

*photo*WORLD

Vol 1 No1
Spring/Summer 2004



Photo by Karen Miller



KONICA MINOLTA

10% off repairs and servicing for Photoworld club members

The Konica Minolta Photoworld Club Camera Check Scheme runs all year round, taking the seasonal load off the service department. Service will give Club Checks 'absolute priority' and these will normally be accomplished within 3-4 days of receipt. This is great news but please be sure to allow a little more time – and please do not send equipment to the Kelso address.

As a Photoworld subscriber you have a permanent 10% discount off all repairs and servicing if you deal directly with Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Limited.

The Service Address is:
Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd
Service Department
Unit 7 Tanners Drive
Blakelands
Milton Keynes MK14 5BU.
Tel 01908 200400

If you ask for the discount, your membership status will be checked and validated. If this is disputed, you may ask the Service Department to check with us, and we will confirm your paid-up status or enable you to renew your subscription if has lapsed not more than six months ago.

Equipment under 1st year warranty can be sent in directly, accompanied by any document showing the date of purchase, including credit card statements etc, even if you have not returned your guarantee card. But you should always complete and return warranty documents after buying equipment.

Club Checks

The cost of a Club Check, inclusive of VAT and return insured carriage, is:

£18.68 for camera + lens
 £25.85 for all video and digital products

Club Check tests include shutter speed accuracy, aperture accuracy, metering accuracy, and focusing accuracy. They also include checks for correct electronic operation,

film transport, AF operation, self timer, flash synchronisation and all other key operational aspects of the camera. External cleaning of camera and lens is undertaken, along with loose dust removal.

Equipment which passes the tests will receive a **Test Certificate** and may qualify for the **Extended Warranty** (right). If problems needing repair are found, you will be contacted with an estimate – the Club Check cost is deducted from the cost of the repair if you decide to go ahead. You also get your 10% discount. See also new information about direct repairs, below.

Direct Repairs

If you know your gear needs to be repaired, remember that a repair always includes a full service and a 6 month guarantee on the whole item. If you have equipment which you think needs repair, you can send it for a Club Check service, enclosing your payment.

You can also send items directly to the service department for repair estimates outside this scheme. Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Limited will accept equipment directly from readers and provide estimates, it is not necessary to go through a dealer. If the estimate is not accepted then a charge of £5.88 is payable for return.

There is a difference between the Photoworld Club Check and a Service. The check may show that your shutter speeds and so on fall within ISO tolerances, but a Service may allow adjustment to better than ISO standards. It also allows lubrication, tightening of screws, cleaning and adjustments.

Information on this page is printed in each issue for your benefit – please use it.
 Call 01908 200400 for service!

Extended Warranty

The **Minolta Extended Warranty Scheme** is available on new equipment. However, you may be able to take out an warranty on a camera which has just been repaired, or overhauled. The warranty is an optional extension of the usual six-month repair guarantee to a full two years. This offer is administered and underwritten by Domestic &

General Insurance Company. Some parts for older models are now no longer available, and Konica Minolta have to restrict these warranties to the list below. If your equipment is more recent, but now out of warranty, call the Service Dept for advice on 01908 200400. If you wish to find out more about the warranty terms, ring Domestic & General's Helpline on 0181 944 4944.

Please note this is NOT the same number as for our Camera Equipment Insurance facility.

Please enquire to the Service Dept about earlier Konica products. We shall be publishing details for Konica owners in future *Photoworld* editions.



KONICA MINOLTA EXTENDED WARRANTY SCHEME

SLR BODY

Dynax 9, 7 and 5
 800si, 700si, 600si
 500si & Super
 505si Super
 300si, 303si
 404si
 X-700, X-370S

COMPACT

Zoom 70, 70EX
 Zoom 90, 90EX
 Zoom 105, 105EX
 Zoom 115
 Zoom 125
 Zoom 150
 Zoom Pico
 AF-25, AF-35
 F-25, F-35BF
 F 35ST Super

AF FLASH

5600HS
 3600HS
 5400HS
 1200AF Macro

AF LENSES

AF 100-300 (D)
 AF 24-105 (D)
 AF 75-300 (D)
 AF 28-80 (D)

AF 35-70/3.5-4.5

ACCESSORIES

VC-600, VC-700,
 VC-7, VC-6, VC-9

MD LENSES

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 MD 50/3.5 macro
 MD 135/2.8 tele
 MD 28/2.8
 MS 100-300/5.6-6.7
 MD 35-70
 MD 70-210
 MD 50/1.7
 also 220X flash

VECTIS

Vectis 40, 300, 300L,
 3000, 2000, 30, 25,
 260, 200, 20, 100BF,
 Weathermatic, GX-1,
 GX-2, GX-3, GX-4. Vectis
 S1, S-100, V lenses
 400RF, 22-80, 50 macro,
 28-56, 25-150, 56-170,
 80-240, SF-1 flash

DIGITAL

Dimage 7, 5
 Dimage S304
 Dimage E203
 Dimage E201

Dimage RD-3000

Dimage RD-175

Dimage 2330

Dimage 2300

Dimage V

Dimage 1500EX

Scan Multi, II, Pro

Scan Elite, II

Scan Speed

Scan Dual, II

Quick Scan, Plus

PHOTOMETERS

Flash Meter V Colour
 Meter II Colour Meter
 IIF Flash Meter III, IV
 Spotmeter F
 Spotmeter M
 Autometer IV-F
 Autometer III, IIIN
 Autometer III Flash

BINOCULARS

Activa: 8x42DWP,
 10x42WP, 7x35W,
 7x50, 8x40W, 10x50W,
 12x50W, 7-15x35,
 8-20x50, 8-22x27,
 10-30x27, Pocket
 8x25WP, Pocket
 10x12WP, 8x25FM,





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KONICA MINOLTA

photowORLD

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Our thanks to Laurie Moore, Paul Genge and colleagues at Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd for input and help; and our thanks also to Carole Trillian and former staff at Milton Keynes for many years of support in the publication of 'Minolta Image' from 1981 to 2004.

Whilst every care is taken of MSS and photographs submitted all submissions remain the responsibility of the sender. Return postage and packing must be included. The views expressed in this magazine are those of individual contributors and do not represent the views or policies of Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd unless otherwise stated. All offers and arrangements made by the Club are subject to availability and limited to paid-up subscribers of KONICA MINOLTA PHOTOWORLD unless specifically stated otherwise.

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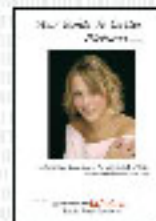


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A fresh start marks the Konica Minolta merger

Moving headquarters to the former Konica (UK) Ltd offices at Feltham, Middlesex, the new Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd retains the Minolta (UK) Ltd Milton Keynes premises for distribution and service.

The company's new combined logo – and variants for use in camera nameplates – uses elements of both the merging companies' corporate identities, which shared a very similar and familiar blue.

The Konica Minolta *Photoworld* magazine and Photoworld Club do not reflect this graphic style – we have our own – but we'll try to use it correctly in context. We shall not be shortening the name to initials, as there is a long history behind both Minolta and Konica.

The Konica colour spectrum symbol will continue to be seen on films and materials, but even the film is carrying the Minolta name too.

Our magazine, by changing name back to *Photoworld* – as it was known originally – marks the completion this April of the merger – and we look forward to a period of growth in readership and activities once again.

On this page or Konica Minolta's Feltham offices, a visual history of two logos combining, and a snapshot sequence of the changes in *Minolta Photoworld* and *Minolta Image*.

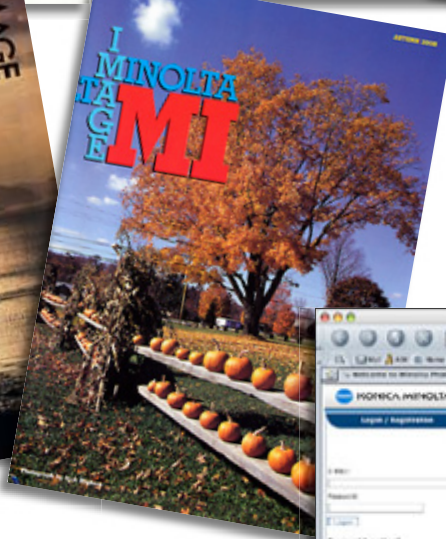
Look out, in future, for 'myphotoworld' – the Konica Minolta Internet Photo Printing service, which just happens to share that name again! Like the European Konica Minolta Photo World website, it's all fitting together very neatly!



