

Jason Schneider On Camera Collecting

Book Two

*A fully illustrated handbook of articles
originally published in MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY.
With Current Prices*

Exakta saga, part 1

The Exakta saga, Part 1. Wherein a humble trapezoidal beast from Dresden becomes the world's first 35mm SLR system.

My detractors, many of whom have the nasty habit of writing me impassioned and articulate letters, are forever accusing me of conniving to inflate used camera prices. Presumably, my prime motivations in this nefarious undertaking are both straightforward (i.e., to increase the value of my own collection and to reward the cohorts who supply me with delectable equipment) and devious (to render good, used cameras as such scarce and sought-after commodities that photographers will be driven into the—shudder—new camera market). My response to such calumnies is the same one offered by reporters and royal messengers down through the millennia—I raise my arms in the air, palms pointed beseechingly upward, and lament, “Please don’t condemn the bearer of bad news. I am only reporting the situation as it exists.”

Now, if you think this is nothing more than a sly cop-out, ponder this. After finally deciding to give in to the sundry pesterings of colleagues, publisher and friends and do “something on Exaktas,” I chuckled to myself, “This is going to be a piece of cake—I’ll just meander down to my usual used-camera haunts and dredge up bunches of these neglected, dust-covered waifs of cameradom.” You can imagine my amazement when the sixth dealer I questioned said precisely the same thing as the previous five: “Old Exaktas? Nothing right now. I get ‘em in from time to time, but they move pretty fast. Funny, though—only a few years ago I wouldn’t even take ‘em in trade. Now they’ve become collectors’ items!” So, feel free to tar me with any brush you like, friends; you can’t honestly blame me for the current “Exakta situation.”

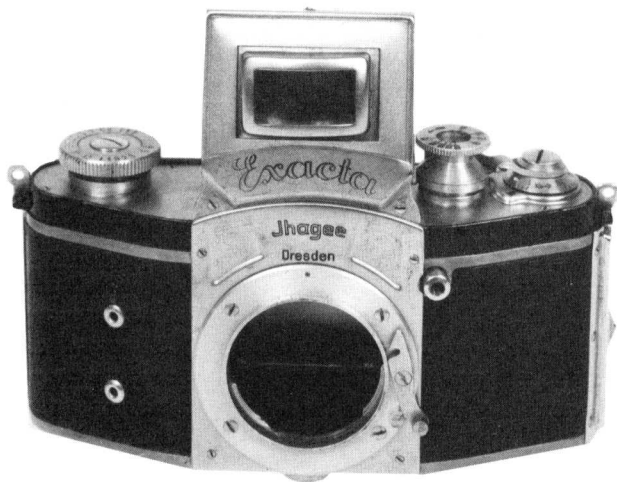
Actually, when you think about it, it’s sort of surprising that “Exaktomania” is such a recent development, since these machines possess all the earmarks of other successful “classics.” First and foremost, all but the last 35mm Exaktas have the look of fine European machinery, with lots of cute little dials with knurled edges, external shutter-release couplings and whatnots, and what must be regarded as a classic trapezoidal body shape accented with (usually) good-quality chrome. They evolved with typical (and excruciating) German slowness over a period of nearly 40 years, mostly by agglomerating seemingly picayune little features onto this basic body shell. And when this sound basic design could no longer accommodate the fea-



The original Exakta 35? Not quite, but this early postwar Exakta I is substantially the same. Flip-down focusing magnifier is at front of focusing hood; plug-in adapter allows use of PC-contact flash. Early, coated 58mm f/2 Biotar provided life-size viewing image. Current value with lens: \$100-125.

tures required in a modern SLR, they finally changed it—most people would say for the worse. In that sense, a 35mm Exakta collection (minus the last two or three models) would resemble a Leica collection or a Zeiss Contax collection (albeit on a somewhat lower level of exterior finish and ultimate mechanical quality), with the strong family resemblance among individual models depicting rational development along systematic lines. Indeed, although the original Kine Exakta of 1936 cannot claim to be the world’s first 35mm SLR (that honor apparently belongs to the Russian Sport of 1935—sorry no portrait), it is most assuredly the progenitor of the world’s first 35mm system.

The first Kine Exakta—so called to differentiate it from earlier roll-film Exaktas produced by the Ihagee Kamerawerk, AG of Dresden—was a very basic, but extremely well-thought-out little machine. (The “Kine” part refers to the cinematic origins of 35mm film.) This is understandable since Ihagee was well known before the war as a manufacturer of high-quality (and always mechanically fascinating) cameras, running the gamut from roll-film folders with unit-focusing lenses to the Vest Pocket Exakta, a very pleasant SLR which made 4.5×6 cm negatives on 127 film. Indeed, the V.P. Exakta, its larger, much rarer



Spelling error? Not really. This early postwar model I sports "Exakta" nameplate also found on some Exakta IIs of same vintage. Finish was usually second-rate; value (body only) about \$70.

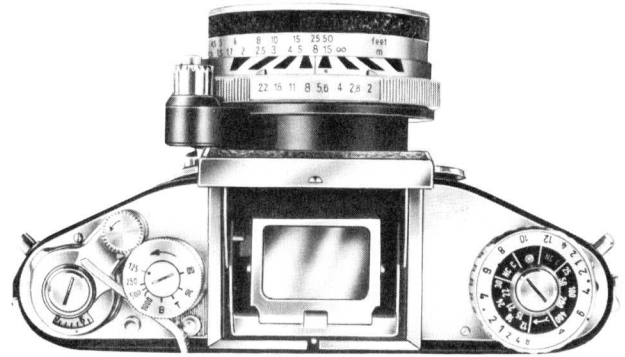
stablemate, the "Square" (6 × 6 cm) Exakta, which used 120 film, and the 35mm version are all cast in the same trapezoidal body mold, and all were fitted with horizontal-motion, cloth focal-plane shutters. Aside from its smaller size, the Kine Exakta differs mainly in having an internal sprocket wheel, a friction-type (non-ratcheted) 36-frame film counter on top, and no red window on the back.

