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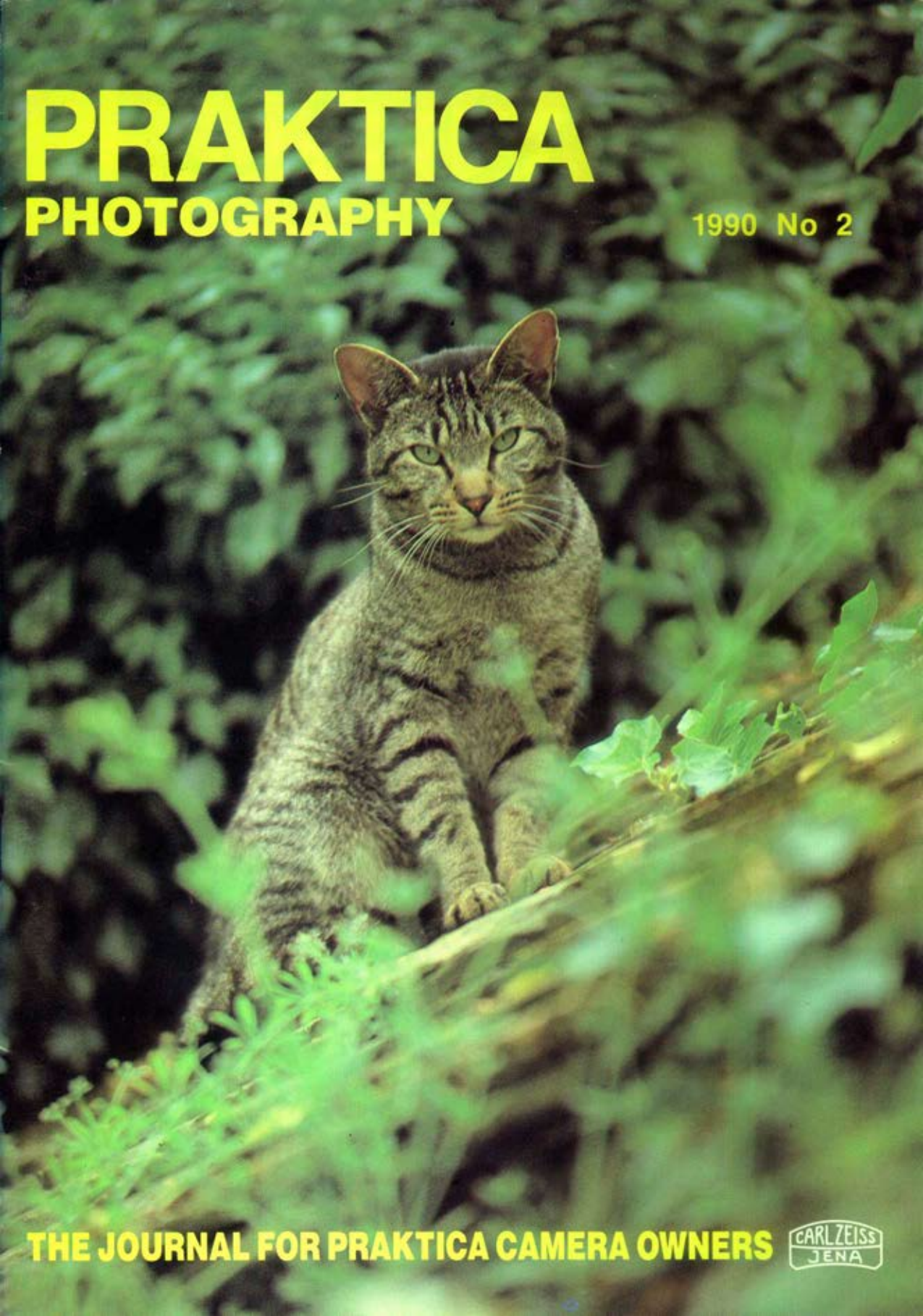

THE JOURNAL FOR PRAKTICA CAMERA OWNERS

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Above: *'Summer on Skye'. A colourful, straightforward landscape which owes much to the square format of the Pentacon-Six. The larger transparency undeniably holds a quality of its own, and is ideal for broad subjects of this type. 1/125 sec f/8 on Agfachrome film.*

The Pentacon-Six Story

The first in a six-part series of articles by **Dr Trevor Allin**, *tracing the history of the famous Pentacon-Six camera, starting with its predecesors in the 1930s and '40s, and detailing both the camera's development in the GDR and compatible bodies, lenses and accessories by various other manufacturers, from the 1950s to the 1990s.*

THE PENTACON SIX has proved to be the most popular of a series of medium-format single lens reflex cameras developed over the past half a century. In this series of articles we plan to look at its ancestors, its own development, and its offspring.

Large format plate single lens reflex cameras had been made since before the beginning of the twentieth century, some in beautifully polished wood, others covered in black leather, and there were 6 × 6 (or 2¼in square) rollfilm reflexes produced before World War I, but the first medium format SLRs of the modern type were produced in the 1930s.