30 years of changing styles



By 1974 the A5 size newsletter of the Minolta Club, edited by David Shaw, looked like a magazine. In 1979 it changed to A4. In 1981 (green cover) the present editors took over and later that year the name changed to 'Image' with the new Minolta logo (top right). In 1988 the logo was updated and we moved to Scotland. Autumn 2000 shows the final logo update.



Photoworld was adopted as the name for the Minolta Club of Great Britain magazine in the early 1970s, although it had been issued since 1966 (reaching number 28 by 1974). By coincidence the Konica Minolta internet printing service – logo above – echoes the name. So does the new European user website:

www.konicaminoltaphotoworld.com



Who's Who @ Konica Minolta Photo Imaging UK and the Photoworld Club

The headquarters of Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd are the former Konica offices at Feltham, Middlesex, close to Heathrow Airport, the M25 and London.

From 1980 on, Minolta (UK) Limited was based in Milton Keynes and the Service Department remains there along with distribution.

For Club members, your two key contacts will still be at Milton Keynes.

Bernard Petticrew is Technical Support Manager, and has a database of information on Minolta products going back to the SR system and beyond. He is the man to contact for advice on conventional (silver imaging) photography, and to obtain instruments manuals or literature. His direct line is 01908 208 352.

John Baker is Service Centre Manager. You should contact John with any queries about repairs or service in progress (it is not necessary to telephone before sending equipment in for a Club Service Check). He is on 01908 208 352.

The Konica Minolta Photoworld Club continues to be free to subscribers to *Konica Minolta Photoworld* (formerly *Minolta Image*). For membership queries or advice on photo technique and camera use, call **David Kilpatrick** on 01573 226032 or email iconmags@btconnect.com.

Paul Genge, who has dealt with digital technical help in the past and will be known to many readers, is now Product Manager of Konica Minolta UK, and digital helplines are 0870 0104107 for the UK, 1850 946478 for Eire. Feltham is now HQ for both the UK and Southern Ireland.

The address for Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd is:

**Plane Tree Crescent
Feltham**

Middlesex TW13 7HD
and the main switchboard number is 020 8751 6121.

We shall keep you updated on services for owners, contact names and telephone numbers. Please use the the Konica Minolta website, if possible, to look for solutions before calling directly.

The Photoworld Club

The Minolta Club of Great Britain was founded in the mid-1960s by Japanese Cameras Limited, and published its magazine *Photoworld* until shortly after the formation of Minolta (UK) Ltd, when the title was changed to *Minolta Image*.

With the merger of Konica and Minolta, and the existence of more than one other magazine called *Image*, the magazine has been returned to its original name and the club is now the Konica Minolta Photoworld Club UK.

The directors are **David and Shirley Kilpatrick**, who are independent of Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd. David and Shirley have been writing and editing photographic magazines and books for 30 years and are directors of Icon Publications Ltd, based in the Scottish Border town of Kelso.

You can email David via iconmags@btconnect.com, or telephone 01573 226032 during office hours, for subscription help and general photo advice.

Websites and email

There are Konica Minolta websites operated in the UK, Europe, the USA and Japan. The correct web address to use is: <http://www.konicaminolta.co.uk/> but since the merger the sites continue to develop, and separate areas still exist for Minolta and Konica. At the time of going to press you can also access www.minolta.co.uk and www.minoltaeurope.com directly.

Technical support, software and firmware downloads, product news and information are all available on-line.

You can download digital camera samples taken by David Kilpatrick by visiting <http://www.pbase.com/davidkilpatrick>

There is also a European owner

club site called **Konica Minolta Photo World** which requires registration (a simple process of filling in an on-screen form) to use. This is at: www.konicaminoltaphotoworld.com and is available in English, French and German. There are monthly competitions which can be entered on-line, together with all the latest product information, a range of technical background articles and some profiles of Konica Minolta users.

You can join a Minolta discussion group at www.yahogroups.com; fill in Yahoo membership, which is free, and you will find this group founded in 1998 now has nearly 5,000 members.

There is another Web Minolta mailing list called the Minoltians, available at www.theminoltians.com, with on-line galleries.



Konica Minolta has launched a whole new revitalised range of inkjet papers and speciality products including T-Shirt transfers, label sheets, professional media and double sided photo gloss. Look for the new branding in retailers now.



Bernard Petticrew, Technical Support Manager – 01908 208 352



John Baker, Service Centre Manager, 01908 208 352



Paul Genge Product Manager

Technical Help

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Film – 01908 208 352

Brochures

and details of your nearest stockists 0208 751 6121

Service and Repairs

01908 208 352

Photoworld Club

01573 226032

The Konica Minolta stand at *Focus on Imaging* has been voted 'Best Stand' by exhibition organiser, Mary Walker, setting the seal on what was an excellent show for the company.

"We were delighted. *Focus on Imaging 2004* is the first UK show at which we have exhibited since the merger, and we wanted the stand design to reflect the dynamism of the new, integrated company" says Laurie Moore, Sales and Marketing Director of Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd.

Focus on Imaging proved successful for Konica Minolta in sales terms too. According to Laurie Moore, interest was strong in all areas of their business, especially the new digital cameras, minilabs and inkjet paper on display.

"Our sales teams report that customers are looking forward to the launch of the new Digital SLR, tentatively called the Dynax 7D. On the photofinishing side, the new R2 Super 700 Compact minilab and the R1 Super 1400 together with the new Konica Minolta Kiosk system were extremely well received and we booked a long list of customers wanting further demonstrations at our Feltham headquarters. We were very pleased too, at the number of photographers who signed up for samples of our QP inkjet paper having seen it being used on both small and large format printers.

"All of us at Konica Minolta are now looking forward to a stimulating and successful year".

Wait for D-Day

With an autumn launch-date provisional, Dynax system DSLR is perhaps the most eagerly awaited product from the company (either company!) in the last 30 years.

Although the camera on show at *Focus* was not operational and could not be handled by the public, it gave a clear idea of the massive size of the review LCD screen on the back, the excellent layout of the controls, and the Dynax 7 based body.

The 'D7D' is expected to have a 1.5X factor CCD sensor – APS-C format, like most other professional DSLRs. The price suggested would place it above the level of cheap consumer DSLRs – as would the use of the Dynax 7 body – and its unique feature of Anti Shake built in to the body will make it a possible first choice option for photojournalists. Expect to see prices of secondhand high level Dynax lenses rise once the D7D is on the market, because a camera like this will be at its best

Konica Minolta Focus show debut wins 'Best Stand'



with 'G' or 'D' optics. The launch specification will be a 6 megapixel CCD but it is suggested that a full frame option may be made in future – or a larger size of APS size sensor. More interchangeable lenses, possibly matched to the smaller sensor format, are also planned.

The A to Z...

Reviewed in this issue, the 8 megapixel DiMAGE A2 is easy to forget as a new product, since your editors have been using one from Day 1 of availability. It is similar to the A1, but with a greatly enhanced electronic viewfinder and a new CCD. See pages 37 to 40 for a first test report on the A2. Next issue: add on wide and tele adaptor lenses!

There is also a Z2, which takes the same approach of enhancing the earlier Z1, going up to 4 megapixels and keeping the same impressive 10X zoom and brilliant ergonomics. This lightweight, handy zoom camera is made for travel and can be powered from ordinary AA batteries.

The X factor...

The original DiMAGE X was one of the classic designs in the development of digital cameras, and it is amazing to see how the line has developed.

The latest additions are the X21 and the Xg.

The X21 returns to the 2 megapixel standard of the original camera in an ultra-slim body – in fact it's very much an update of the first X. It has the same 3X optical zoom and fast start-up in a 24.5mm thick body, and adds functions to appeal to new digicam users, such as direct printing using PictBridge. It has unlimited time movie recording, a graphic user interface, Frame and Border and Side by Side image functions for direct printing, a slide show program with wipes, dissolves and fades. It's the X updated for cool young users!

The Xg – made in a range of colours – is a new ultra-slim variant on the pocketable design only 20mm thick, and still has a folded path 3X zoom. It's a 3.2 megapixel camera like the Xt, has a very fast 0.8 second startup, and includes modes such as Night Movie. It has PictBridge, and a range of special controls like Image Pasting to put picture-in-picture, and has an optional Marine Case.



... and the G Spot!

