

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

It is well known that Nikon started life as an optical company. They began when three companies merged in 1917 and formed the Japanese optical company, Nippon Kogaku (Japan Optical). It seems like moments ago that we were celebrating seventy-five years with the opening of our Nippon Kogaku Room. That was in 1992. As we have previously mentioned, Nikon did not start life as a camera maker. That said they are awfully good at it. No, Nikon did not make cameras until they produced the Nikon I in 1948.

So fresh from the celebration of eighty years of optical excellence Nikon are faced with the dilemma of how to mark fifty years of camera production. It could be argued that they have left sufficient impression, with fifty years of cameras out there, not to mention the fact that forty years of them all carry the same lens mount. The obvious answer is to produce a special camera.

Unlike a certain German manufacturer Nikon's history is not littered with special editions. Yes, they have produced the odd titanium version and the



legendary high-speed cameras but little else. Notable recent ones are the F3 based F3 limited and the Year of the Dog FM2/T. What these two have in common with the new camera is that they were designed with the Japanese market in mind.

They considered restricting sales of this camera to Japan only. The original plan was produce two thousand cameras and sell them all in Japan. We have it on good authority that they had plans to earmark some of these for a certain Nikon-only shop. A last-minute change of mind led them to produce a further thousand for the rest of the World. In fact the tense is wrong there as they are

still making them as I write this.

So without further delay let me say that the new camera is based on the flagship Nikon F5. The F5 is already a super camera and the changes made are cosmetic in nature. The word superficial seems inappropriate due to the significance of the changes but below the skin breathes a normal Nikon F5.

In my mind's eye I had been building up a picture of the camera. My imagination was

Continued on page 2...

Featured in this edition of the Grays of Westminster Gazette...

- Tony Munday - Happy Anniversary
- Coolpix 900 Update
- Nick Wynne - A beginners guide...
- Acrobatics
- Tony Munday - New Compacts
- Mark Jones - Large Format II
- Gray Levett - Nikon Legend - Part LI

fired by various data. Some arrived by telephone. Most fascinating were many short notes from anonymous fax machines bearing the telltale signs of a Japanese hand writing English script. More recently I eyed transparencies of what looked like an adapted F5, a mock-up if you like. All of these gave me a good idea of what to expect, as well as providing something of a story behind the camera's production.

Today (mid-August) I have been fortunate enough to see the camera. I can see that the photographs did not tell the full story. The top covers that form the shoulders of the camera looked silver in the shots; the data said they should be grey. They are certainly a metallic colour and it has a slight bronze tinge to it. Grey is the colour of the special BF-1A body cap. Nikon have also used grey instead of the bright red flash fitted to the handgrip of the standard offering. So we have a Guigiaro design, without the legendary red stripe!

The familiar titanium viewfinder

cover is still black; that said, it is a less matt black. But that is not the only change. Gone is the familiar Nikon logo. It is replaced with the former Nikon logo. The script is styled to match that of the first rangefinder. The change is subtle, yet the message is powerful.

Moving on, the rear of the camera is relatively unchanged. The discreet Nippon Kogaku triangle shape logo graces the battery pack, to the left of the LCD (Liquid Crystal Display). It has a small 50 below it. There was some debate whether this was to be an 80. Clearly Nikon decided they were marking fifty years of cameras rather than eighty years in existence. Hopefully the photographs with this article will show this in sufficient detail for those unfamiliar with the design.

The camera arrives in a special presentation case. The outer surfaces of the case are a mottled light grey. Opening the box reveals a striking gold lining. The camera and a strap bearing a special inscription nestle into the padded inner. The box itself is

protected in transit by an cardboard sleeve. The instruction booklet is let into a panel of card which sits between presentation case and the sleeve.

So we have a special edition of the flagship F5 and a limited one at that. We have been quietly offering the camera to selected customers for a while now and the order list is significant. Due to the limited production of the camera it is folly to make any firm commitment regarding the numbers but we are confident of being able to fulfil the orders we have taken thus far.