The Noviflex

In 1935 the Noviflex was produced in Germany; it had a focal-plane shutter with speeds from 1/20 to 1/1000 sec. It was fitted with an f/3.5 7.5cm Victar lens from Ludwig in Dresden. Focusing was unusual, since the lens was not in a helical mount; instead, it was focused by a large knurled wheel on the side of the mirror housing.

The camera was supplied with a fixed waist-level finder the front of which was made of metal, while the other three sides were cloth on a wire frame, as was then standard practice for viewfinders on many cameras. Film advance was via a knob at the left-hand end of the top plate. The Noviflex weighed 1lb 15oz (c. 880grs) and measured (W × D × H with finder closed and lens at infinity) 6 × 3⅝ × 3⅜ins (152 × 92 × 87mm).

Two years later, the Noviflex II offered interchangeable lenses. The 1970 SLR Yearbook quotes the price when originally sold in the thirties as ranging from £10 10s 0d with an f/3.5 lens to £16 10s 0d with an f/2.9 Trioplan (£10.50p to £16.50p to our younger readers!). There was also an f/5.5 150mm Tele-Megor from Meyer.

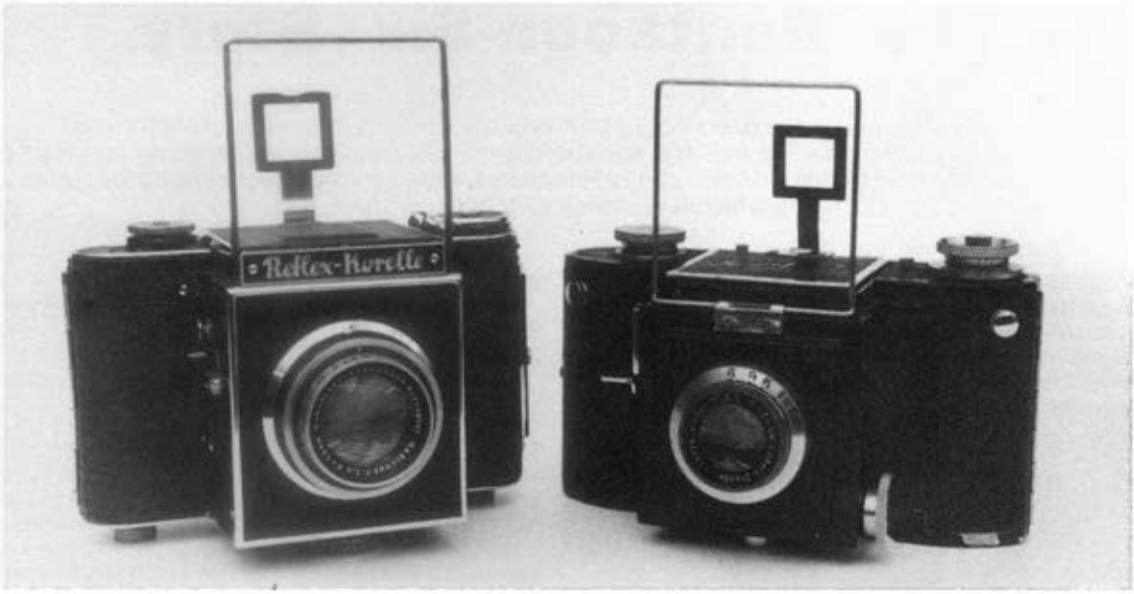
The Noviflex had a short life, but it played a part in the development of the camera which can be considered the grandfather of the Pentacon Six.

The Reflex-Korelle

The Reflex-Korelle camera was first produced in Germany in 1935. It had a cloth focal plane shutter with the speeds from 1/10 to 1/1000, although later models had the speeds B 1/25 1/50 1/75 1/100 1/200 and 1/500. No flash synchronisation was provided on Reflex-Korelles, although some users had this added subsequently.

A manual Schneider Kreuznach Radionar lens marked f/2.9 7.5cm was supplied as standard, attached to the camera throat by a screw thread of 40.5mm diameter × 0.75. There were also f/3.5 and f/2.8 Xenars

Top left: *The Noviflex. Note the knurled knob at bottom right of lens throat, used to focus the lens.* **Left:** *The Reflex-Korelle. The shutter-speed dial is seen to the left of the viewfinder hood. There was also a version of the Korelle with a second, smaller dial for slow speeds, on the top plate to the left of the one seen here. (Both cameras loaned by Stein Falchenberg.)*



Above: *The Reflex-Korelle and the Noviflex with direct-vision (sports) finder upright. The similarities between the two cameras cannot be ignored.*

from Schneider and a 7.5cm Tessar from Carl Zeiss, as well as f/2.9 & f/3.5 7.5cm Victars.

There was no viewfinder prism and of course no light metering facility on the camera. Viewing was through a non-removable waist-level finder made with four fold-up metal sides, and there was a fold-up magnifier. The reflex image was as bright as one can get with a plain glass, but in most Reflex-Korelles that I have seen, the brightness has been poor by modern standards, although this has been partly due to deterioration of the silvering on the mirror. Closing the waist-level finder gave access to a direct-vision finder useful when photographing sports or other moving objects. This looked remarkably similar to the Noviflex direct-vision finder, in spite of a more sophisticated design.