A different 'G' is the G series – formerly to have been Konica models – of G400, G500 and G600. These are exceptional cameras, very simply and neatly cased, which in tests so far as showing the highest



The Dynax 40 (back) and 60 have a brand new clean body design



resolution of any in their pixel classes. The G500 when tested by FOTO in Sweden resolved the same as a typical 6 megapixel DSLR. They are 4, 5 and 6 megapixel cameras.

At Focus Minolta also showed the neat updated Scan Dual IV scanner, two brand new designs of entry-level Dynax the 40 and 60.

The Scan Dual IV is a 3200 dpi scanner (which some claim is the perfect resolution) and handles 35mm and APS films. It has Auto Dust Brush dust removal as well as Digital Grain Dissolver and Pixel Polish.

The Dynax 40 and 60 are newly designed bodies with very light weight (the 60 is only 375g), good basic specifications and controls. They are D-lens compatible with advanced flash metering and the 60 motors along at 3 frames a second.



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photoWORLD gallery

Earn Konica Minolta film, inkjet paper & CD-R media with your pictures



We are pleased to continue the *Image Space* quarterly open reader competition under a new name, and with new rules and prizes, in Konica Minolta *Photoworld* magazine.

You may now enter pictures taken on Konica equipment as well as Minolta, and this is retrospective – vintage Minolta pictures were always eligible, and the same goes for vintage Konica.

You may also enter pictures from other camera brands made on Konica films and (if colour negative rather than slide) processed and printed by a Konica photofinisher, normally a High Street mini-lab using Konica paper and chemicals. See the new entry rules on page 12.

Each picture used will receive a prize of Konica Minolta supplies – E6 35mm slide film, 35mm colour negative film, inkjet paper or CD-R media. Film entry winners will be sent films, and digital winners will be sent paper or CD-Rs (or both). The prize packs are at the discretion of Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd.

As always, all entries remain your own property and we require only single rights use in the context of the *Photoworld Gallery* pages. Slides are returned (you must send return p&p); prints and digital entries are only returned if you ask for them to be, and enclose return p&p.

Right: 'Fallen Kaffir Lily' by John Wilson of Douglas, Isle of Man. John removed some debris from his garden pond before shooting with the Dimage A1, and a little more in Photoshop Elements afterwards! 1/125 f5.6, shot as TIFF. Facing page: at Beamish Museum, Co. Durham, by Roger Tate of Kendal. Roger used a 28-80mm lens on a Dynax 600si body with a polariser and 1A filter, using Ektachrome EBX100 film.





COLMAN'S
D.S.F.
MUSTARD





Facing page: the Weather Project at the Tate Modern gallery, photographed by Joseph Lee of Ilford, Essex. To make his 12 x 8" colour print, Joseph used Superia 400 colour negative film in his Dynax 600si fitted with 24-105mm Minolta D lens, exposing for 1/30th at f3.5 handheld.

Left: Snow on Sand Dunes, near Aberdyfi, by Andrew McCartney of Bala. Dynax 600si, 24mm lens, grey graduated filter plus polariser, HDC 100 colour negative film (from a 6 x 4" gloss print).

Below: and more weather! Alnwick Castle by Craig Elsbaw of Kendal. Craig set his Dimage 7Hi to full zoom at 200mm, and exposed at ISO 100 speed for 1/500th at f10.





Left: who needs nuts? By John Bacon of Clay Cross, Derbyshire. Minolta X-700 with 70-300mm zoom, f4.5 at 1/60th with EBX 100 slide film. Below: black and white from the Dimage A1, by Chris Mole of Danehill, West Sussex. Sculpture on Brighton seafront. 50mm equivalent focal length, 1/500th at f9, ISO 100, custom process for monochrome in-camera.

Photoworld Gallery Rules

You may enter a maximum of three slides, three prints and three digital images every quarter. Slides must be in non-glass mounts, clearly labelled with your return address on each slide, and protected in a plastic sleeve or wallet. Prints must be no larger than 12 x 8"/A4, on glossy photographic paper NOT inkjet paper, unmounted, with name and address and caption details on the reverse. Digital images should be on an ISO 9660 Mac/PC readable CD-R, in RGB JPEG or TIFF form, file resolution set to 300dpi and should be a minimum of 1600x 1200 pixels in size. A printed contact sheet, or reference prints, must accompany your CD.

Slides must be accompanied by return post and packing; prints and digital entries should be accompanied by return post and packing only if you require their return. Otherwise, they may be filed or destroyed as seen fit. Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (UK) Ltd and Icon Publications Ltd accept no financial responsibility for the receipt, safety or return of entries.

Suggested entry dates are before the end of June, September, December and March. You may send single digital entries consisting of a high quality JPEG from any Konica Minolta digital camera to iconmags@btconnect.com stating 'Photoworld Gallery Entry' in your email subject header, and including your postal address and all caption details in your email.



Beating the underwater ba

Underwater housings are made for the entire generation of Dimage X cameras from the X/Xi through to the new Xg – which is well suited to subaqua use with its LCD screen as the only viewfinder option.

Minolta pioneered recreational underwater cameras, under the Weathermatic name. There have been 110 film, 35mm film and APS film versions with true underwater capabilities and the entire APS 'GX' series was designed to be splashproof.

Digital photography has unique underwater advantages for the beginner. One of the main problems with all underwater photography, even at fairly shallow depths, is the turbidity (cloudiness) of sites; a second problem once you get just a few feet down is the lack of red wavelengths in the light, resulting in pictures which have blue-green appearance. The bright colours of fish, and subtle colours of corals and weed, can be entirely obscured by the loss of saturation and

Chris Kay took a Dimage Xt with underwater housing to Australia's Great Barrier Reef



balance. Chris Kay, who is the sales manager for a leading national photo lab in Glasgow, took a Dimage Xt 3.2 megapixel pocket digital camera with its DG 200 underwater housing on a holiday to Australia's Great Barrier Reef. He wanted a camera which would take fairly small files of good quality, as he didn't want to waste time visiting Internet cafés and getting CDs burned from memory cards. The Xt shooting normal quality JPEGs is ideal for this and fits dozens of images on a relatively inexpensive SecureDigital memory card.

The benefits of digital are seen when you get the images back home and edit them. *Photoshop's* 'Auto Colour' command instantly finds the missing colours from those pale blue-green shots, and if the result is too strong, you can just 'Fade' the effect. Most editing programs – including Dimage Viewer – offer a similar auto adjustment of the picture colours and contrast. However, for some shots leaving the

Pictures corrected using Photoshop Auto Colour adjust. Below: before and after adjustment. Background shot unadjusted camera JPEG.

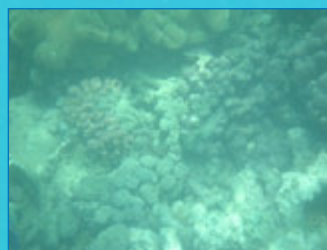


Photo by Jens Niebuhr for Konica Minolta

Carrier



The Marine Case MC-DG 200 for the Xt clips together round the camera and provides rear buttons for all the important functions – you can even review and delete pictures while on a dive.

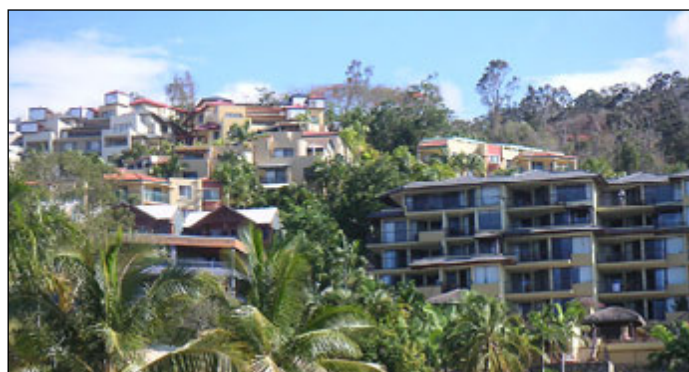
natural colour alone works much better. The blue background picture with the shoal of fish is an example – you would not want to remove this blue colour by auto adjustment.

Digital cameras underwater offer easier viewing using the rear LCD screen, while the memory card stores many more images than a single roll of film. You may not even need to open the housing for a few days. The LithIon battery used in the Dimage X series cameras is also capable of keeping going for days

rather than hours. Above water, the Xt out of its housing is easily carried in a shirt pocket and never gets in the way of relaxation or activity.

Chris's lab (www.loxleycolour.com to find out who they are) – makes prints from digital files directly and the JPEG format needs no adjustment for normal shots like those shown here; the colour and density are 'out of the camera'.

