

DRESDEN MILESTONES

75 Years of Exakta

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This article is to be read in conjunction with the article in PhotoDeal, and the captions to the pictures there are given at the end.

Seventy-five years ago, in 1933, Ihagee showed the Exakta 4 x 6.5, later known as the Standard Exakta, at the Leipzig Fair. It was the smallest SLR of its day; and this is reason enough to remember this outstanding camera and its many variations.

On 13 May 1912 the Dutch businessman Johan Steenbergen (1886-1967) founded the Industry and Trading Company in Dresden.

Steenbergen was born on 7 December 1886 in the small Dutch town of Meppel to a Dutch draper and a German mother. While still at school, he worked in his parents' business, and at the same time opened his own first business, trading in photographic material and gramophones. With the intention of eventually succeeding to his parents' business he went to the Tailors' School in Dresden in 1908. While there he came into contact with Dresden's already burgeoning photographic trade, and lost interest in textiles. He began work as a trainee Apprentice at H. Ernemann & Co.

In May 1912, at the age of 25, and with financial help from his mother, he founded the Industry and Trading Company, which within a year had become the Ihagee Camera Co. In 1919 the firm was re-incorporated as the Ihagee Camera Factory Steenbergen & Co.

Ihagee sold cameras of various kinds. Outstanding early ones were the Corona and the Neugold, both appearing in 1920. In the field of reflex cameras there were the 4.5 x 6cm Plan Paff Reflex, the company's first SLR, and the similar but somewhat later 6 x 6cm Roll Paff Reflex, built from 1921 to 1930. Well-known also were the Patent Klappreflex of 1924 to 1936, and the Night Reflex of 1929 to 1935 (the latter is treated by Manfred Rehm, *Night Cameras of the 20s*, in *PhotoDeal II/2005*).

The Exakta arrives

On 5 March 1933, 75 years ago, Ihagee showed the Exakta 4 x 6.5, a reflex camera for 127 roll-film, at the Leipzig Spring Fair. It was a massive but compact camera with a trapezoidal shape. It had a 45° mirror and a folding waist-level viewfinder. There was a cloth slit-shutter running horizontally, with a shortest speed of 1/1000 second. Depending on the version, the slowest speed could be as long as 12 seconds. The majority of the interchangeable lenses were supplied by famous names like Zeiss Jena, Schneider Bad Kreuznach and Meyer Görlitz. Ihagee themselves supplied a wide range of accessories including the Vakublitz flash and accessory lenses for microscopes.

The camera was designed by Steenbergen's Chief Engineer, Karl Nüchterlein (1904-1945), who was responsible also for the design of the Kine-Exakta that appeared a few years later. The Exakta and the Kine-Exakta were developed in parallel for some time. Nüchterlein worked on the principle that what was right for the larger camera—the medium-format—would be right also on the smaller one, the Kine-Exakta. It is true that correspondences between, in particular, the slow-speed and time-delay mechanism, controls and flash synchronisation, are unmistakable.

From January 1937 the Exakta became known as the Standard Exakta. This happened first and foremost to avoid confusion at the 1936 Leipzig Fair where the Kine was first shown.

Ihagee took out several patents for the Standard Exakta, in its day the smallest SLR; for example, concerning the Model B:

Reichspatent 634353, 31 Aug 1934: *Slit-shutter camera with time delay*

Reichspatent 627460, 13 Nov 1934: *Ground-glass screen for photographic purposes*

Reichspatent 647226, 31 Aug 1934: *Reflex camera*

Nüchterlein also took out an interesting US patent, No. 99297 of 9 March 1936, on the outward appearance of the Exakta: *Design for a camera*. (A very similar, perhaps identical, Swiss patent No 176059 of 31 March 1935, was described in *Exakta Times* 48, Autumn 2002, page 12.)

The Standard Exakta used the format 4 x 6.5cm, just like the Kodak Vest Pocket camera, whence it also became known as the VP Exakta.

In 1942 Karl Nüchterlein was called up into the German army and was lost in 1945.