Since a surprising number of features found on this original model "Exakta I" endured until the last trapezoidal-bodied VX 1000 was produced more than 35 years later, let's run down the list. First are the left-handed, long-throw film-advance lever and front-mounted left-hand-operated shutter release, two "controversial" features lifted directly from the earlier V.P. Exakta. The logic of their placement? Well, the front-mounted shutter release did permit the later use of external auto-diaphragm lenses, and besides, any fool knows you're supposed to focus a camera with your right hand, and this leaves your left hand free to wind and shoot! Actually, it's not a bad system once you get used to it, but Exakta wind levers—even the late model "shorter throw" type—can hardly be called *rapid* wind levers. The Exakta, like the Alpa (which also traces its origins to the deep, dark 30's), is designed for a slow, deliberate frame of mind, and speedy operation is not its forte.

Remove the Exakta I's back and you're greeted by a nicely finished interior with cartridge compartment on the right, sprocket wheel and removable take-up spool on the left. At the bottom of each end is a pivoted handle—the right-hand one for rewinding the film, the other to pull a spring-loaded locating pin downward, enabling the take-up spool to be removed. Over the years, the rewind evolved into a knurled knob and finally a folded crank, but the basic bottom layout remained the same, including a heftily mounted tripod socket in the middle, up towards the lens mount. Speaking of the lens mount, this deep,

three-lug bayonet mount, with the external, spring-loaded locking catch, is yet another hallmark of all "classic" Exaktas, and lenses are, with few exceptions, fully interchangeable from first model to last. Before we close the back, we can't fail to mention what is perhaps the most peculiar feature found on all classic Exakta 35s but the VX 500—a film-cutting knife! This unlikely device is basically a shaft with a tiny blade affixed to its top, and it's found on the left side of the film aperture. To cut the film while it's still in the camera, you undo a tiny knurled knob next to the rewind from its threaded shaft and pull the knob downwards, neatly slicing the film perpendicularly to its direction of travel. Who needs such a knife, you ask? Well, it's handy for impoverished scientists who want to quickly develop, say, a half-dozen photomicrographs without running through the entire roll, and if you remove the take-up spool and substitute a special or standard cartridge, you don't even have to unload those six frames in the darkroom.

O.K., let's close the back and direct our attention to the original Exakta's top once again, where the distinctive but clumsy shutter-speed setting controls are located. To the left of the chest-level finder is the "fast" shutter dial, controlling speeds of 1/25-1/1000 sec. plus T and B. In keeping with its era, it's a "lift and turn to set" affair which rotates in a clockwise direction as the exposure is made. The spacing between successive settings is uneven, but at least you can cock the shutter manually for intentional double exposures by rotating the knurled dial counter-clockwise until it clicks in place.



Atop an old Exakta? Nope, but this top view of early-60's VX IIB shows the "classic" layout, with fast and slow shutter-speed dials, long-throw wind lever, manual exposure counter settable by turning knurled knob.

Setting slow shutter speeds and/or using the Exakta's self-timer are a unique experience. You begin by setting the fast shutter dial to T or B, and then direct your attention to the slow-speed control to the right of the chest-level finder. This knurled, lift-and-set dial has 13 numbers in black (1/10 sec. to 12 sec. with no 1/5 sec. setting on the Exakta I, 1/5 sec. to 12 sec. with no 1/10 sec. setting on most other models). To obtain this impressive range of slow speeds, you have to wind the film, thereby cocking the shutter, set the desired speed opposite an index dot, wind the spring-loaded slow shutter control as far as it'll go in a clockwise direction, and press the shutter release—not exactly a convenient procedure. Setting the self-timer is equally amusing, except you set the index mark opposite one of the red digits. These cover a slow speed range down to 6 sec., usable in conjunction with the self-timer, and it matters little which one you use if you want to use the self-timer in conjunction with *fast* shutter speeds—the shutter will still click about 12 sec. later as long as you cock the shutter, set a red number, and wind the slow-speed dial before firing. Yes, as you've probably guessed, this comprehensive but pesky system is found on all classic Exaktas with provision for slow speeds.



How to spot an Exakta II? Best way is to look for Roman II under nameplate. Aside from modern flip-up magnifier with protective front cover, features are almost identical to Exakta I. With black 58mm f/2 Biotar, this one will fetch about \$150.

The time has now come to take a peek through this early 35mm SLR to see what we can see. We'll mount our early postwar 58mm f/2 Carl Zeiss Jena Biotar, set its manual (not pre-set—manual!) aperture ring to f/2 for maximum brightness, press the button on the back of the folded chest-level finder so it springs into viewing position, gaze downwards and—nothing! Forgot to wind the film,

eh? Well, what do you expect—an instant-return mirror? All right, wind the film and there it is—a rather bright viewing image on the screen. How did they do it? Easy. The Exakta is blessed with a good-quality single-surface mirror, and its plain ground-glass focusing screen is surmounted with a big, fat condenser lens which serves the same basic function as the modern Fresnel lens in evening out the illumination. Oh, there's a bit of barrel distortion, but, by and large, it's a surprisingly satisfactory view, even by modern standards.

Of course, with its non-removable chest-level finder, the Exakta I is not ideally suited to following action, since the viewing image is reversed left to right. An even more serious shortcoming is the lack of a modern-type focusing magnifier. There's a 2X focusing magnifier all right (a round one on really early model Is), but to position it, you've got to push in the front part of the erected viewing hood until it clicks into place about 1/8 in. above the condenser lens. So, you can either focus with relative precision on the central part of the viewing image *or* see the entire frame, but not both at once. Indeed, the original directions advise you to compose your shot by gazing at the screen at a distance of 6-8 in. as though it were nothing more than a tiny reflex finder affixed to the front standard of an old folding camera. As if to make up for these shortcomings, the focusing hood incorporates a number of clever tricks—an interlock prevents you from firing the camera unless it's open for viewing; when the magnifier is positioned for "critical focusing," its front and rear sections constitute a non-optical frame-type viewfinder; and the magnifier springs back to normal viewing position at the touch of a cute little button on its rear flap.