If you are diving this summer consider a Dimage X with housing!



On dry land the Xt delivers a good quality images from its 3X zoom lens, which has good geometry for distant subjects. It is better to leave the camera in its underwater housing for beach scenes, on board boats, or indeed in heavy rain or unusual conditions like dust storms. The housing has a window which allows a normal view out of water.



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Downhill all the way!

Shooting mountain bike trials

Duncan McEwan captures a sport with growing spectator potential

If you are looking to photograph an exciting sporting event in a scenic location, then downhill mountain biking can provide that opportunity. It is a relatively modern sport having developed rapidly over the last 20 years and some categories are now included in Olympic and Commonwealth Games.

Various meetings are held throughout Britain but the biggest event in this year's calendar is the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup to be held in Fort William on 5th and 6th June when 500 riders from 30 countries are expected to take part. This is the second stage in a series of 8, with other rounds being held in Spain, Belgium, Austria, Italy and Canada.

There are three disciplines – **Downhill**, **4-Cross** and **Cross Country**, each with its own characteristics to guarantee a good variety of images. Due to the length of the Downhill and Cross Country courses, spectators are so well spread out that there is no problem getting really close to the action. The short but spectacular 4-Cross track, however, attracts huge crowds and it is advisable to take up position well in advance – something I failed to do last year.

For the Cross Country event it is well worth arriving early in order to walk the course in advance of the race starting. This pinpoints the more dramatic or scenic locations as well as seeking good backgrounds and assessing the direction of the sun in relation to the way riders will be facing.

Long flat sections are perhaps the least interesting and it is much more productive to concentrate on bends, jumps and the steeper parts. Following a mass start, riders gradually get spread out. Working out if it is possible to get from A to

B before the riders come round for subsequent laps can prove advantageous. Where the opportunity arises, getting more than one cyclist in a shot is something to aim for as it gives a stronger sense of competition as well as aiding composition.

In the Downhill course, riders face a 1200 foot descent, at break-neck speed, encountering a diverse range of track surfaces and features – loose gravel, peat, solid granite, mud, bumps, jumps, steeply banked bends (berms), mostly on open mountain-side, some in woodland scrub.

The more extrovert riders can be expected to do a bit of showboating on the jumps as they approach the finishing line. Their skill and nerve has to be admired, although it looks decidedly suicidal to someone of more mature years! Downhill is a race against the clock with riders setting off individually and attacking the course as aggressively as World Cup skiers would treat their descent. Only single rider pictures can therefore be expected in this discipline.

The 4-Cross is a spectacular sprint, fitting four riders against each other on a short (250metre) downhill track littered with *jumps, berms, rollers, step-downs*, and *step-ups* every few metres. This is the best discipline for getting riders "in the air" and most races involve crashes or mishaps of some sort – the difficulty lies in knowing where these are likely to occur and with large crowds there is little chance of moving position.

Good lighting on faces can reveal expressions of effort, pain and concentration, adding to the impact of pictures, but heavy head helmets and face protection mean that faces are deeply shaded, if not partially obscured. However, the use of fill-in flash seems to be



Duncan McEwan shoots with Minolta Dynax 7 and 9 bodies using the 200mm f2.8 APO, Kodachrome, Ektachrome and Fujichrome slide films. He is the Konica Minolta Club Scottish Regional organiser, a popular lecturer, and judge.

quite acceptable in the sport and helps to overcome this problem.

Cyclists sitting vertically in the saddle can tend to appear rather static even if travelling quite fast, so it is best to look out for a more dynamic body language to convey a sense of speed or drama – for example, rider crouched over handlebars, angled body/bike when negotiating a tight bend, perhaps with an outstretched leg or with dust and stones being thrown into the air. Likewise, capturing riders out of the saddle on uphill stretches or catching wheels off the ground at some of the jumps can emphasise action.

One dilemma that constantly has to be addressed is whether to stay at the one location for the duration of a race or take in as many locations as possible. Staying put will result in all

pictures being very similar but will increase the chances of capturing the one-off dramatic spill. Moving around on the other hand will introduce more picture variety but maybe at the expense of missing that vital moment. It's a hard one to call and is very much an individual decision.

To fully exploit the opportunities, carry a range of lenses from wideangle to telephoto. The former are ideal for trackside shots while the longer lenses (eg 200mm-300mm), used at wide apertures, will limit depth of field and make riders stand out sharply against a more pleasing background.

Apart from providing good photography, it is an entertaining day out. Full scheduling details can be found at www.fortwilliamworldcup.co.uk





Mountain Bike Action by Duncan McEwan







Meet Karen's Zoo Crew!

It's surprisingly difficult to get really good shots at the zoo. For most of us, the bars and barriers are enough of a problem. Many animals don't like to be right out in the sunshine, and will keep well away from the visitor's lens as well. When they do come close, it is often with a turn of speed which surprises you.

For Karen Miller, zoo photography is a way of life with her Minolta Dynax cameras, and she has gone the whole distance to be a friend to a zoo, and gain privileged access to the animals. In return the zoo gets some cracking images as you can see here.

You might expect all this to be shot on transparency film, but in fact Karen uses colour negative film and these colourful crisp images are all from prints, ranging from 7 x 5 to 8 x 12 inches.

"I have been photographing the animals at Twycross Zoo in Leicestershire for many years now, and I thoroughly enjoy each and every visit", she tells us.

"No matter what the weather, sun or snow, a visit to Twycross Zoo is always a special occasion, both pleasurable and educational.

"Twycross Zoo is the leading primate zoo in the country, and has a breeding programme for threatened species. These breeding programmes play a vital rôle in well-run zoos today. Most of the animals at Twycross Zoo were captive bred either at Twycross or in another zoo.

"It is always a challenge to photograph a new zoo baby, and oh! how many times I have heard that comment about working with children or animals... these are children AND animals, and you need great patience here."

Zoo friends

Today, visits to zoos can be expensive for a family, though a solo photographer can afford the admission. One thing to consider is a season ticket, or a membership.

Here at *photoWORLD*, David and Shirley are members of the Royal Scottish Zoological Society, an annual £65 which is more than worth when admission to Edinburgh Zoo normally costs £8 a head plus £2 parking. With each visit at £18

for two, the annual membership is quickly covered and the benefits of a members' entrance and private room (with excellent sandwiches costing less than city cafés!) are thrown in free. So is admission to several other affiliated zoos, including Amsterdam and the Highland Wildlife Park.

Zoos benefit greatly from long-term annual family or personal memberships, and of course, if you have this any requests you make for photography beyond the normal confines are more likely to be considered.

While editing Karen's images we took a trip to the zoo to see just how difficult it is to get excellent shots. You need a fast lens, and top choices include the old AF 135mm f2.8, the 200mm f2.8 and the 80-200mm f2.8.

With such a fast lens, you can shoot through netting or bars at full aperture and they will 'disappear' due to the limited depth of field. With an ordinary f4 or f5.6 zoom, they will still be softened if you get close and make sure the unfocused image does not obscure a critical part of the shot like eyes.

Shooting through clean glass is made easier if you can obtain a flexible rubber lens hood. This can be placed in contact with the glass, gently, and the camera can be aimed without losing the contact. The hood will eliminate any reflections from the glass which might otherwise spoil the shot, and you can even use flash (where allowed). If you try to use flash through glass without a rubber lens hood sealing off the light, the picture will normally be ruined by the reflection of stray flash.

A fast film is very important, too, and though Karen has been able to limit herself to the range of 100 to 400 ISO, films such as Konica Centuria 800 and 1600 have excellent colour and moderate grain. The gain in sharpness from a fast shutter speed means pictures with these films have more fine detail. With flash, a regular 100 to 200 film can be used and the faster materials are no advantage.

A monopod is very useful as a support when shooting in zoos, or for any medium range wildlife pictures. Unless you are lucky enough to have a digital Dimage A1 or A2 with Anti Shake, hand-held telephoto shots



Left: hand-reared baby Orang-Utan 'Beau' photographed in August 2000
Right: sequence of hand-reared baby Bonobo addressing a ball in best Shakespearean fashion



in low light are a recipe for camera shake. You need patience, and having the camera supported by a monopod helps you wait for longer period for that elusive movement or expression. Tripods are not to be recommended unless the zoo is happy with their use; they can obstruct free passage and may even be a safety hazard. A monopod is always a better bet when crowds of people may be round you to hear talks or watch feeding time.