Having done so much to limit this F5 one might think that Nikon would have applied an outrageously high price tag. However, the truth is far from this and they have set the price at £2300.00. We are expecting to ship cameras some time in September and due to the nature of the item buyers should be prepared for a wait.

by Tony Munday

Coolpix 900 Update

Nikon UK were very pleased with the Coolpix 900 and had high hopes for it. I think it is fair to say that it has exceeded their expectations. Magazine after magazine have been giving the camera rave reviews. Having started to use it I can see why. The camera is easy to use and produces results that are above the level the bare specification suggests it should be

capable of.

We have been using it to record equipment, particularly rare collectables, and some of the shots will have appeared on our website by the time you read this. For this kind of on-screen work the Coolpix is way over specified; it needs a good size print to put it to the test. I tried a print on my aged colour inkjet and unintentionally printed a

crop from a shot up to A4 size. Whilst the result showed the printer was behind modern technology, the quality of the Coolpix 900 still managed to shine through.

We continue to recommend the premium bundle with larger memory card and mains supply as the only way to buy it. The price is currently £850.00 including VAT.

THE BEGINNERS GUIDE TO THE WHAT?

Something has entered our lives which is variously called "The Internet" or "The World Wide Web" or "The Information Super-Highway". These terms attempt to describe something new by comparison to something familiar. This is a handy use of language such as describing a parsnip as "like a carrot but whitish rather than orange"

Or a lithium AA battery as "like a conventional AA battery but a fraction of the weight and with three times the life".

Well let's start with the question, "Do I really care anyway?" Maybe you don't have much to do with computers but have noticed them in places you have visited. You've seen people looking at screens just like television screens to establish whether a product/flight is in stock or discontinued, partly or fully booked. You are seeking information and this screen displays it. So the travel agent turns to you and says, "Thursday the 14th is fully booked but Friday the 15th is fine".

If you choose to get trained to have access to all the information stored in this computer, you could yourself establish that flight 123 still has some seats available. If you were at Nikon, you could find out from a computer screen if AF 20-35mm zoom lenses were in stock. Alternatively you could phone up and ask them.

The information is what you require and you take steps to acquire it. Classified adverts contain vast quantities of information. Look at the second-hand section of a photographic magazine. Thousands of lenses and so on are listed out. Well what I don't know about computers would fill a very large, well, computer, but if it holds information and is designed to help me I'll always be interested.

For example, how long would it take to scan every advert in 2 or 3 photographic magazines to find out if a particular item is available? Quite a while I think and if you enjoy browsing that's fine. What if you were in a hurry?

Imagine if you had a computer at home just for your own use, a personal computer, an electronic butler as it were. You notice outside that it has started to rain, re-trouser the money you were going to spend at the newsagents on a magazine and stay indoors. Deftly, your fingers a blur at the controls, you call for the same stock information from computer files that the dealers have made, and along the phone line to your house comes the very information that you want.

It's as you suspected, only Grays of Westminster have one! You now have the information you wanted, quickly and simply. You didn't get wet in the rain and the coffee is now nicely brewed. It might just be the coffee but you begin to think you might be warming to computers!

More next month and by the way you've just benefited from the thing described in three ways in the first sentence in this article.....

by Nick Wynne

A very warm welcome to this month's issue of the *Gazette*.

For those of you interested in early Nikon equipment, we have just acquired a number of rather rare pieces of equipment. For example from the era of the rangefinder, a model S eight digit version, complete with leather ever ready case, warranty cards, inspection slips, instruction book and in it's original dark blue maker's box. Also newly arrived is the very rare Nikon bellows in

as new condition and boxed! From the Nikon F period, a brand new Nikon F camera in a black finish and... well, I could go on and on, but I won't. If you would like to know what we have in stock secondhand please contact us. If you have access to the internet you can view what we have, both early and modern, by looking up our website on: **www.graysofwestminster.co.uk**

There is just space to tell you about our Wants List which

records your interest in secondhand Nikon equipment not currently in stock. If you are searching for some elusive item, I urge you to register with us, as a lot of second hand never makes it onto our shelves or in our adverts as those on the wants list get first choice. Please telephone, write, fax or e-mail us with your requirements. When the item becomes available we will contact and offer it to you.

Gray Levett

ACROBATICS

Visitors to our website (www.graysofwestminster.co.uk) will notice things are changing. One of the changes is the inclusion of a second-hand equipment stock list. There are two ways of providing such a list. There is the option of having the list appear on the site as simple text, which can be read, saved or printed. The other option is to provide the list as a file that can be retrieved from our site and can be opened and read using a readily available program.