Despite its strange combination of fascinating capabilities and curious drawbacks—the original Biotar lens focused down to a blistering 3 ft.—the Exakta I was clearly destined to have a long and profitable future. Perhaps no other camera had as many things going for it, and so many obvious things that needed improvement. And so it came to pass that, after a production run of nearly 10 years (until 1946), in the face of monumental production difficulties resulting from World War II, and the fact that Dresden was on the wrong side of the political railroad tracks (East Germany), Ihagee finally brought forth the Exakta II in 1949. It had a modern-type flip-up finder magnifier with protective cover, a flip-up rewind "button" next to the frame counter instead of a knurled lever, a slightly revised frame counter with a cutout window, and a Roman II under the Exakta nameplate. Don't be disappointed. As we'll see next time, the "big change" took place in 1951, with the Exakta V, which had a removable reflex finder hood replaceable with a pentaprism.

Many thanks to Earl Seymour of Seymour's Camera in Manhattan, Jules Swirdlin of Exakta Camera Co. of Bronxville, N.Y., and Ken Hansen of Ken Hansen Photographic of Manhattan for their generous assistance in the preparation of this column.

Exakta saga, part 2

The Exakta Saga, Part 2. How a simple, unassuming waist-level SLR acquired interchangeable finders and became the darling of the scientific set.

Last time, we bid adieu to the poor, prismless little Exakta II with promises of interchangeable finders to come. But before we tackle the modern Exaktas' ingenious top-mounted accessories, let's say a few words about the incredibly vast assortment of optics that were produced for the trapezoidal beasts from Dresden. Indeed, with the possible exception of the now-waning 42mm screw-thread mount originated by Praktica and nurtured for nearly two decades by Pentax *et al*, it's safe to say that more lenses from a greater assortment of optical houses were offered for the Exakta than for any other 35mm SLR before or since.



Best normal lens for Exakta VX? Hard to say, but 50mm f/1.9 Schneider Xenon shown is certainly one of the most prestigious. This competent combo presently fetches \$150 or so.

How many lenses are we talking about? Well, the Exakta Collectors' Club's list numbers roughly 1400 distinct entries, and the roster of optical firms involved reads like a European "Who's Who in Optical Manufacture." Among German companies alone (in no particular order) are: Steinheil of Munich, Schneider-Kreuznach, Carl Zeiss Jena of East Germany (later ignominiously shortened to "aus Jena" in the U.S. after protracted legal hassles), Enna, Schacht, Kilfitt, Novoflex, and naturally, Meyer (from Gor-

litz, also on the "wrong" side of the political railroad tracks). Of course we mustn't forget Angenieux of Paris, Kern of Switzerland, or the virtually endless list of Japanese manufacturers (including such old friends as Soligor, Vivitar and Tamron to name just a few) who also supplied lenses for the once-very-popular Exakta line. The obvious question in all of this is what about the Ihagee factory, the Exakta's daddy?

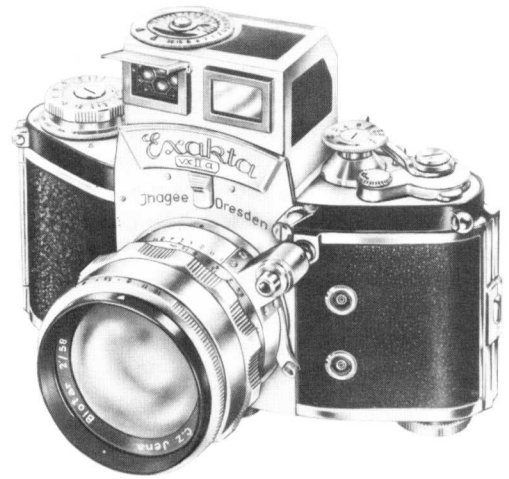
Well, I wouldn't be prepared to go out on a 800mm lens barrel and say that Ihagee never ground a lens. And the company most assuredly labeled lenses for some of its folders and SLRs of the mid-30's "Ihagee Anastigmat."



A scientific setup? You bet! This lucky Exakta VX Ila sports Ihagee's Magnear close-focusing finder and "Cobra" device to couple shutter, auto-diaphragm on lens.

However, Ihagee made damn few, if any, picture-taking lenses for the 35mm Exakta, and even those second-rate normal lenses labeled "Exaktar" were not made at the Exakta factory (some originated in Japan). If you're tempted to berate the company as "parasitic" on that account, don't. Unlike, for example, Plaubel—which produced its fair share of optical "bombs" because its management insisted on making its own lenses, come what may—Ihagee had the good sense to realize that its expertise and excellence lay in the mechanical arena. Besides, given the political climate in postwar East Germany, any enterprise which succeeded in not only producing, but also developing a viable SLR system and successfully selling it on the world market, is deserving of our commendation.

All right, enough optical palaver, let's take a gander at what is probably the most significantly updated Exakta 35 ever—the Exakta V of 1951. Outwardly, this machine is differentiated from Exaktas I and II by having two sets of push-in (*not* PC) flash contacts on either side of the lens, and a cute, striated finder-release button placed in between the “Ihagee” and “Dresden,” just below the Exakta nameplate. Press the button downwards and you can lift off the prism (or waist-level finder) and get a good look at the cleverly simple and secure finder locking system. At first glance, it appears that the spring-loaded bar directly behind the Exakta nameplate holds finders in place by means of a pin emerging from its center, but as it turns out, said pin merely affixes the lock button to the bar. What actually holds the finders in place and in proper alignment are two pivoted arms on the sides of the finder housing, each of which terminates in a protruding triangular “ear.” Insert a finder and press it downwards and each of these ears engages a pin on each side of the body of the finder, locking it in place with an audible click.