For the same reason, very bulky camera bags are not a good idea. A compact bag which just holds the lens and body you want – especially if like Karen your main lens is a very versatile wide ranging long zoom – will cause less interference with other people's pleasure.

"As we move into the world of digital cameras it is quite amusing to see small children standing by their parents and snapping away with the latest digital equipment, while I stand there with old-fashioned equipment", says Karen. We think she is being a bit unfair to film! It is not old-fashioned and her cameras are right up to date!

"My trusty Dynax 7si and Dynax 9 have always worked well for me and continue to do so – I'm just an old-fashioned girl!", she says.

Well, if these pictures are old-fashioned then give us the old way any time. They are ordinary glossy machine prints, and apart

from the composition, pin sharp focus and timing there is no special trick used to get the results.

Karen does have an Apo 200mm f2.8, the ideal lens for shooting through bars and wire; she uses a 24-50mm AF zoom as well, and her long lens choice is the excellent 100-400mm AF. She uses a monopod, and that little bit of information came to light AFTER we wrote the section on using monopods! She also has the 5400 HS flash, with its many advantages including high speed daylight fill in with the Dynax 9. The superb detail and lighting on many of these shots is helped by fill-in flash.

Karen uses colour negative film, and our recommendation for zoo shots would be to try Konica Super Centuria 400 when the light permits. The faster 800 film still produces 10 x 8 or 10 x 12 prints with fine grain, and anything with a higher ISO rating should only be used when light is very poor.

Our reproductions are from prints, for directly from negatives, as this reduces graininess.



*Left: Meerkat suckling young
Below: Tara, Asian elephant calf
Facing page top left: Jadzia, Asian lion
cub at Twycross Zoo. Top right: mother
and baby gorilla. Bottom: Asian lion-
ess and cub. More over the page!*



Karen's Zoo Crew



Karen's Zoo Crew

*Right: Langur monkey family
Below: Dhole cuba
Facing page: Sand Cat kittens*

*Do you have a special subject
you are expert in shooting? Why
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Konica Minolta Centuria Super colour film range

THE test prints from our trial set of **Konica Centuria Super** films, when they were launched two years ago, were stunningly good, regardless of what you think of the photography; our local studio had just taken delivery of a digital minilab with new C41 processor, and the 7 x 5s which this laser imaging machine turned out had a zero failure rate – 130 exposures, 130 perfectly balanced and exposed prints.

For this test, I decided to imitate the restraints of a typical 35mm compact camera but do so in style, using a 10 year old **Konica Hexar**. This was and is a remarkable camera, often forgotten; it has a 35mm $f2$ lens which can match a Leica Summicron, pinpoint autofocus, almost silent leaf shutter action and the most versatile programmed exposure system ever designed. You set your chosen aperture, in half stops from $f2$ to $f22$, and you choose a maximum hand-held speed (I used $1/30$ th). The camera uses your set aperture between $1/30$ th and its fastest shutter speed

David Kilpatrick tested Konica's negative films in the deep South



The Konica films I tested (above) are now being branded Konica Minolta (below). In this article, I refer to Konica only – but future films will be under the new name.



of $1/250$ th; if anything longer than $1/30$ th is needed it opens up the lens instead of giving a longer time, and if overexposure threatens, it stops the lens down.

This meant I could wander round using 1600 speed film with the lens set to $f8$, and duck into a darkened bar for one shot, then aim at a sunlit building for the next – the worst that could happen was a daylight exposure of $1/250$ th at $f22$ with 1600, which is a couple of stops over in midday conditions. In evening sun it was not overexposed at all.

The Konica camera turned out perfect exposures and critical corner to corner sharpness even at $f2$. With no flash, and a 'silent' shooting mode which reduces the motorized wind-on to a whisper, I could use it on the streets of New Orleans at night. The city has a reputation which persuades most visitors to lock their cameras in a hotel safe. We found it friendly and open.

Because the only noticeable difference between the films was the





The Konica 100 and 200 films are very similar, with subtle but strong colours and a warm neutrality as processed and digitally printed on a digital minilab system by Hector Innes of Kelso. Magnolia Ridge cypress swamp, Washington LA, bottom of left hand page: drugstore, above, and detail of old shop doorway in Washington, lower right. Hydrant in St Francisville, LA. Apertures for these were around f2.8 to 4 except the hydrant which was at f11.





Konica Centuria Super 400 is a very sharp and brightly saturated film its speed, and copes particularly well with mixed lighting. It also has a good latitude and can handle extreme contrasts without losing its 'punch'. Above and below left, attorneys' offices in St Francisville, photographed a minute or two apart by in very different lighting conditions at f8. Below right – Audubon Zoo, New Orleans, sea lion 'underwater viewing window' exhibit shot at f2.8.



grain, once processed, your choice would be determined purely by speed.

Centuria Super 200 would have handled almost everything well and the 400 is fine enough in grain for general use; it has beautiful clean colour, as good as any 100 speed. The 800 and 1600 are a touch more muted in colour but with digital printing even this is evened out.

Confronted with 100 per cent success from a big mixed bag of subjects on five different films, it is hard to make any judgment or analytical comment. There is not a single hint of muddiness, colour cast, excess contrast, mixed light failure or any other vice present in

any of the Centuria Super emulsions. Given that Konica films are often cheaper than other brands, all I can say is that if you use colour negative stock, you should try them. I have a particular respect for the 800 and 1600; all too often, I find myself with a versatile SLR and zoom kit, loaded with 100 speed film and limited to apertures like f3.5. A combination of 1600 speed film and the Hexar's superb f2 lens meant shooting in almost any light was possible, and every shot was sharp and crisp.

The new Konica Minolta brand means your camera now has 'official film' – and this is it!





We reached New Orleans at the end of a 10-day drive through Mississippi and Louisiana, and saved the 800 and 1600 speed films for the evening and night-time shots which the city promises. US customs officers in New Orleans agreed to allow the fast films through without X-ray, and were satisfied with a hand examination of the camera; they also asked if we had any other 1000-plus films which needed a hand search. Above, a corner of Bourbon Street late at night. The police station vehicles and officers on every block of the busiest area after darkness falls, and it is recommended that tourists stay within this area. Since our guest house was in the 'not recommended' wrong end of the French Quarter we could not comply, but encountered no problems. A straight exposure at f2.8, shutter speed unknown. Below, the French Market at dusk using the 1600 speed film. Twilight is almost as useful as daylight with this film and an f2 lens, and the simultaneous handling of shop window lighting, the bright sky and the dark building details would be hard to better even using a digital camera.





The Konica Hexar camera used for this test may be an old design (its successor the Hexar RF is now better known) but its unique programmed exposure mode covers all lighting conditions regardless of how you set your preferences. Even if set to f2, it would capture the daylight shot (top) on 1600 speed film correctly, by overriding the program and closing the lens down to f22. And if you set f22 and tried to grab the night shot below, it would open up first to whatever slow speed you designate (programmable between 1/4 and 1/30th) and then increase the aperture as required. In fact I set f22 when shooting in evening sun on Bourbon Street, and f2.8 for the bikers and their steeds opposite Pat O'Brien's bar (which was resisting the temptation to let them in). Shooting without flash ensured that no unwanted attention was attracted to the camera. No exposure compensation was used on this shot, but the Hexar offers very rapid \pm override as well as shutter-lock hold. I used both occasionally, but never bracketed any shots.

The 8MP DiMAGE A2. It makes the competition look a little shaky.



The DiMAGE A2. The only digital camera in its class with Anti-Shake.

Anti-Shake. A truly critical feature for successfully capturing pin sharp images in low light and telephoto situations. The A2 allows you to hand-hold down to 3 shutter speeds slower than all the other cameras in its class, none of which have this unique stabilisation system.

8 million pixels plus high quality image processing. The combination of the high pixel count 2/3" CCD and the advanced LSI delivers higher quality images – sharper detail, richer colours, better white balance, contrast and the suppression of noise in low contrast areas.

High precision GT glass lens. The all glass 28-200mm APO lens has been designed exclusively for digital photography. 16 elements in 13 groups, including 2 AD elements to reduce flare, ensure the image reaches the CCD as seen by you.

Brighter, sharper EVF. The ultra-sharp super fine EVF offers nearly 4 times the

*Windows is a Trademark or Registered Trademark of Microsoft.



resolution than a conventional electronic viewfinder. With over 922,000 pixels, it's not surprising that the preview and playback are amazingly sharp, smooth and flicker free.