A quick survey revealed the file download option was favoured. The next question is what kind of file. The possible problem is that there is no universal software. We came up with a solution from a company called Adobe. The same company makes the renowned PhotoShop software. The program we use creates a file that is known as

an Acrobat file. A free program called Acrobat Reader... well you can guess what that does.

If you do not have Acrobat Reader do not worry. You do need it, but it is possible to get it from the Internet, via our site. An easy option is to wander out and pick up a copy of *Personal Computer World* magazine. The CD that comes with it will have Acrobat in the Utility section of the Software Library. This is £3 well spent, as the installation is as simple as clicking a button marked 'install'.

Having got Acrobat Reader one can then browse our second-hand listing. But that is not all. *The Grays of Westminster Gazette* is now available from our website. It arrives a touch before the printed version at times, too. We will also be publishing various price lists, technical articles and more.

If you have no computer do not feel too left out. As the file can be printed you can get a friend to print it out or even have the job done at many libraries. Computers are going through the same phases as the fax machine and the video recorder before it and hopefully most of you have access to one.

This is not meant to sound like some kind of apology, but do bear in mind the fact that the website is far from finished. We have plans that will make it a better place to visit but it takes time to get everything done. Do come back regularly to check progress. We will also offer the option to register with us to be notified of updates. Keep watching.

STOP PRESS - Nippon Kogaku Room stock now on our website. New version of site now up and running.

NEW NIKON ZOOM COMPACTS

After a quiet period in the area, the 35mm compacts are now back up to strength. The ever popular Zoom 310, itself only a tweak of the Zoom 300, remains in the range. Whilst this kept the 35-70 buyer happy, the longer-range zoom model has been absent from the line-up. Since the TW105 headed the compacts,

Nikon have kept a 35-105 type model in the range. The smaller Zoom 500 proved quite popular and was less expensive than the TW105 that preceded it. Whilst the Zoom 500 fitted the bill as far as lens range was concerned, it had no extra features to distinguish it from its lesser cousins. It is good to see a little extra in the top of the

range model and that tradition is back. What we have now is in fact two models above the Zoom 310. In keeping with the current trend both are presented in silver. The first of these has a 38-110 lens and is called the Zoom 600. The top of the bill spot belongs to the Zoom 800.

So let us get the Zoom 600 out of the way first. It has the usual array of features which means auto focus, auto exposure, auto wind-on and a built-in flash. The flash is quite powerful for a small camera and has a guide number of 16 (In metres with 100 ISO film). The automatic flash option is fine for much of the time but the option to force the flash to fire, or to remain off is useful. Slow shutter speed and flash work well for low light, to bring out the background and the red-eye reduction system is also present.

Good though the Zoom 600 is, I find the Zoom 800 a touch more interesting. For a start it has a 38-130 zoom lens; three of the six lens elements are aspherical. It carries the same kind of basic functions as the Zoom 600 regarding exposure and flash, but that is just the beginning. The guide number of the flash is 21 at the long end of the zoom, for example.

To switch the Zoom 800 on you turn one of the two illuminated command wheels; yes, on a compact. This one is a rotary switch that covers on/off duties, plus self-timer, remote control option and continuous motor drive. The other wheel chooses between general program mode and four special program options: portrait, action, landscape and night scene modes respectively. The final option on this wheel is spot AF.

You might be wondering if spot AF is an option, what is the normal AF system. Well, it has a multi-area system that covers seven zones within the normal focus brackets to avoid those

embarrassing fuzzy shots. The camera requires that we point the centre of the viewfinder area at the object we wish it to focus on, half depress the shutter, recompose, and shoot. Using



the multi-AF system increases the chances of success, particularly at the long end of the zoom where it covers a large part of the viewfinder image. The AF system has over a thousand steps to choose from to further improve the sharpness.

The special programs are quite clever. The portrait option heads for the telephoto end of the zoom, automatically, and uses flash regardless of the lighting conditions; naturally filling-in if the light is favourable. The action mode switches to spot AF and changes the motor drive to continuous shooting mode. Landscape mode shifts the focus out to infinity and switches off the flash.