But surely this VX Ila is meterized? Well, sort of. Its genuine Ihagee “meter prism” sports an uncoupled selenium meter and auxiliary optical finder. Price with 58mm f/2 C.Z. Jena Biotar, about \$125.

sonably bright even by modern standards, focusing was quick and precise, and with a right-side-up, laterally unreversed viewing image, you could actually follow moving subjects and photograph them at the same time! Think I'm losing my marbles? Well, folks, you've got to remember that this is back in 1951 and the only other camera capable of performing such shenanigans was the Contax SLR, which was often hard to find and sold for 475 bananas.

Actually, the Exakta V, for all its sophistication, is a rather rare bird, since it was manufactured for only about a year. Hot on its heels was the much more common Exakta VX, which sprouted such startling improvements as a film-transport warning signal (a series of red lines, visible in a tiny window to the right of the slow-speed dial which rotate only when the film is advancing properly), a *hinged* removable back, and a built-in film-speed reminder dial to the left of the slow-speed dial. More importantly, the VX's film aperture and main body were manufactured in a single, rigid casting (as opposed to having the film plane established by a screwed-on metal, film aperture plate) which did wonders for lens-to-film alignment. Last but far from least, the VX sported a very nice “pull-down-and-turn” back lock on its bottom, consisting of a knurled knob attached to a spring-loaded shaft. Like most Exakta features, it is unusual, a mechanic's delight, and you either love it or hate it. I like it and was sad to see it go on the last two “classic” Exaktas, the VX 1000 and VX 500.

As if the Exakta epic isn't confusing enough, there were, in fact, two distinct Exakta VXs—the first one (the original) was introduced in 1952 and discontinued in '54. The second or “automatic” VX debuted in '54 and was phased out in '57. As you might expect, both models are practically identical except that the later version had sprouted a few minor improvements. These include a ratcheted exposure counter (instead of the former “friction” type) that's set by turning (what else?) a small knurled wheel adjacent to the film-wind pivot; a hinged shutter-release lock,



A meterized Exakta? Not quite. It's a standard VX Ila with Schneider's selenium-metered f/1.9 Xenon. Shutter settings on side-mounted scale had to be transferred to shutter dials on body.

Clearly, the main reason for having such an interchangeable finder system is that it permitted Ihagee to equip the Exakta with a pentaprism while retaining the advantages of alternative waist-level viewing for scientific and nature photography, among other things. In addition, it enabled Ihagee to offer specialized finders of various sorts, which is one reason that, in the 50's and 60's, scads of labs, individual scientists and medical folks adopted the Exakta system. Eventually, the camera's “top door” even saw such startling appendages as through-lens meter prisms, but these tall, ungainly affairs were never very popular for reasons we'll get to later. For the moment it suffices to say that the Exakta V (please don't ask what happened to models III and IV), when fitted with its elegant-but-fragile chrome topped “pointy” pentaprism, was nothing short of a revelation. Eye-level viewing was rea-

which is essentially a chrome collar which physically prevents you from pressing the shutter button when it's in the down position; an improved rewind mechanism (if you can consider a spring-loaded button you must keep depressed during rewinding an improvement over a pivoted knob which you don't); and finally, an improved shutter mechanism which allows you to fire the shutter with the waist-level finder folded. You think that's amusing? How about a list price of \$392 from 58mm f/2 Biotar? (Don't panic, a similarly-equipped VX today fetches about \$125-140.)

And what better way to conclude the festivities than by extolling the virtues of my favorite 35mm Exakta of all



This is an VX IIa? Yep, that's what it says in chrome under inelegant Exakta nameplate, but it isn't nearly as nice as the '58 original.

time, the VX IIa, introduced in 1958 and discontinued in 1963. Featurewise, the VX IIa (inquire not about the fate of the VX Ia) hardly broke any new ground to speak of, but, largely for aesthetic reasons, it remains the most sought-after of classic Exaktas. Aside from all the aforementioned little doodads that found their way into late VXs, the IIa sports regular PC outlets thoughtfully labeled X, M and F (for long peak focal-plane bulbs), and on the inside you'll find a stippled, rather than flat pressure plate (please don't ask me why). Operationally, the VX IIa's most noteworthy advance concerns the slow speed/self-timer mechanism, which is virtually noiseless in contrast to the rasping, high-pitched cacaphony of previous Exaktas' slow-speed gear trains. In terms of appearance, to get nitpicky, the IIa's alternately knurled slow-speed knob is prettier (and easier to grasp) than the continuously knurled control on older models, and the round film-speed reminder dial directly below it is nicer looking, too.

Basically, the VX IIa is admired because it represents the pinnacle of Ihagee's 35mm achievement. It is well-finished throughout, unlike most subsequent models, incorporates every little nicety the company ever devised (unlike previous models which lacked or later models which deleted this or that), and it has the reputation (whether deserved or not, I'm not sure) of being the best assembled and most reliable of 35mm Exaktas.

Not content with resting on their laurels (and to the utter confusion of Exakta collectors and users alike), Ihagee then sprung upon the world a second version of the VX IIa, which was not as nice as the first. I haven't been able to snare one of these curious animals in the flesh, but it has an "ugly modern" silver-on-black nameplate with "EXAKTA" appearing in upper-case print characters instead of elegant script, and the chrome finish was reportedly down a notch on the "early" VX IIa. Why didn't they leave well enough alone? Frankly, I wonder the same thing—even the flattened-out pentaprism looks out of place on the late model VX IIa. I guess they were preparing us for the slightly less magnificent delights of the VX IIb, but that, friends, will have to wait for the next episode, "The Day the Exakta Lost Its Button." Many thanks to Cambridge Camera and Seymour's Camera of New York City, Exakta Camera Co. of Bronxville, NY, and Brooks Cameras of San Francisco for supplying the Exakta equipment.

Exakta saga, part 3

The Exakta Saga, Part 3. The slow, excruciating demise, complete with lost buttons, cruder chrome, and an attempted “heirlift” from Berlin.