Fastest Autofocus in its class. Advanced 3D AF compensates for shutter lag through Predictive Focus Control, constantly tracking your subject. Pick up the Dimage A2 and in less than 1/5th sec. the 3D AF starts to 'lock on' to the subject.

High quality movie. 30fps at 544 x 408. At 30fps the 544 x 408 pixel resolution records

TV quality clips. Anti-Shake, through its 7x zoom range, High Quality and Night Movie modes mean you'll be editing the "Director's Cut" on the Ulead VideoStudio™ software included.

Dimage A2: the heart of an impressive system. Equipped with high speed USB 2.0 output and AV/TV connectors as standard, the A2 also has PictBridge built-in for direct camera to printer printing.

Optional system accessories include: 22mm and 300mm Optical Conversion Lenses, BP400 Vertical Control Grip and a range of dedicated Flash Guns. Dimage Capture™ software can expand control to your Windows™ Desktop.

Check out the Dimage A2 for yourself and discover why it makes the competition look more than a little shaky.



DiMAGE A2

www.konicaminolta.com/dimage
The essentials of imaging

Club Events & Activities 2005

HIGHLAND SPRING WEEKEND

13th– 15th May, 2005

MONESS COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL, ABERFELDY

MONESS HOUSE and Country Club has proved to be an ideal base for photographic weekends, with comfortable en-suite accommodation and good food, combined with a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Instead of the customary October weekend, the course gives the opportunity to appreciate the delights of springtime as the beautiful Perthshire landscape comes to life. The course starts with dinner on Friday 13th at 7.00pm and concludes with afternoon tea at 4.00pm on the Sunday. Aberfeldy lies in the heart of Highland Perthshire. Within easy reach are Lochs Tummel, Rannoch and Tay, The Queen's View, Pitlochry, Killiecrankie and lovely Glen Lyon, while the Birks o' Aberfeldy are just across the road from the hotel. Mountains, moorland, rivers and waterfalls provide other attractions in this scenically rich area. The aim will be to provide as many picture-taking opportunities as possible, as well as giving instruction in the techniques of landscape and general outdoor photography. There will be evening lectures and an opportunity to assess participants' work.

Price: £200.00 for 2 nights dinner, bed and breakfast, picnic lunches, Sunday afternoon tea and inclusive of course fee and VAT. There is a £10.00 per night single room supplement. A booking deposit of £50.00 is required, payable to Duncan McEwan.

LIGHT AND LAND

– ROMANTIC LOCHABER MOORINGS HOTEL, BANAVIE

21st – 25th MAY, 2005

THIS 4-DAY photographic holiday/course covers one of the most dramatic and varied parts of the West Highlands for landscape photography. It will be based in the Moorings Hotel at Banavie, near Fort William and from where it will be possible to explore such scenic gems as Glen Nevis, The Great Glen and Caledonian Canal, The Road to the Isles (Glenfinnan, Arisaig, Morar and Mallaig), Castle Stalker and Loch Linnhe, as well as Glen Coe and Rannoch Moor. Travel during the course will be by minibus.

Full details are in the 2005 Light and Land brochure. For a copy, telephone 01432-839111 or email contactus@lightandland.co.uk Website is www.lightandland.co.uk



Elibank Tower near Peebles, Scottish Borders, by Duncan McEwan

INVERNSNAID PHOTOGRAPHY CENTRE

3rd-8th JUNE 2005

DUNCAN McEwan will lead another five-day course on colour landscape photography at the highly popular Inversnaid Photography Centre on Loch Lomondside. The extended duration of this course allows a more comprehensive coverage of landscape techniques. The Centre has its own E-6 processing facilities, giving the opportunity to view work taken during the day. Inversnaid is renowned for its superb food and relaxing atmosphere. Much of the time will be spent in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs area, Scotland's first National Park, with the possibility of a visit to Glen Coe/Glen Etive/Rannoch Moor.

Telephone 01877-386254 or email info@inversnaidphoto.com for the full Inversnaid brochure. Website is www.inversnaidphoto.com

HARRIS AND LEWIS - "INVERNSNAID AWAY"

21st-28th SEPTEMBER 2005

EXPLORE the beauty of Harris and Lewis in the remote Outer Hebrides. Marvel at the contrast between the east and west coasts of Harris - the former a landscape of barren rock and peaty lochans, while the latter has some of the most stunning stretches of sandy beaches to be found anywhere. Lewis offers fantastic variety in its coastal scenery - beaches, sand dunes, machair, sea cliffs, sea stacks and boulder shores. Inland are extensive, bleak peat moorlands broken up with numerous lochs and lochans. Step back in

time by visiting the famous standing stones at Callanish, the Pictish broch at Carloway as well as the many derelict and abandoned croft houses that dot the landscape. Good pictures will not be hard to come by.

E-6 processing will be carried out on-site by Inversnaid staff. Travel during the course will be by minibus.

Telephone 01877-386254 or email info@inversnaidphoto.com for the full Inversnaid brochure. Website is www.inversnaidphoto.com

AUTUMN IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS PHILIPBURN COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL, SELKIRK

INSTEAD of the usual Springtime weekend, this will give the opportunity to enjoy the glory of Autumn in the lovely Scottish Borders. Enjoy the luxurious comfort and superb cuisine of this privately owned country house hotel, located on the outskirts of the Border town of Selkirk. All bedrooms are en suite. An excellent conference room will be used for lectures and talks, although the emphasis will be on practical instruction out of doors. The course starts with dinner on Friday 7th October at 7.00pm, concluding with afternoon tea at 4.00pm on Sunday. The Border countryside offers great scope for landscape photography with many locations within easy reach of Selkirk - Ettrick and Yarrow Valleys, St Mary's Loch, River Tweed, Eildon Hills, Teviotdale, Smailholm Tower and Lochan, as well as the Border Abbeys at Melrose, Dryburgh and Jedburgh.

Price: to be confirmed

A booking deposit of £50.00 is required, payable to Duncan McEwan.

LIGHT AND LAND

– HIGHLAND AUTUMN MONESS HOUSE HOTEL, ABERFELDY

21st – 25th OCTOBER, 2005

THIS is an opportunity to experience and capture autumn in an area of the Highlands that undoubtedly ranks as one of the top locations in the whole of Scotland for autumnal colour. Particularly impressive are the golden birch trees around Loch Tummel and Loch Rannoch, the mature beechwoods in Glen Lyon and at Killiecrankie while the eastern edge of Rannoch Moor provides a more wilderness location.

Apart from wonderful colour, dramatic and varied moods can be experienced at this time of year – morning mist, stormy skies, rainbows and frost can be reasonably expected and even the first snowfall of winter on the mountains is not uncommon. Travel during the course will be by minibus.

Full details are in the 2005 Light and Land brochure. For a copy, telephone 01432-839111 or email contactus@lightandland.co.uk Website is www.lightandland.co.uk

Details of all courses and meetings can be obtained from:

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fsnet.co.uk

Peter Karry show

PETER KARRY whose article on fisheye lenses appears in this issue is one of Konica Minolta's most dedicated slide show speakers visiting camera clubs.

You can catch him on **April 26th 2005** (Tuesday), at Maidstone Camera Club – with 'Creative Colour'. The club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall, St Andrew's Road, Barming, Maidstone, 7.45pm. Contact: Margaret Lloyd, 01622 672492.

Konica Minolta Photoworld subscribers are admitted to our sponsored lectures at camera clubs on the same terms as the club members. The clubs welcome new members if you are local to them!



Size, speed and stamina: the Dimage A2

Making an 8 megapixel version of the now-classic Dimage 5, 7 or A series design was not originally in Minolta's plans. At the time of the Dimage 5 and 7 launches, the optical team said that the new 28-200mm equivalent 7.2-50.6mm f2.8-3.5 APO GT zoom was designed to cope with a future resolution of 7 megapixels.

There is not a lot of difference between 7 and 8, and I first tried the A2 my instinct was to compare the field of view with my Dimage 7Hi. What if the sensor was a little bigger? The 7Hi was supposed to be a 1/1.8 inch format, and the A2 a 2/3 inch.

No such luck! It seems that the 1/1.8 inch size must always have referred only to the Dimage 5, and all the other cameras in the series have used the same 2/3 size for the their sensor whether 5 megapixels (7, 7i, 7Hi, and A1) or 8 (A2). The field of view remains exactly the same.

