

Viewpoint

Tony Kemplen



When **Tony Kemplen** resolved to use a different film camera each week, he found a treasure trove of lost gems. Here he looks at the **Diax 1a**, from Walter Voss of Ulm

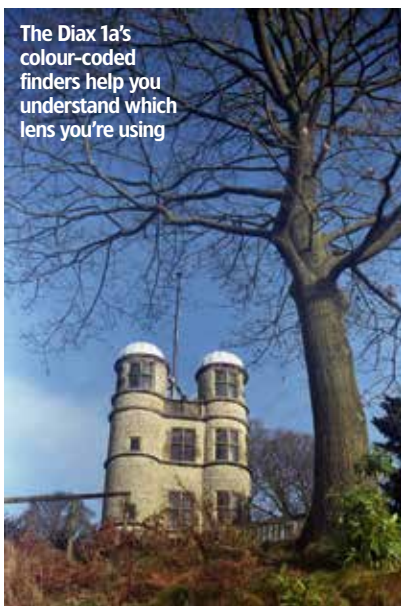
One of the fascinating things about using old cameras is seeing the ways in which manufacturers found solutions to the same problem. Take the viewfinder. Unless it is an SLR, any camera with interchangeable lenses will need a way of showing the photographer what will appear on the film. Perhaps the commonest method is to have a set of bright lines in the viewfinder, one for each focal length, while a more costly option is a separate accessory viewfinder for each lens.

In the case of the Diax 1a, the manufacturer, Walter Voss of Ulm, in Germany, has eschewed these systems, choosing instead to have three built-in finders, each catering for a different focal-length lens. This accounts for the rather unusual appearance of the Diax, with three viewfinder windows at the front, and three eyepieces at the back. An added sophistication is the colour coding of the 35mm and 90mm finders, which are blue and yellow respectively.

Lens choice

The Diax range was made between 1945 and 1957, and is similar in size and scope to the Voigtlander Vito series. Like the Voigtlanders, the Diax was aimed at the serious amateur market – photographers who understood how to use the various shutter speeds and apertures, but couldn't afford a Contax or a Leica. Mine came with three lenses. As well as the standard 50mm f/2.8 Xenar, I have the 35mm f/3.5 Westron and the

The Diax 1a's colour-coded finders help you understand which lens you're using



85mm f/4.5 Isconar. The behind-the-lens Syncro-Compur shutter has speeds from 1–1/500sec. There is no built-in rangefinder, so to focus, you either have to estimate or use an accessory rangefinder.

I chose a bright January day to take my Diax out for a spin in the grounds of Chatsworth House in Derbyshire. The camera really is very compact, and I could fit it and three lenses into my coat pockets. It has a precision feel to it, and the quirky lens mount, which is a hybrid between a breech lock and a screw, was easy enough to get the hang of. It was a novel experience seeing the world in blue and yellow, but I'm not convinced that these colour-coded viewfinders are particularly helpful. However, I suppose if you put the camera to your eye and the scene changes colour, at least it makes you think twice about which lens you're actually using!

Tony Kemplen's love of photography began as a teenager and ever since he has been collecting cameras with a view to testing as many as he can. You can follow his progress on his 52 Cameras blog at 52cameras.blogspot.co.uk. You can also see more photos from the Diax 1a at www.flickr.com/photos/tony_kemplen/sets/72157632496843170



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New Books

The latest and best books from the world of photography. By Oliver Atwell



Songbook

by Alec Soth, Mack Books, £40, 144 pages, hardback, ISBN 9-781-91016-402-0



It would be a little ridiculous to announce the book of the year when 2015 is barely out of its nappies, but if this volume isn't in my end-of-year top ten, then I can only dream of the books that may appear in the coming

months. American photographer Alec Soth is known – to quote *The Guardian* – for his 'off-beat, hauntingly banal images of modern America'. It's a perfect description. In *Songbook*, Soth adopts the role of community newspaper reporter. For two years, the photographer travelled America, state by state, while working on his self-published newspaper *The LBM Dispatch*, as well as on assignment for *The New York Times*. His journey took him to a variety of community gatherings, all of which are populated by individuals who seem to be longing for a human connection. Soth's perfectly exposed and printed black & white images are breathtaking. They are eerie, beautiful and affecting. *Songbook* is a near perfect photobook. ★★★★★

Capturing the Moment: The Essence of Photography

by Michael Freeman, CRC Press, £31.95, 208 pages, paperback, ISBN 9-781-13883-248-0



Michael Freeman is one of photography's most prolific writers. Anyone with even a passing interest in photographic technique is likely to have at least one of his books on their shelves. With that in mind, it's always worth

paying attention when a book appears bearing his name. *Capturing the Moment* deals with photography's ability to capture a slice of time, or, to use that most overused of phrases, the 'decisive moment'. When do you press the shutter? At what point do the elements align to give you the perfectly composed shot? The moment is, in the words of Freeman, the true core of photography. It must be said, he does a pretty reasonable job of helping readers shape their instincts so they'll rarely miss a shot again. ★★★★★