group of the SFF, and now, with two assistants working for her, one of the foremost photographers of foodstuffs, producing colour work which is a joy to behold. There are many other personalities in this corner of European photography, but—time is always at a premium.

A final word about general working conditions. It is never easy to compare

wages and living standards between different countries, so many factors being incomparable, but it seems that the average employment status of the professional photographer in Sweden is about equivalent to that of a good managerial-level typist-secretary. Photographic staff salaries range from about £70 a month earned by a 19-year-old boy, to £290 a month earned by a few top-level senior photographers. Many employed photographers are also paid a mileage of allowance for a car which is sufficient to cover two-thirds the cost of purchase and maintenance. Let it be also noted that there are no 'dark-rooms' in Sweden—only 'photographic laboratories', which seems a much happier term, to me. The Swedes have a high standard of housing, double glazing and central heating being practically universal, and the proportion of the population owning a car is one of the highest in Europe. As far as one can judge the average photographer must work for 27 to 30 hours to buy a new suit of clothes, whereas the average national wage rate requires 52 hours' work. In the higher income brackets it is common practice for a family to live in a town flat during the week and in a 'cottage' on the coast or on one of the archipelago islands, at week-ends. The general standard of living is very high, but the gap between Sweden and this country is rapidly being closed.