Characteristics

Like many other cameras of the time, the VP Exakta was an outstanding piece of work and met professional expectations. It cost about as much as a Leica II. Naturally it possessed many important attributes of its own, such as:

- it was an SLR
- it took 8 exposures on 4 x 6.5cm (127) roll-film
- it had a rubberised cloth shutter with speeds from 1/25sec to 1/1000sec, and B and Z
- depending on the model, the shutter speeds could be extended to 12sec
- again depending on the model, delayed action was available for speeds from 1/1000 to 6 sec
- interchangeable objectives mounted on a thread
- image size on the ground-glass screen about 95% of the image of the film
- folding waist-level viewfinder with magnifying lens
- folding metal mirror in finder, allowing right-way-up viewing in finder
- knob or lever for film transport and cocking the shutter
- trapezoidal body measuring 150 x 65 x 50mm and weighing about 750g
- double-exposure lock
- vacuum flash connection
- many accessories, making it a system camera

Ranges and Models

The different VP Exaktas are classified by the author into four ranges and eight models. Tables at the end of this leaflet give an appropriate overview. According to Clément Aguila and Michel Rouah, *Exakta Collection* (2003), further divisions into Versions may be undertaken, with different numbers of versions according to the Model.

To distinguish Versions by colour for example, most VP Exaktas were lacquered black, and perhaps 20 or 25% were produced in chrome. Other differences concern the presence or otherwise of flash contacts and a security screw thread, details of the film transport mechanism, and the design of the film-window on the back. Older models had a knob for film transport, of varying design, and later ones a lever.

Standard Exakta Model A

The Model A is the original type, made from 1933 to 1939 in six versions altogether. The chief characteristic is that there are no very slow shutter speeds: the speeds provided were 1/25, 1/50, 1/100, 1/200, 1/300, 1/600 and 1/1000 sec, and B and Z. Many lenses from well-known makers were available, with focal lengths from 5.5cm to 36cm. Contacts were provided for the Vakublitz flash.

Standard Exakta Model B

This Model was also built from 1933 to 1939. Basically, for every version of the Model A there was a corresponding version of the Model B. The B, however, provided a wider range of shutter speeds: beyond the range shown above, there were also speeds of 1/10, 1/2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12sec. An additional control knob on the upper surface of the camera handled the new

speeds and the delay functions. The self-timer was functional on all speeds from the shortest up to 6sec.

Night Exakta

The Night Exakta was basically a Model A or a Model B, but the standard lens was replaced by a faster one. In contrast to other VPs, the serial number was not engraved on the focusing ring but on the viewfinder. This was the distinguishing mark of a real Night-Exakta as opposed to a “normal” one from the word go. The appended table shows the various lenses that were available for the Night-Exakta.

Aguila and Rouah recognise six versions of the Night Exakta, which was made from 1934 to 1939.

Exakta Junior

Built from 1934 to 1939, this was a simplified version of the Model A and had no slow speeds. In fact the range of shutter speeds was 1/25, 1/50, 1/100, 1/200, 1/300, 1/400, 1/500, B and Z. The lens was fixed and the focusing was simplified. The engraving on the front plate read “Exakta jr.” The lenses supplied, usually a three-element design, and their makers appear in the table.

Rarely seen is the very first model engraved “Ihagee jr”. Only about 18 are known. No 413580 made 4800 euros at an auction in Vienna in May 2006.

Standard Exakta with plate back

A plate back offered the possibility of using 4 x 6.5cm plates. It was available from 1936 to 1939, in three versions of the Model A and three of the Model B. It is sometimes known as the Model C, which is irritating in so far as it was not a new model; all the versions of the A and B were available with a plate back right to the end.

Optics and Accessories

The so-called “Special” lenses were made by a number of prominent makers: Carl Zeiss Jena, Meyer Görlitz, Schneider Bad Kreuznach, Steinheil, Dallmeyer, Som Berthiot, Ihagee. Wide-angle, standard and telephoto lenses were offered, with focal lengths from 5.5cm to 36cm, together with close-up and telephoto auxiliary lenses. The fast lenses and those for the Junior were also of high quality.

The accessories program was significant for its period. It included:

- Ever-ready case
- Extension tubes for lens
- Universal extension for viewfinder
- Lens-hood
- Oversized knob
- Locating peg for focusing
- Ball-and-socket joint
- various filters
- small tripod
- distance piece for use with microscope
- various flash fittings
- copying frames

Conclusions

Compared to the small-format Exaktas, the VP is much less likely to be found. At fairs and auctions they are only rarely offered. They are more often found by diving into eBay, mostly only Models A and B. As a rule it's a question of a later version with fast rewind lever, finished in

black. Prices range from 150 to 250 euros. Depending on condition, older models can reach 400 euros. The Junior commands between 200 and 400 euros; the Nights between 400 and 800.