The final mode, night scene is interesting. If it detects a subject within six metres it will focus on infinity and use an exposure time of up to two seconds, then focus on the subject and use flash for a second exposure on the same frame; a multiple exposure. A tripod should be used, of course. Should you accidentally select

this mode in brighter conditions it will switch to landscape mode for distant subjects and use slow-sync mode if it finds anything within six metres.

Other nice touches include the pre-wind feature that ensures that exposed film is wound back into the cassette after each shot is taken. Should the back be opened this will limit the damage done. The camera is well laid out and simple to use. It took an outing to our weekend with Heather Angel where it was used to create a record of some of the events.

As you may have gathered I quite like the new Zoom 800. Priced at £199.00 it represents good value. I think Nikon have pitched the specification about right to make it stand out from the £149.00 Zoom 600. Neither of these will disappoint but I feel that long-term the Zoom 800 is worth the extra money.

by Tony Munday

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LARGE FORMAT LENSES PART II

by Mark Jones

This month, we explore the range of Nikon large format lenses.

There are currently twenty-six lenses in the range. They extend from extreme wide-angle to long telephoto and include two Apo Macro lenses. The macro and telephoto lenses all incorporate Nikon's ED glass. All of the lenses have the benefit of Nikon Integrated Coating (NIC), familiar to Nikon 35mm users, and yield an image quality and colour temperature similar to that of the 35mm range of Nikkor lenses.

Before looking at the range in detail, 35mm users must adapt their understanding of focal lengths and apertures. As previously indicated, the 5" by 4" negative is fifteen times larger than the 35mm negative. The film diagonal of 35mm is 43mm. In the case of 5" by 4" film it is 152mm. The commonly accepted "standard" focal length for 35mm film is the 50mm lens. The equivalent for 5" by 4" film is the 150mm or 180mm lens. As to aperture, a "fast" maximum aperture in large format is f4; f5.6 or f8 is standard. At the other end, virtually all large format lenses stop down to at least f64 and many to f128. Forget f1.4 to f16 as your range!! The common practice of "stopping down two or three stops", which in 35mm typically yields f5.6 or f8, gets you to f22 in large format (and indeed, f22 is the aperture at which the image circle of a large format lens is

usually measured and specified). Aperture for aperture, there is less apparent depth of field in a scene on a large format camera than on a 35mm camera. Most of the time you will find yourself using f22 or f32 as your taking (but not viewing!) aperture.

The focal lengths available in the Nikon large format range, with



their equivalent focal length in 35mm terms, are shown in the table opposite.

Nikon UK Limited supplies a brochure, entitled "Nikkor Lenses for Large-Format Cameras", which gives the full specifications for all of these lenses, including their image circle, flange focal distance and shutter size.

The lens range is grouped into the SW lenses (broadly speaking designed for wide-angle photography), the W lenses (for

normal and slightly long focus photography), the AM lenses (Apo Macros computed specifically for close-up photography), the T lenses (of telephoto construction) and the M lenses (slightly simpler four element designs for general purpose photography). All of the AM and T lenses boast ED glass.

So what distinguishes the large format Nikkors from other ranges of large format lenses? Several things:

First - and this is very much a personal and subjective matter - the quality of finish of the metalwork of the large format Nikkors is distinctive. One hesitates to say that it is superior to the competition, but it is certainly unsurpassed!

Second, just as Nikon developed a "standard" filter size of 52mm for their manual focus Nikkors between 24mm and 200mm in focal length, so they have done for the large format Nikkors. No less than eleven lenses in the range, namely the 65mm f4, 75mm f4.5, 90mm f8, 180mm f5.6, 210mm f5.6, 210mm f5.6 AM, 270mm f6.3, 360mm f8, 450mm f9, 500mm f11 and 720mm f16 all share a 67mm filter mount in common. In 35mm terms, that takes the user from 20mm to 216mm with one filter size. It is therefore possible to build a wonderful large format outfit with but one filter size. With the price of filters these days, that is a significant advantage. Indeed, for those who are existing 35mm Nikon users and are contemplating

Large format Nikkor lens	65	75	90	105	120	135	150	180	200	2100
35mm equivalent focal length	20	23	27	31	36	40	45	54	60	63
Large format Nikkor lens	240	270	300	360	450	500	600	720	800	1200
35mm equivalent focal length	71	81	89	107	134	149	179	216	240	360

buying in to large format on a budget, Nikon have gone one better: six lenses share the 52mm filter common to many 35mm Nikkors. The six are the 105mm f5.6, 120mm f5.6 AM, 135mm f5.6, 150mm f5.6, 200mm f8 and 300mm f9. Again, in 35mm terms that takes the user from 31mm to 89mm with one filter size; a useful, albeit more limited, range.