The 28-200mm is said to have been redesigned, though examination of internal reflections does not show a change of optical unit. The A2 zoom action is definitely better, and the lens feels more rigid. We can assume the redesign is intended to improve accuracy and performance to cope with the extreme demands of an 8 megapixel 2/3 inch sensor.

To clarify how incredible this is, the 2/3 sensor is roughly 1/16th of a 35mm frame or 1/4 the size of a typical digital SLR 6 megapixel sensor. If you packed a 6 megapixel sensor to the same density, it would be a staggering 32 megapixel device, and no such item exists even for full 35mm frame models. The largest sensor made is 13.7 megapixels.

Demanding a resolution of almost 400 cycles per millimetre from the lens, the A2's sensor is within 20 per cent of the limit of optical performance for conventional lenses. It also benefits from Noise Reduction processing when shooting at ISO 200 or higher, but many users will leave Noise Reduction set ON permanently. One result of this is that pictures from the A2, when viewed at 100 per cent size on screen, may not look as sharp as pictures from an A1 or 7-series. Although more detail is definitely present – lettering

David Kilpatrick tests Konica Minolta's digital flagship



The Konica Minolta Dimage A2 is the first camera to carry the new double-barrelled name. Many aspects of the body have been redesigned.



With tilting finder and screen like the A1, further control refinements make it the fastest 7/A series model to use yet, with the best 'feature set' of all the new 8 megapixel rivals. Start up takes under 2 seconds and shutter release is faster than most film SLRs.

can be read which is illegible in a similarly composed 7Hi shot in my own tests – the image with Noise Reduction does not look as clean.

One unique feature of the A2 is RAW+JPEG, a professional shooting method which allows a JPEG to be created along with your 'digital negative' RAW file. This really taxes the processor power and can't be used with continuous shooting. Generally, I found the JPEG compression to give a ragged or uneven appearance, not visible in a normal print but no match for shooting RAW and exporting a top quality JPEG from the Viewer application.

The TIFF files saved in-camera are Huffman (losslessly) compressed but once again if Noise Reduction is turned on, there is a visible loss of fine detail.

Where the A2 shows its strength is in shooting RAW files and converting these to TIFF (or indeed JPEG) on the computer. The supplied *Dimage Viewer 2.3.2* software should not be used to judge the best quality from the A2, and a newer version (2.3.3) is downloadable from Konica Minolta websites. This makes a visible difference to the fine structure of the image, reducing noise while enhancing detail. It will no doubt be on the CD in future shipments of the camera, but if you buy the A2 and get v2.3.2 with it, make it your first priority to download and install v2.3.3 or later. The latest Adobe *Photoshop CS Camera Raw Plug-In* (v2.1) supports A2 .MRW files and gives excellent results with a range of seven different image size settings.

Reasons to be cheerful

I did not want to wait for a loan camera when the A2 became available at *Focus on Imaging 2004*; Konica Minolta were moving offices, many staff changes were taking place, and I made a decision to buy at the show.

In past years, I have spent two or three thousand on lab bills and film. Since I started shooting digital I have become very mean, and my lab bill fell to £30 for last year. Of course, I buy inkjet inks and paper, and CDs, and even new CompactFlash cards – but none of this adds up

to the same. So £699 for a camera does not seem excessive, even once a year. And we needed two cameras between Shirley and myself.

We shoot digital pictures for the same reason we once shot 35mm – they go into a picture library, and they sell. We do not have many slides left in libraries now, and we're starting to place pictures on-line through a British agency, **alamy.com**. At first this was an experiment, using the 14 megabyte TIFF files created by the 7 series cameras. In the first year-and-a-bit, with just 117 images filed, a total of five sales notched up over £200 and statistically that means Alamy is an excellent service. You would be very lucky indeed to make five sales from that number of slides in a library in the first year.

Alamy, however, changed their policy on digital camera files and now ask for them to be interpolated up to at least 48 megabytes of TIFF (8-bit, RGB). This involves upscaling a Dimage 7 series file by 2X, taking it to 56Mb, but really pushing the limits of image quality in the process.

The 8 megapixel A2 offers a 24 megabyte TIFF file directly, and this needs only a 50 per cent interpolated image size boost to reach the 48Mb figure which Alamy want. Initially, working with Viewer 2.3.2, I was disappointed. I could not for certain claim my upsized files were better than those from Dimage 7Hi shots. With *Viewer 2.3.3* things changed. I prefer to use the Soft setting for sharpness, as any artificial enhancement of edges is not liked in the image-library market.

You should not in any case expect 8 megapixels to be *vastly* superior to 5. It's only a 66% increase in image sensor area, and that's a 33% increase in linear resolution, as I'll explain later.

Field life

Since I skipped the A1, I have moved straight from a camera with very high battery consumption to one which lasts all day, then all day again, and a week later. The NiMH batteries I use with the 7Hi are terrible for draining themselves unless used daily. The LithIon battery for the A2, though only 50 per cent higher in capacity, offers more than double the shooting time (or number of shots) and keeps its charge for weeks.

This means I no longer have to worry about picking up the camera and finding it dead. I must obtain a second rechargeable cell (essential) but my battery belt pack is no longer going to be vital for a day's shoot. The same does of course apply to the A1



Above: by turning off Noise Reduction in the camera, and using the ISO 800 setting, you can create an attractive film-like grain. This section does however represent part of a 12 x 16 print and you might need to crop and enlarge to produce a graphic result. Below: shooting RAW at 2.7 fps for a three-frame burst produced this image at 1/125th – Anti Shake keeps the rocks sharp, but the otter is too fast! Right: consumerism and waste, advertising versus reality. The full image area of an A2 file reproduced at 300dpi exactly. ISO 64, lens set to 10.9mm, 1/250th at f7.1 – imported to Adobe Photoshop CS using the latest Adobe Camera Raw 2.1 plug-in. You can see here the exact level of image distortion, vignetting, and sharpness of detail present in an A2 file. USM 200%/r1/l2 applied for reproduction.



which uses an identical LithIon cell.

A replacement for my 10 gigabyte ImageTank file storage device is going to be called for, though. The USB 2.0 connection to my iBook laptop is so fast it's tempting just to take that on trips, but I much prefer a portable storage device with a card reader. The files are very large, and the camera will read 'Fat-32' formatted media which means you can fit 2Gb, or even the new 4Gb, CF cards. My 512Mb card fills up too quickly!

In bright daylight, the new 922,000 pixel viewing screen can be a bit low in contrast but presents a very finely detailed view. It is possible to check focus accuracy, see small details and expression changes. Switching from the 30 frames per

second 'high quality' refresh rate to a 60fps 'fast' option lets you track action – with outstanding AF speed – and still have a higher quality view than the earlier cameras offer. Indoors, or in normal daylight, the finder is easier on the eye. It's only when sun and surroundings are glaring that you might need to adjust the screen's brightness setting.

Because of the fine quality of the screen, it also provides a far better idea of colour and contrast adjustments. In darkness – or nearly so – it can be switched to a high gain monochrome mode and acts like night vision.

Generally the controls of the A2 are superior to previous models, and all response times are fast – 2

seconds to start up, but after that almost instant for every main function, including a review of pictures taken even in RAW mode. The only criticism I have is that the Power On/Off button, in the centre of the Shoot/View/Movie mode switch on the rear, requires only a very light touch and I have often found the A2 switched on by touching clothing or the interior of the camera bag.

Unique features

When comparing the A2 against rival 8 megapixel cameras, rather than against earlier Minolta models, it is easy to forget that no other camera offers 100-800 ISO speeds with efficient noise reduction, a 922,000 pixel EVF, or shutter speeds to 1/16,000th, or indeed Anti Shake.

Some rivals have a faster lens, closer focusing, or more motordrive frame capacity (the A2 will shoot three RAW frames only at 2.7 frames per second – fastest in the class – before needing a 20 second breather for the card to receive the into). But if you study all the information and reports, you discover very quickly that the Konica Minolta A2 is the highest specified camera all round and has more unique features.

I urge some caution if you read on-line test reports. *DPreview*, for example, states that the distortion at 28mm setting is 1.3 per cent. They conclude this from a shot taken of a test card at close distance. Anyone who has used the 7.2-50.6mm GT lens will know that barrel distortion at the wide-angle end is a function of focus distance – it's very noticeable on the macro setting, but negligible for infinity subjects and most architectural interiors. Even 1.3 per cent is not bad but the truth is the 28mm setting matches the very best 35mm film camera zooms and beats any 28-200mm I've tested!