It is noticeable that the slit-shutter is often not working and that the camera has therefore not been kept tight. The cloth curtains are not usually light-tight, particularly if they are original. A defective shutter can usually be repaired, so the collector should not refuse to buy, if the camera is externally in reasonable condition.

The Exakta is a milestone in camera history. Between 1933 and 1939 the serial number range of Ihagee cameras in Dresden advanced from 400000 to 600000. The precise number of cameras made cannot now be determined, since Ihagee allocated serial numbers sequentially without regard for the camera type, and precise numbers have been lost. The VP Exakta smoothed the way for the Kine-Exakta, the first miniature-format SLR in the world, to be introduced at Leipzig in 1936. Numbering began at 400000. It developed after the war into the Exakta Varex, which was a real system camera and a symbol of the East German camera industry.

For a long time Ihagee enjoyed a certain independence in East Germany, but on 1 January 1970 it was finally, completely and officially swallowed up by the Kombinat VEB Pentacon.

Acknowledgments

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Ranges, Models and Lenses of the VP Exakta

Range	Model	Features
Standard	A	Without slow speeds
	B	With slow speeds and delay
Night	A	fast lens, without slow speeds
	B	fast lens, with slow speeds and delay
Junior	Ihagee jr	simplified version of Standard A engraved "Ihagee jr"
	Exakta jr	simplified version of Standard A engraved "Exakta jr"
Plate-back	A	plate back and viewing screen without slow speeds
	B	plate back and viewing screen with slow speeds and delay
Lenses		
Night	Meyer	Primoplan 1/9/8cm
	Meyer	Primoplan 1.9/7.5cm
	Schneider	Xenon 2.0/8cm
	Zeiss	Biotar 2.0/8cm
	Dallmeyer	Super-Six 1.9/3inch
Junior	Ihagee	Exaktar Anastigmat 3.5/7cm
	Ihagee	Exaktar Anastigmat 1.9/7.5cm
	Ihagee	Exaktar Anastigmat 3.5/7.5cm
	Ihagee	Exaktar Anastigmat 4.5/7.5cm
	Steinheil	Cassar 2.9/7.5cm
	Boyer	Topaz 3.5/7.5cm

Picture captions

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page 56: *Right upper*: Karl Nüchterlein, the creator of the Kine-Exakta in 1936, born on 14 March 1904, began the development of the first Exakta for the 4 x 6.5 cm format about 1930. His obvious destiny was, according to Richard Hummel's standard work *SLRs from Dresden*, "a small, elegant, single-lens reflex, with which one could do everything." The brilliant engineer was posted missing in April 1945.

Left upper: Exakta Model A, serial number 399986, the rare first version from 1933, with raised wind-on knob and lens locking lever on the right.

Left lower: An Exakta B version 5.2 in the less common chromed finish, produced between 1937 and 1939.

page 57: The interesting advertisement for the Standard Exakta, including pricing information, taken from the *Schaja Photoführer* of 1937.

Below: Exakta advertising from 1934.

page 58 *Upper*: View in the Dresden production facility – Model B with lever having the slow-speed knob mounted; quality control.

Lower: Two drawings from Nüchterlein's patent application of 9 March 1936.

page 59 *Top left*: Camera No. 437668, Model B version 4.1, sold between 1935 and 1938, fitted with Carl Zeiss Jena 2.8/7.5cm Tessar.

Top right: Model A Version 5.1, serial number 489274, built from 1937 to 1939, in the less common chromed finish. The lens is an Ihagee Exaktar 3.5/7.5cm.

Bottom left: "Standard Exakta: the ideal small-format reflex" – a 12-page brochure from 1939. Shown is the Model B version 5.2, fitted with a 2.8/7.5cm Tessar.

Bottom right: Whoever specialises in collecting early Exaktas is faced with a rather large range of models that are at first sight not so easily distinguished – and not so easy to collect in their entirety.

page 60: *Top left*: Night-Exakta B, fitted with the fast Schneider Xenon 2.0/8cm. In contrast to other models the serial number of the Night-Exakta is engraved on the finder.

Top right: Night-Exakta B, this one in chrome finish and with a Meyer Primoplan 1.9/8cm

Lower: Exakta Junior, the simple variant, in black finish, with serial number 490161 and Anastigmat 3.5/7.5cm.

page 61: Title page of an Ihagee brochure in French from 1935