As I expected, it didn't take the Exaktamaniacs and nitpickers long to begin excoriating me for any misplaced minutiae or lapses of logic contained in the last Exakta installment. All right, I do apologize for the upside-down photo of the renowned Exakta film-cutting knife in use, which is being pulled up rather than down as stated in the caption, but to call me to task on my procedure for setting the slow-speed dial is really a bit much! In short, anyone using these scribbings in lieu of an instruction manual had best beware.



Second-most-desirable Exakta 35? I'd say this VX IIb with early 50mm f/2 Pancolar qualifies, and it's certainly a usable bargain at \$125 or thereabouts.

Actually, the nameless nitpicker is technically correct—to set slow speeds on any classic Exakta you're supposed to cock the shutter, set the fast-speed dial to B or T, wind the slow-speed dial, set the desired slow speed (red numbers for 12-13 sec. delay *plus* slow speed), and *gently* press the shutter release. I advised the hapless multitudes to do all of the above, but to set the slow speed first and *then* wind the slow-speed dial—a method which usually works as well but isn't always possible if the spring-powered slow-speed mechanism is completely, or almost completely, wound down. And so, friends, in the interest of consistency and adhering to the official instruction manual (two things which are of paramount importance in operating

German machinery), I stand corrected. I will not, however, accede to said nitpicker's description of my mistake as an “egregious error”—anyone who didn't realize that you had to wind the damn thing first if the number couldn't be set probably thought the problem was a dead battery.

Okay, enough sackcloth and ashes department, let's get back to the glacier-slow downhill trek of the trapezoidal beast from Dresden on its way to ultimate oblivion. You'll doubtlessly recall that at the end of the last installment, we detailed what mechanical mavens and technological aesthetes regard as the pinnacle of Ihagee's 35mm achievements, the magnificently snazzy VX IIa. This model was replete with every precious doodad and thingamabob the factory could muster, and the surprising thing is, despite the agglomerative nature of its evolution, the whole thing hung together remarkably well in terms of function as well as appearance. Alas, the handwriting was already on the Berlin Wall—as already mentioned late model VX IIa's began to lose some of their aesthetic pizzazz, and so, in 1963, enter the VX IIb.



Last “real” Exakta? Just about. VX 500 has no slow speeds, brings about \$100 with 50mm f/2.8 aus Jena Tessar.

As expected, the changes incorporated therein were hardly earthshaking, but virtually all of them had one aim in mind—to reduce production costs. You would have thought that, tools and dies having long since been amortized, the company could have rested on their laurels or even (shudder) redesigned the Exakta to accept a coupled,

through-lens metering system and/or internal auto-diaphragm lenses, but no. What we got was geometric shutter speeds (1/4, 1/8—no 1/15—1/30, 1/60, etc.), a revised slow-speed dial with broader, uniform knurling, a film-speed reminder dial built into its top, and, incredibly, no finder-locking button under the nameplate! True, the finder was still held in the proper orientation by spring-loaded hooks which engaged pins on either side of the finder housings, and VX IIb's as a rule don't suffer from finder falloff, but the change was universally decried. Equally unappreciated was the glued on nameplate above the "shield shaped" front plate, and the fact that the satin chrome finish on top and front plates had deteriorated from good to mediocre and coarse grained. Withal, the VX IIb performs quite well, has a quiet slow-speed gear train like its immediate predecessor, and mine has a convenient accessory shoe affixed to its pentaprism. (That makes sense, you skimp on the prism-retaining mechanism so you add a shoe to mount accessories onto it!) I know that Exakta fanatics will want to hang me from the nearest yardarm for the statement I'm about to make, but in spite of its minor flaws, I'd still be forced to nominate the VX IIb as the second most desirable Exakta 35 in terms of actual picture taking.

ventional spring loaded, pull-down catch). Perhaps the most amazing thing about these last two "genuine" Exaktas was the re-emergence of the finder locking catch beneath the nameplate. Evidently so many Exakta owners bitched and moaned about its absence on the VX IIb that it was eventually reinstated.

Now if this were any other camera but the Exakta, that would be the end of the tale—birth, procreation, and death—but this Volkswagen of SLR-dom was destined to act out a lingering demise that is, to some, almost as fascinating as its golden age. Frankly, I must admit that the Exakta RTL 1000 for all its internal auto-diaphragm action and semi-coupled through-lens CdS metering turns me off sufficiently that I can't bear writing about it even if you could bear reading about it. Exaktas in name only were Ihagee West's Exakta Twin TL (which is really a Japanese Cosina down to its Copal Square shutter and Exaktar lenses) and the "Petri-fied" Exakta FE 2000 (whose 55mm f/1.7 Exaktar lens screwed into a Praktica-type 42mm screw-thread mount).



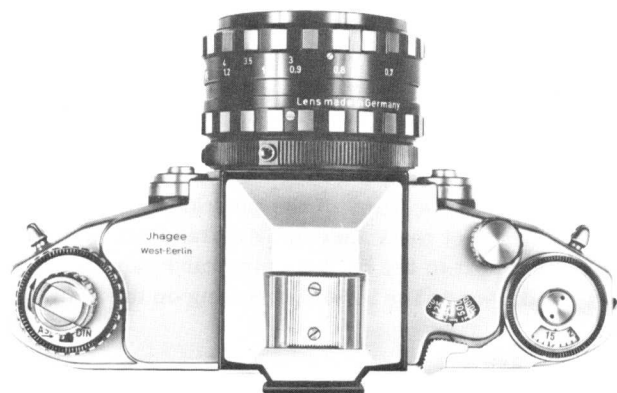
A real Real down to its 50mm f/2.8 Schacht Travenar lens, this is rarest Exakta model.

Through-lens metering VX 1000? Yep, but Examat prism shown is of the infamous transfer-the-setting variety.