Colour and sharpness

The A2 allows you to shoot using **sRGB** colour space in either standard or vivid modes (these are NOT different colour spaces – they are different interpretations of colour, within the same space, sRGB). You can also shoot using **AdobeRGB**, which is a much wider ranging colour model and desirable for professional work. It's possible to embed an AdobeRGB profile in the file at the camera stage, and this is useful, since without that profile any third party has to guess the colour settings on your picture.

Relative to the Dimage 7Hi, the colour is generally a little more saturated and film-like, so less work is needed to remove that



Improving the Interface

THE SETUP menus on the A2 are so much improved compared to the earlier cameras that anyone owning – for example – a 7Hi for use with studio flash will find the options invaluable. In this case, you can set the 'Monitor Amplification' either to reflect exposure corrections, or to provide comfortable viewing, when working in automatic modes; and further set it to either show the effect of manual exposure, or provide a normal image, in manual mode.

The Noise Reduction which is important when using ISO speed of 200, 400 or 800 can be turned off – and really should be when using ISO 64 or 100 if you want top quality fine detail sharpness. Some reports, especially on internet sites, have made the mistake of assessing the A2's image resolution with Noise Reduction turned on.

The two control wheels can have any function you choose assigned to them, and in auto modes one of the most useful custom settings you can make is to assign the +/- over-ride control to one of the wheels. You then can fine tune exposure without having to press a button, instantly, at any time. Overall, I have found the set-up choices on the A2 make such a difference compared to the 7Hi and earlier models. The Menu system is also very easy to navigate with only a few commands which call for a dip into the instruction book.

over-smooth, slightly flat look which digital capture often produces.

Colour aberrations are a problem in digital files generally, but the GT lens is so good that chromatic aberration does not intrude, and what there is at the edge of the field. Purple fringing of bright edges near the limits of the field, due to CCD microlens structure, can be reduced by stopping down. Purple fringes may appear at full aperture, but if you set A (or manual) and ensure you are closed down to *f*5.6, they disappear.

The Dimage A2 benefits all round from working at apertures like *f*5.6 and *f*8, instead of letting the camera set full aperture or one stop down all the time. While it will stop down to *f*11, useful for studio flash, it is not desirable to use this smallest aperture as it limits lens resolution. The best working aperture to pick is around *f*4.5 to *f*8, regardless of focal length. At 28mm, it cuts out the purple fringe effect; at 200mm, it ensures optimum sharpness.

I prefer to turn sharpness in the camera menus down to -1 rather than the normal 0 setting. Most users will leave the 0 setting as printing direct from cards, a typical application today, benefits from the extra bite.

As for the colour management choices, if you shoot RAW you automatically get the full gamut the camera is capable of. If you shoot TIFF or JPEG, the AdobeRGB choice retains all this information.

If you select sRGB – either Natural or Vivid – the colours will be proportionally changed to fit the typical limits of a computer screen. *Viewer 2.3.3* has full colour management and now includes an sRGB based standard printer profile which matches many photo minilabs.

Bigger, or better?

There are two ways of using the A2's extra pixel count. The most obvious is to make larger prints. The difference is not enormous. The A2 file is 2448 x 3264 pixels; the earlier 5 megapixel models are 1920 x 2560 pixels. That's the same as a 10.6 x 8 inch print compared to an 8 x 6, a 33 per cent linear size increase.

As most people make 10.6 x 8 prints on A4 paper already, and this is the most common inkjet size, what the A2 does is provide a higher level of detail. The extra 33 per cent linear resolution is used to make a sharper print of the same size.

If you regularly pushed your 5 megapixel camera to make 12 x 16 or A3 prints with perfect results, then the A2 will improve them, or let you attempt a 20 x 16. Not that you can buy 20 x 16 inkjet printers or paper very easily!

The A2 also lets you crop the picture. You can select an in-camera crop which reduces the picture to a 35mm 2:3 ratio instead of the squarer 3:4 ratio of the full sensor area. You can also crop when processing the image, giving you the effect of a 260mm zoom on a 5 megapixel camera.

The A2 always shoots RAW 8 megapixel files, but you can choose smaller sizes including 5 megapixel if you save to TIFF or JPEG. There does seem to be a quality gain, and shifting down to 5 megapixel size means you can enable the digital zoom with no quality loss. The 1600 x 1200 2 megapixel image size is very cleanly rendered by the camera and gives you an additional 2X zoom with fine quality – a 28-400mm.

Using a modern LCD projec-

tor to show your work, instead of making prints, these smaller image sizes are quite useful. Combined with Anti Shake and Digital Zoom, the 2 megapixel resolution is great for shooting digital slide shows or TV presentations.

In the *Dimage Viewer 2.3.x* application, you can up or down size a RAW file. With the 5 megapixel cameras, the option is 2X either way. Interestingly, you can't enlarge an A2 file any bigger than a 7-series/A1 file. The top limit of output file size is always 3840 x 5120 pixels, a 56Mb image, regardless of whether you are reading 7, A1 or A2 files to start with.

One way of using the A2 to obtain very high quality is to set a reduction to 5 megapixel size from the RAW file, in *Dimage Viewer*.

Other modes

The A2 supports very high quality TV resolution 30 frames per second video capture with sound, and can be used a digital camcorder. Anti Shake will function in the movie mode, and unlike the Z-series cameras, having a manual zoom lens means you are able to change zoom while filming.

There is additionally an unlimited high speed shooting mode with 7 frames per second of top quality 640 x 480 JPEG, which furthermore permits a 4X digital zoom factor so that your lens become an 800mm equivalent. Although this is just a regular computer screen resolution, suitable for web or video editing uses rather than printing, continuous 7fps shooting has specific uses for wildlife, sports and technical photographers. It is the perfect speed for analysing dance, gymnastics, golf swings, fishing casts and other movements which require practice.

Untouched...

Being a very simple photographer, more interested in the subject than the technique, I tend to leave my cameras set on 'Program' mode and just point and shoot. I do activate the Grid Screen on the viewfinder to help line up compositions, I do use the histogram, and I change exposure over-ride, contrast and colour controls. Shooting RAW means not needing to worry with these because it's all handled in the *Viewer* software.

I do not use a separate on-camera flashgun, but I shoot with studio flash, and the A2 proves even better than any other model for this (there is a menu setting to give the viewfinder a fixed gain instead of dynamically changing with lighting). Wireless flash is an alien world to me, and so for that

matter is the use of shutter speeds like the shortest 1/16,000th exposure.

The Anti Shake remains switched on, but a few tests show that you can obtain better results with a tripod and no Anti Shake when time and circumstances permit. In fact a tripod becomes even more essential with this high resolution camera. It is 33 per cent more sensitive to camera shake than a 5 megapixel camera to start with.

I've experimented with ISO 800, a setting I normally only use for concerts or night shots, and conclude that it has a very nice grain structure. In fact, it's a setting I might use deliberately for a special effect, turning the Noise Reduction off. It is not unpleasant at all and looks like real film grain, not that digital mushy noise you so often see.

I will leave it to others to show us the best that the A2 can manage. In the meantime, bear in mind that your A1 or 7 series is not suddenly made redundant by the larger image size, which requires special care to yield the best results. Used without this care the A2 is still superior to the older cameras, with some major refinements in the viewfinder, autofocus, speed of operation, card compatibility, controls and body design. These aspects alone may give it all the appeal you need; the viewfinder was enough to persuade Shirley. Her eyesight has never agreed with the earlier models but she loves the A2. That what's a trebling in density of screen pixels can do!

The boffins at A. N. Other digital manufacturer, producing a £1,000 5 megapixel rangefinder style semi-pro model, are on record as doubting whether any maker could afford to fit viewfinder displays like that of the A2 because it would add too much to the cost of each camera.

At £300 less than this rival's offering with its 235,000 pixel viewing system, the A2 has put paid to that excuse for low resolution EVFs once and for all. Of the four other 8 megapixel EVF based cameras launched at the same time as the A2, not one has a finder exceeding the old 235,000 standard. Two are still stuck with USB 1.1 only, not the considerably faster USB 2.0; three use only sRGB for non-RAW files and throw away over half their colour information to do so; not one will shoot as fast as 2.7fps in RAW mode.

Overall, on comparison of features, weight, size, controls, and cost the A2 is ahead of some very advanced competition and I do not regret my snap decision to invest in one of the first sold in the UK.





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*35mm equivalent.

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