

BOOK REVIEW

Nikon: A Celebration

Brian Long

The Crowood Press Ltd., Wiltshire, U.K., 2006;

224 pages, \$65

Shutter Release, November 2006

Nikon: A Celebration should be greatly appreciated by enthusiasts with an attachment to the marque as well as admirers of classic photographic equipment. The book is a treasury of learned detail spiced with splendid photographs of timeless Nikons, old ads and all kinds of interesting tidbits.

Authors of camera histories have learned that care has to be taken to make such books lively, rather than encyclopedic and tedious. This book is no exception. Brian Long intersperses his colorful tome with historical anecdotes and memorabilia, creating a literal and pictorial celebration of Nikon while offering an abundance of quantitative detail in comprehensive annexes.



Nikon M (1949)

The early history of Nikon is interesting and somewhat unexpected. Nippon Kogoku Kogyo KK (Japan Optical Manufacturing Co. Ltd.) was created in July 1917. But Nikon would not produce its first camera until 1947. Up to that point, Nikon produced telescopes, periscopes, binoculars and rangefinders. . .and lenses. Actually,

Nikon and Canon had a symbiotic relationship. Nikon produced all the lenses for Canon cameras until 1948, up to the time when Canon decided to manufacture its own lenses, and Nikon its own cameras.

Nikon's first production lens for conventional cameras was the 120mm f/4.5 Anytar, introduced in 1931. Nikon lenses equipped the sterling Canon "Hansa" rangefinder camera of the late 1930s, for which were available the bright Nikkor 50mm f/3.5 and f/2 lenses.

Nikon's first camera, the premier ad for which appeared in October 1947, was the aptly named Nikon I. The instrument was a rangefinder camera (Nikon's first SLR would appear 12 years later). The Nikon I featured an innovation that didn't last—a 32x24mm frame, instead of the standard 36x24mm format; the shorter aspect ratio produced 40 frames per standard roll.

The Nikon M, the company's second camera, came out in 1949 with the nearly universal 36x24mm frame for standard 35mm photography. The Nikon S soon followed with flash synchronization. The company established its first office in the U.S. at 277 Fifth Ave. in New York City in late 1953 (a photograph of which is duly provided). Innovation followed innovation. Shock and noise-reduction padding protected the Nikon SP. The Nikon S3, introduced in 1957, included a built-in exposure meter. A 135mm telephoto lens was produced for Nikon rangefinders (telephoto lenses for rangefinder cameras being relatively rare).

Finally in 1959, Nikon introduced its first SLR (single-lens reflex) camera, the Nikon F, with automatic returning mirror. Nikon was several years behind other manufacturers in innovating an SLR, but its product was peerless. The camera offered mirror lockup (to minimize vibration in stationary photography) and depth-of-field preview.

The Nikon F acquired a sterling reputation. National Geographic selected the camera for its Mt. Everest expedition in 1963.

The contemporary Nikon F6 film camera, produced since 2004, descends from the Nikon F. Nikon's evaluative exposure program, which reportedly can recognize a composition of a person on a horse or camel, and properly expose for the person (among other capabilities!) is considered the industry leader in "intelligent" programmed exposure, and available on nearly all the company's film and digital cameras.

Speaking of digital, *Nikon: A Celebration* spares no details. All the models are elaborated, from the Coolpix to professional instruments. The Nikon digital D1 camera was introduced in September 1999 (how time flies!) with impressive 2.7MP resolution. The D1X came out in 2001 with 5.3MPs. The last introduction covered in the book, the D2X (January 2005) offers 12.4MPs.

Nikonos underwater cameras, which date from 1963, are elaborated in depth and richly illustrated as well.

I was impressed by the thorough tabular annexes setting out a substantial amount of information for not just Nikon cameras but lenses, speedlights and other accessories. It appears that the widest Nikon rectilinear lens (essentially non-distorting/non-fisheye) has been of 13mm focal length. A 6mm (!) fisheye lens has also been produced; both were pioneered in 1977 and cost on the order of 750,000 yen (about \$3,700 at that time, or \$12,400 in 2006 dollars). The most powerful Nikon fixed-length telephoto lens has been the 2000mm f11 (introduced in 1972), selling for 990,000 yen.

A whopping Nikon optic—a 1200-1700mm zoom lens—was made available in 1994. Not intended to be hand-held, the instrument weighs 35 lbs. Price: 6 million yen, roughly \$60,000. If you relish such kernels of knowledge, and images galore of beautiful Nikons, you'll adore this book.

©Bill Katzenstein