The last models that can accurately be termed classic Exaktas were the VX 1000 and its stripped down stablemate the VX 500, which was actually the last Exakta to be fully assembled in the Ihagee factory (the last East German Exakta, the 1971 to 1974 Exakta RTL 1000, was actually produced in the Pentacon factory). The VX 1000 featured (what else?) revised knurling on the slow-speed dial, ASA settings up to 3200 but no film-type indicator in the film-speed index (the film-type reminder migrated to the back-opening lug on the bottom), a black fast-speed dial with numerals in silver, and a more modern-looking, shorter-throw (hooray, only 200° or so) film-wind lever with coaxial frame counter sans spring-loaded, geared setting knob. Also lost in the shuffle were the Exakta's unique backlocking arrangement (the VX 1000 and VX 500 have a con-

But, to conclude these festivities on an equally quixotic and infinitely more Germanic note, here, in brief, is the story of the rarest of all 35mm Exaktas, the Exakta Real (which monicker probably was intended to denote "genuine" rather than "royal" as in Spanish). Apparently none too pleased at the course of the Exakta's development on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain and determined to make a couple of Deutschmarks in the process, one Johan Steenbergen, a Dutchman who was one of the principal founders of the original Ihagee factory in Dresden before the war, bought up the essentially worthless shares of a group of the original stockholders in that company with the notion of wresting the proud Exakta name from these bolshevik upstarts. That was back in 1959, and for four years the new—er, old—company produced nothing but fancy lawsuits on both sides of the Atlantic, which demanded financial compensation from the Exakta factory as

well as Exakta importers, for use of the name. After protracted litigation, the East German Ihagee Factory retained most international rights and were able to label their cameras Exaktas in all countries except West Germany, where they lost the case in what has been called a "rigged tribunal." Dresden Exaktas destined for the Bundesrepublik were henceforth dubbed Elbaflexes (after the Elbe river, I presume) while in the U.S., the courts decided the issue along Solomonic lines, with both Ihagee, Dresden and Ihagee West (Berlin) obtaining equal rights to the name. Considering the diminishing luster of the Exakta moniker, one wonders whether these battles were worth the trouble.



Real's top deck: conventional layout.

Then, at the Photokina exposition of 1963, something remarkable happened. Ihagee West showed an honest-to-gosh working model of the new Exakta Real, a hefty machine that is said to bear the unmistakable stamp of the Edixa factory's design staff. Although superficially resembling a classic Exakta in its trapezoidal body contours, this slightly larger ($5\frac{7}{8} \times 3\frac{7}{8} \times 3\frac{1}{4}$ in. with 50 mm f/1.9 Schneider Xenon lens), heavier (2 lb. 6 oz. with same optic) beast was brand new from the ground up, and sported a host of desirable mechanical features representing a valid and worthwhile evolution of the basic Exakta concept. It had, alas, no meter, but its right-hand-operated, single (200°)-stroke wind lever, and conventional top-mounted rewind crank certainly made life easier. Its most obvious departure from standard Exakta practice is the presence of two cable-release-threaded shutter-release buttons, which work with commendable smoothness, and permit facile right- or left-handed operation. Its internally-flanged lens mount is considerably wider than the standard Exaktas (46mm to be exact), to improve the lot of optical designers and to allow sufficient space for an internal-auto-diaphragm-actuating "roller pin" (it's located directly below the enlarged, 29mm-deep mirror). But an adapter was available to let you mount virtually any Dresden Exakta lens on the Real, and, of course, the left-hand shutter release was properly positioned to engage with the Dresden model's external auto-diaphragm lenses. Directly in front of the Real's film-wind lever (which has a coaxial, but non-self-zeroing frame counter that slowly turns from

a green to a red background as you near the 36th frame!) there's a large knurled knob which is the shutter-speed dial. Settings from 2 sec. to 1/1000 sec. are read out in a little arcuate window behind this knob, and the dial has the advantage of being non-rotating so settings can be made before or after winding the film. However, the numerals are not evenly spaced, B and T are mysteriously placed in between 1/15 and 1/30 sec., and the last three numerals, 250, 500, and 1000 are too bunched together to be legible.

Quality on the inside

To open the Real's back you pull up on the top-mounted rewind crank and then turn the outer ring of the film-speed reminder dial below it (shades of the Nikon FM). Inside, you'll find an interior that's very well finished—perhaps a notch or two above the East German Exaktas—with a cloth focal-plane shutter in the middle. Unlike the "classic" Exaktas, the Real loads on the left, takes up on the right, has a large, flat pressure plate with a film tension roller to its left, and double light baffles on its hinged cast alloy back plate. On the front, aside from the aforementioned shutter buttons, you'll find a small shutter-lock lever which locks both releases simultaneously, a left-handed self-timer lever, and a small black button to activate it. The small lens-release lever works in a similar manner to the Dresden models, but its mechanism is internal. Finally, surmounting the Real is a removable pentaprism with a permanently affixed accessory shoe that is held in place by two hefty flat springs and slides off the back. And you purists in the audience would appreciate the Real's viewing screen—an utterly unadorned slice of ground glass surmounted by the condenser lens, just like the ones from the Eastern Zone.

How did this all work out in practice, you ask? Very well and not very well at all. The camera itself had a few foibles, like a delicate frame counter mechanism and a guaranteed-to-peel-off leatherlike covering, but by and large it was a very nicely executed, eminently workable design. Regrettably, by the time the original heirs to the Exakta mystique got the camera into production (four years later in 1967!) much of the glamour was gone from the name and production costs had escalated. Indeed, the Real would have had to sell for about twice the price of the East German model, putting it into head-to-head competition with the Japanese SLR onslaught. True, the Real had an instant-return mirror but by then so did the Exakta VX 1000 and Nikon, Topcon, Pentax *et al* had behind-lens CdS metering built in, and numerous other amenities. Of course, when it comes to being a super-rare production SLR, few can hold a candle to the evanescent Real—precisely how many were made is something of a mystery, but the number was assuredly in the upper hundreds or lower thousands. Number 00948 pictured herein is the property of Modern's publisher who was lucky enough to be in the right place (Cologne, Germany) at the right time with the right number of D-marks. Today I'd peg this jewel at around \$1,000, but this is just a ballpark guesstimate.