Third, for their T range of telephoto lenses Nikon has developed a very valuable feature: interchangeable rear lens groups. On any large format lens, in order to mount the lens on the lens board, the "front half" of the lens (which includes the shutter) is unscrewed from the "rear half", the lens board is fitted between the two halves and they are then screwed back together again. Nikon, ever innovative, have taken this one step further. The front lens group for the 360mm f8, the 500mm f11 and the 720mm f16 is the same. Buy the 360mm f8 and the rear lens group (only) for the 500mm f11 and 720mm f16 and one therefore has three telephoto lenses at a very substantial cost saving and a significant weight saving. Likewise, the front lens group for the 600mm f9, 800mm f12 and 1200mm f18 is the same. The same opportunity for flexibility, cost and weight saving therefore applies. When one takes into account the fact that the Nikkor T telephotos are particularly highly regarded for their image quality and performance, the benefits



are all the more valuable.

Fourth, the Nikkor SW lenses offer either wider apertures or keener prices (or sometimes even both!) when compared to their competition. The 65mm f4, 75mm f4.5 and 90mm f4.5 compare typically to f5.6 optics from other manufacturers. When focusing and composing on a ground glass screen, the difference of two thirds of a stop to a stop in maximum aperture is noticeable in terms of screen brightness.

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The Nikon Legend - Part LI

by Gray Levett

I am occasionally asked just how many items of unusual early Nikon equipment have been produced. Well, chances are that if you have followed these articles since I first started (issue no. 1) you will know that there have been quite a number of them. I do not know exactly how many, as records are not easily accessible.

This month we will examine an unusual Nikon camera. As far as I can ascertain it has not been covered in any UK photographic magazine. It is often referred to as the Nikon Cloud Camera while others call it the Nikon Sky Camera. Indeed Sky Camera

is perhaps the correct description as it was designed for this purpose, to photograph the sky. The original purpose of this camera was to record, for the Japanese power company, lightning striking their electrical conductors.

The Nikon Sky camera is a splendid piece of equipment. Simply stated it consists of a 16.3mm f/8 Fisheye (or Fish-eye-Nikkor 1:8 f=16.3mm as is engraved around the outside rim of the lens) which is mounted onto the camera body. The camera accepts 120 (medium format) roll film. The Fish-eye-Nikkor is a fixed focus lens with five elements in four groups mounted in a Seiko SLV #0 shutter. It offers speeds from 1 second to 1/500 second plus M & X flash contacts. The lens gives a depth of field of 8 inches to Infinity at f/8. The aperture range is 3 stops: f/8, f/11 & f/16. The circular image projected onto the film is 22.5mm in diameter.

From production records at Nikon in Japan it has been established that 30 Sky cameras were manufactured, but only 18 were sold, which included a prototype. What happened to the remaining unsold cameras? To answer this we must look to the Japanese tax laws. Back then, Japanese companies faced severe financial penalties on any unsold equipment remaining in their inventory. The solution Nippon Kogaku came up with was to destroy the remaining stock and photograph the evidence of its



destruction. The shots and records were held for five years, thus avoiding a penalty.

Apparently a majority of the 18 cameras were sold in the US but at least one remains in Japan, resting in the JCI museum.

Due to the efforts of Nikon's US distributor, the Nikon Sky camera was loaned out to large press agencies, and magazines such as *National Geographic* and *LIFE*. Fisheye photographs started to appear in publications. Nikon, were as usual, quick to spot the potential of fisheye photography. The 16.3mm was the basis for the 8mm f/8 Fish-eye-Nikkor. This was the world's first 35mm fisheye lens. It appeared in 1962 for the Nikon F. Other camera manufacturers followed Nikon's pioneering example and fisheye lenses were soon to be seen on Canon, Pentax, Olympus and Zeiss cameras.

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