As with the Noviflex, the mirror was gradually raised by pressure on a lever to the right of the throat (viewed from behind). Letting go of this lever allowed the mirror to drop back down; pressing it to the end of its travel fired the shutter, after which the mirror came back down as the lever was released.

The film was advanced by a lever on the top plate operated by the left hand. Apart from on the cheapest model, this lever also cocked the shutter, but there was no frame counter on the early models; the traditional red window on the camera back enabled the user to check the number of pictures taken from the numbers printed on the backing paper. On the base-plate were two knobs which were pulled out and twisted when inserting or removing film spools – not in itself a new development, but one also adopted for the Pentacon Six, with slightly larger diameter knobs.

From model IIA (first produced in 1938) onwards a second slow-speed shutter dial provided additionally ½ 1/5 1/10 1 sec and 2 secs, as well as adding delayed action. The Korelle III added the top speed of 1/1000, and changed the lens mount to a 56mm diameter bayonet. Dallmeyer and other lens manufacturers produced long-focus lenses in this mount. The Reflex-Korelle with the Radionar lens weighted fractionally less than the Noviflex, at 1lb 12½oz (c. 805 grs), and its dimensions were $5^{23}/_{32} \times 3^{5}/_{8} \times 3^{13}/_{16}$" (145 × 92 × 97mm).

Reflex-Korelles are occasionally available second-hand, and optimistic camera dealers occasionally hope to obtain quite high prices for them, although I

Right: *The Agiflex II, as advertised in the 1954 British Journal Almanac. Note the separate slow-speed dial.*

Left: *The Meister-Korelle. The Meyer-Optik 85mm f/3.5 Primotar lens adds considerably to the total bulk and weight in comparison with the preceding cameras. Like its predecessors, it was a pre-set lens. The fully-automatic spring diaphragm first appeared on the Praktisix, six year later. (Loaned by Stein Falchenberg.)*

have never seen an early model in good condition in a shop.

The Agiflex

Another 'relative' of the Pentacon Six is the Agiflex, a modified copy of the Relex-Korelle manufactured by Aeronautical & General Instruments Ltd of Croydon, which had produced other cameras in the 1940s for use principally by the Admiralty and the Air Force for reconnaissance

The Agiflex was probably first available in 1948 and like the Reflex-Korelle had a left-hand film-advance lever and a rotating shutter speed dial providing speeds of 1/25 1/50 1/100 1/200 1/500 and B. It had a folding waist-level finder, the sides of which were made of metal. The 1970 SLR Yearbook tells us that the original price of the Agiflex I with the Agilux lens was £42 10s 0d plus £9 4s 2d Purchase Tax (£42.50p + approximately £9.21). The standard lens was an f/3.5 80mm Agilux stopping down to f/32 in a three-pronged bayonet mount. Flash synchronisation was provided by two contact pins.

The Agiflex II was introduced in 1951, and incorporated various improvements. In 1953 it was priced at £78 10s 0d (£78.50p). As you can see from the 1954 advertisement reproduced here from the British Journal Alamanac, a range of 'bloomed' lenses from 80 to 300mm was available, as well as extension tubes. The Agiflex III (from 1955) was supplied with pre-set f/2.8 80mm Agilux Anastigmat in a different mount. Sales continued until the 1960s, when production ceased in the face of German and Japanese competition.

The Meister-Korelle

In 1950 VEB Wefo of Dresden produced the Meister-Korelle, consciously inspired by the pre-war Reflex-Korelle. This had one, non-rotating, shutter speed dial with the speeds B 1 sec 1/2 1/5 1/10 1/25 1/50 1/100 1/250 1/500 and a top speed of 1/1000. Flash synchronisation was provided by two contact pins.

The film advance lever was on the right-hand side of the top plate (as viewed from behind), as has now become standard practice, and an f/3.5 85mm Meyer Primotar was supplied as standard, in a 58mm × 1 screw thread mount, with an f/2.8 80mm Tessar T lens from Carl Zeiss Jena available as an alternative. The Tessar incorporated a pre-set ring.

The larger lens added to the overall depth, and the dimensions were $6\frac{3}{16} \times 4\frac{17}{32} \times 3\frac{15}{16}$" (157 × 115 × 100mm), although at 1lb $14\frac{3}{4}$oz (c. 875grs) the Meister-Korelle weighed virtually the same as the Noviflex of 15 years earlier.

In the next part of this series, we shall look at the development of the Praktisix and 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. Mr Falchenberg also loaned the Noviflex, the Reflex-Korelle and the Meister-Korelle that appear in the illustrations.

Below: *This picture of the Pentacon-Six with three of the cameras that preceded it reveals both the similarities and the progressive increase in size from camera to camera. Those 1930s cameras really were smaller and lighter (even if they did offer less features).*