SLRs from Dresden: Square, Exakta, Korelle, Praktisix, Pentacon Six

I left my heart in Dresden—or, if you can't stop writing about Exaktas, how about spicing things up with a few other distinctive SLRs from the same city.

Well, I've almost gotten those damned Exaktas out of my system in the course of researching the last three chapters—but not quite. Indeed, there's one machine of the mid-to-late 30's that, with the possible exception of the Berlin-made Exakta Real covered in the last installment, is the rarest of all Exaktas. Aesthetically and functionally, it's also one of the nicest, and it set me to thinking about roll-film cameras of similar design, which constituted one of the most sensible approaches in constructing a 2¼ SLR, but which are now virtually extinct except for the Pentax 6×7.



First modern SLR? In terms of fast optics, features, well-integrated design, this late 30's Square Exakta probably was.

The camera to which I refer is the renowned Square Exakta of 1937, a cleverly conceived beast that probably ranks as the first thoroughly modern roll-film SLR. Do I hear any complaints? Then take a gander at the elegant

machine pictured. You can see that it's blessed (afflicted?) with the traditional Exakta accoutrements of the era—a pop-up chest-level viewing hood with built-in magnifier (it flips up from the top of the back section), a fast-shutter-speed dial with speeds up to 1/1000 sec. above the left-handed shutter release button on the front, and the large, knurled show-speed/self-timer dial adjacent to the hinge for the back. Yes, both dials rotate when they're in use, and those cute little round sockets on both sides of the huge 80mm f/1.9 Meyer Primoplan bayonet-mount lens are indeed the precursors of the notorious PC flash sync cord outlets. Not too visible are the frame counter (atop the camera next to the back-opening catch) and the huge film-wind lever on the bottom, pivoting on the right.



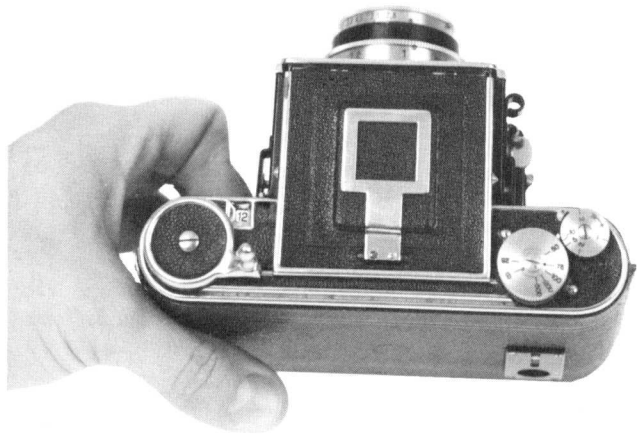
A Depression favorite, the spartan Korelle was a Kamera Werkstatte creation.

What makes it so special? Well, the Square Exakta had automatic film stop, bayonet-mount, fast lenses and reasonably bright viewing nearly 25 years before any other 2¼ SLR with lateral (side-to-side) film transport. It was beautifully made and finished and convenient to use. What did it in was a combination of high price (about \$300 in 1937) and focal-plane shutter/film-wind problems—a disease that has plagued many of its successors. Unfortunately, I was unable to snare one of these rare birds in time for a complete dissection herein, but you've got to admit, even its formal portrait bears witness to its well-integrated design. Oh, yes, for you inflation-hedging

investors out there, I'd presently peg a clean, functioning machine as pictured at a cool \$650.

Delving into the origins of such a nice, handy, medium-format SLR, I began to cudgel my brain to come up with its antecedents. By golly, there was an American-made 2¼ SLR with lateral film transport—a two model “series” in fact. And while the model II offered only a limited array of screw-thread interchangeable lenses, these focal-plane shutter 2¼ × 2½-in.-format SLRs were pretty advanced for their day. These were, of course, the National Graflexes which debuted way back in 1933. Yet, despite their basic specs—which included automatic film spacing, the Nationals, with their deep, leather-sided chest-level-viewing “chimneys” somehow seem to date from an earlier era (this despite the fact that the Model II was produced up until World War II).

I hate to give products of native Yankee ingenuity such short shrift, and I promise to devote a future column to the entire National Graflex saga as it deserves. Nevertheless, there *is* a lineal descendant of the aforementioned Square Exakta that more closely parallels its design, albeit on a simpler, less sophisticated level. I speak, of course, of the Reflex-Korelle, heartthrob of so many Depression-era photo-cognoscenti which was introduced back in 1936. The model I, which I haven't a picture of, was basically quite similar to the model II I fondled in preparation of this column, except that it lacked slow shutter speeds and had no self-timer—which brings us to the more comprehensive model II.



Convenient Korelle control array with shutter dials on right, film wind on left.

The first thing one notices in picking up a Korelle II is its relative lightness compared to contemporary 2¼ SLRs—it weighs almost precisely 2 lbs. complete with 75mm f/2.8 Schneider Xenar lens. It fits nicely in the hands—a characteristic of the breed—and is also well balanced. Like most classic Exaktas, the Korelle has separate fast (1/25-1/500 sec.) and slow (2-1/10 sec.) shutter-speed dials atop the camera which rotate as the shutter fires, but they're placed next to each other, to the right of the finder hood. To its left is a beautifully chromed flip-up film-wind

crank of a distinctly bulbous design, with a built-in automatic frame counter directly in front of it. Like most cameras of its era, the Korelle lacks automatic first-frame positioning—you've got to line up the first frame manually in ye olde red window on the back, and set the counter to number 1 using a tiny button just above the left-hand neckstrap lug. Press the back-opening catch on the camera's left-hand side and swing the back open toward the right and you're greeted with a spartan interior, with a thin film roller on either side of the film aperture and a cloth focal-plane shutter in the middle. The 120 rolls are held in place at the bottom by spring-loaded lugs that can be pulled out and locked in the out position (to facilitate loading) by pulling and turning a pair of knurled knobs on the bottom. Erect the viewing/focusing hood by lifting the front section in place, and the three other sides automatically spring into proper position. Lift the magnifier in place and peer down into the unadorned ground-glass viewing screen, and even with the lens wide open you'll see what many have acclaimed as the original “dimo-flex” viewing image—the center is none too bright or contrasty, and it gets considerably worse at the edges. Considering the abysmal finder, the Korelle actually is fairly easy to focus accurately, but you'd better be composing your shots outdoors if you hope to see the corners of the screen. For the record, the Xenar lens on our Korelle focuses smoothly down to 1 m in a 240° turn of its very thin, knurled focusing ring, has non-click-stopped apertures to f/16, and if you unscrew this optic from its 42mm (!) mount, you'll notice that the entire top edge of the rear of the lens mount has been bevelled away to clear the flipping mirror.

Almost instant-return mirror

Speaking of flipping mirrors, the Korelle's deep, trapezoidal-mirror mechanism incorporates what might be termed a primitive version of “almost-instant” return. As you relax your finger pressure on the shutter release (please wait until after the shutter completes its travel—there's no mechanical interlock), the mirror will simply fall by gravity back to the proper viewing position. In other words, the mirror's flipping motion—whether up or down—is controlled by a simple pivoted arm arrangement with only a very weak spring on its flip-down end to keep the mirror from flopping around if the camera is shaken.

Fine, simple, and functional, but what if you want to make a long time exposure—on a tripod, for instance. Easy, just slide a little button on the side of the squarish shutter-button housing on the camera's right side from “A” to “E” (sorry, no English translation) and the mirror will lock in position as soon as it reaches the top of its travel. In front of the aforementioned mirror-lock button there's a threaded cable-release socket, and just below it is a mechanical self-timer. The mirror-lock button doubles as a self-timer actuator so the mirror will automatically lock up when the self-timer is used—ingenious. Incidentally, while the self-timer and slow-speed-gear train emit the typical rasping sounds while in operation, at fast speeds

the shutter is extremely quiet—quieter in fact, than most modern SLRs.

Despite its foibles, the Dresden-made Reflex-Korelle qualifies as a genuine landmark among 2¼ SLRs and in fact was in production in its various German guises until at least 1959 (the year of the demise of the Master Reflex). The Master has features similar to the Korelle II but had a larger lens mount to alleviate optical design problems, and one takeoff on the Master—the Reflex 66, was produced in Japan up until the mid-60's. In the 30's many pros mounted the then-superfast f/2 Ernostar lenses (lifted from Ermanoxes and other Ernemann cameras) and mounted them on Korelles, and back in the World War II era Consumer's Union (of all people) chose the Korelle as a more convenient and better performing-alternative to the Primar (Kurt Bentzin) Reflex. Alas, some poor Korelles lived



This one's a trouble-maker. Original Praktisix had great potential, but was plagued with film-wind, focal-plane-shutter woes.

out their lives behind pretty miserable 75mm f/3.5 Victor lenses, but these simple, manual diaphragm SLRs nevertheless endeared themselves to many photographers, which is probably why these nicely finished (but not breathtakingly so) machines have finally earned their place in the sun. As recently as 10-15 years ago you couldn't give 'em away, but this star presently resides under a \$200 price tag at Ken Hansen Photographic in New York City.

Having devoted so much space to the Korelle's history, I can do no more than adumbrate subsequent efforts at constructing a lateral-film-transport (as opposed to vertical-film transport a la Hasselblad) 2¼ SLR, except to say that both East German and Japanese efforts in this direction took the logical step of providing pentaprism finders atop their easily hand-holdable bodies.

First, there's the Pentacon Six nee Praktisix, by VEB Pentacon of Dresden (now in the German Democratic Republic). Though considerably larger and heavier than the almost petite Korelle, the Praktisix introduced in 1956, made up for it by incorporating numerous refinements in a still comparatively handy package. To begin with, the

Praktisix has its Korelle-inspired film-wind crank on the right like a proper 35, and it is coupled to an automatic frame counter with semi-auto first-frame positioning (you have to line up the arrows on the paper backing with an orientation dot below the film aperture). There's no instant-return mirror—it flips up when you press the shutter release and stays there until you wind the film, which also opens the lens to maximum aperture—but at least all shutter speeds (1-1/1000 sec. plus B) are set with a single large (1¼-in.-diameter), knurled dial to the left of the finder housing. The prism (or chest-level finder) is held in place by four sturdy lugs which mate with holes at corners of the finder bottoms, and the holes are firmly secured onto the lugs by spring-loaded bars controlled by buttons on the side of the finders.

Operationally, the Praktisix's prism finder image is yellowish, fairly dim, but with reasonable contrast. The very



Pentacon Six had fewer troubles than its predecessors, but its "transfer-the-setting," through-lens meter is slow to operate.

good quality, five-element 80mm f/2.8 Carl Zeiss Biometar lens (dubbed Aus Jena B on many Praktisix/Pentacon Six models imported into the U.S.), focuses smoothly down to 1 meter, and, in terms of control placement and overall design concept, the fairly well-finished Praktisix is a competent and interesting machine. Unfortunately, the film-spacing and shutter-wind mechanisms cannot rate similar kudos, which is why there were subsequent Praktisix II and Pentacon Six models. When Modern tested the latter some years ago, we still encountered occasional frame-spacing problems, and film "unflatness"—the perennial bugaboo of roll-film cameras in general—reared its curly head. Still, in all, the current Pentacon Six with its through-lens, CdS, uncoupled (transfer the setting) meter prism is a seviceable beast capable of quite good results

but isn't currently imported into the U.S. I had hoped to be able to sneak in the last of the breed in terms of its date of introduction—the Japanese Norita—but don't despair medium-format reflex fans. I'll cover it (them?) eventually.

Oh, by the way, to avoid letters from outraged Pentax 6 × 7 aficionados—yes, I must admit the SLR of your dreams also fits this category, but it was really conceived as a scaled-up 35 rather than as a scaled sideways Korelle, and besides, it's sold here and in current production.