

BELOW A line-up of the key early Mamiyaflex cameras (l to r) Mamiyaflex C2 with 'chrome-bezel' 80mm f/2.8 Mamiya-Sekors, Mamiyaflex C3 also with 80mm f/2.8 Mamiya-Sekors, Mamiyaflex C33 fitted with a later black set of 135mm f/4.5 Mamiya-Sekors



Classics to Use

THIS IS not the first time I have written in AP about the Mamiyaflex C series of interchangeable lens TLRs. In the 5 February 1975 issue, when I was using a Mamiyaflex C3 and a set of lenses, I wrote an article headed 'In praise of Old Two-Eyes' in which I described some of the benefits of an interchangeable-lens twin-lens reflex. Things have moved on rather a lot since then, but I still have the greatest respect for the versatility, ruggedness and sheer picture-making ability of a Mamiyaflex C.

The fundamental difference between the Mamiyaflex C-series design and that of most other comparatively modern twin-lens reflexes was the incorporation of a set of bellows to make it possible to focus pairs of viewing and taking lenses of various focal lengths, set on panels without focusing mounts. This made the lens sets inherently cheaper to manufacture than lenses in focusing mounts. The quality of these interchangeable pairs of lenses, held in place on the camera by a rudimentary spring clip and delivering professional-standard results, made these very versatile cameras exceptional value for money. An internal light baffle, swung into place by a knob on the side of the camera marked 'Lock' and 'Unlock', made it possible to change lenses without fogging the

The **Mamiyaflex C** range of TLRs was seen as a reliable and affordable way into interchangeable-lens medium-format photography. **Ivor Matanle** reports



Ivor Matanle

Ivor Matanle is a journalist, photographer and author who has written a number of books, two of which, *Collecting and Using Classic Cameras* and *Collecting and Using Classic SLRs* have become standard works for collectors

film, and locked up the shutter release mechanism while you did it.

The presence of the bellows also made the Mamiyaflex a supremely capable camera for close-up work, provided that the difference between the view of the subject that the viewing lens presented on the focusing screen and the view that the lower taking lens put on to the film was allowed for. A neat parallax-correcting accessory called a Paramender made this easy when the camera was on a tripod. Although heavy, particularly in its early forms, a Mamiyaflex was a versatile, well-balanced and easily handled camera

Twin-lens experience

The first Mamiyaflex C was far from being the first Mamiya twin-lens reflex. Mamiya had launched the Mamiyaflex Junior, a simple knob-wind TLR similar in specification to an early Rolleicord, in 1948, and followed that with the Mamiyaflex Auromatic A, with automatic film winding (no need for a red window) in 1949. In the late 1940s and early '50s Mamiya, like so many other manufacturers, made a series of thoroughly competent and rather unexciting TLR cameras, initially for the Japanese home market and the US Forces PX stores in Japan, and then

progressively more for export markets. Most of these were not marketed in Britain and are rarely seen here even in collectors' circles. When the new Mamiyaflex C with interchangeable lenses did appear in Britain, at the end of 1958, it was seized upon by retailers supplying the professional photographic market as a comparatively low-cost route into interchangeable-lens rollfilm reflex photography.

In AP 7 September 1960, Piccadilly Photo Centre, a well-known London retailer, advertised its display of 'Mamiyaflex photography by Lewis Morley' as a means of emphasising the quality that could be achieved with the equipment, and listed their prices below a picture of a Mamiyaflex C. For a Mamiyaflex C with 105mm f/3.5 lens, their price was £83 16s 6d, for a C2 with 80mm f/2.8 they asked £99 13s 3d, for a 135mm f/4.5 Mamiya Sekor the price was £49 10s and for a 180mm f/4.5 Mamiya-Sekor it was £66 6s. These prices compared, in the same issue, with a new Rolleiflex 2.8E2 (a lot more quality, but no interchangeable lenses) at £140 6s 10d, and a Hasselblad 500C (the ultimate professional camera at the time) at just more than £250.

The principal differences between the Mamiyaflex C (first manufactured in 1957) and the C2 (first



ABOVE LEFT A Mamiyaflex C2 with 80mm f/2.8 'chrome-bezel' Mamiya-Sekors. Note that the lens-retaining spring latches are on the right-hand side of the camera as you hold it – later models latch on the left



ABOVE RIGHT A Mamiya C3 fitted with 80mm f/2.8 'chrome-bezel' Mamiya-Sekors. Although basic, this is a reliable and effective camera

manufactured in 1958 and, I believe, launched in Britain in 1959) was a removable viewfinder hood on the C2 and the number of focusing knobs on the camera. The C assumed a right-handed user and was focused using a knob at the lower right of the front panel of the camera, with a focus lock facility on the left. The C2 had similar focusing knobs to the left and right of the front panel. The base unit of the C2 was also rather larger than that of the C, and introduced the flat base with 'chin' at the front that is characteristic of all later models. This overcame the unfortunate tendency of early Mamiyaflex cameras to topple forwards if stood on a flat surface when the bellows were extended. The C could do this with a 105mm lens focused to about 2m, whereas a C2 and later cameras were free of the problem unless the heavier 180mm or 250mm lenses, which obviously needed greater bellows extension, were fitted.

Great for weddings

In the early 1960s, it gradually became quite common to see the more successful wedding photographers working with Mamiyaflex outfits. Although at that time most wedding photography consisted of formal groups at the church door in glorious black & white, every part-time wedding photographer knew the frustrations imposed by large wedding groups and small churchyards when the

camera in use did not permit the fitting of a wideangle lens. For this reason, and for considerations of image quality, many wedding pros preferred to stick to their trusty 5x4in or half-plate cameras, slowing up the proceedings significantly. The Mamiyaflex, for which the excellent 65mm f/3.5 Mamiya-Sekor wideangle lens had appeared in Britain during 1960, made it possible to meet the most demanding requirements since the coverage of the wideangle lens and the contrasty image quality delivered by the Mamiya-Sekor lenses provided for most eventualities.

In 1962/63 the crank-wind Mamiyaflex C3 was announced to sell alongside the knob-wind C2, resolving at least some of the doubts that photographers accustomed to the crank wind of the Rolleiflex had felt when confronted with a Mamiyaflex. The Mamiyaflex C3 certainly had crank wind, automatic exposure counter reset and double-exposure prevention, none of which was present on a C2, but you still had to cock the shutter manually after you had wound on the film – a practice alien to the Rolleiflex user. The C3 also had new styling and somehow looked more 'professional' than the earlier cameras. The textured rubber finish on the body is virtually indestructible and you will rarely see a C3, even 40-odd years on, with a damaged body covering.

I remember a Rolleiflex-using press photographer waiting beside me in Wales

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If you enjoyed this article, join the Photographic Collectors Club of Great Britain, which organises meetings and fairs all over Britain, runs a quarterly postal auction and publishes magazines full of classic camera information. Go to www.pccgb.org for more information and to download a membership form. Or phone 01920 821611 (but not to ask for valuations on cameras). Remember that the membership secretary is a volunteer who may not be able to return your call for a couple of days.

Forthcoming camera fairs

16 April	Manchester, Mike Haunch 01723 375167
17 April	Newbury, Peter Levinson 0208 205 1518
23 April	St. Albans, Peter Levinson 0208 205 1518
30 April	Cambridge, Malcolm Collins 01954 250981
7 May	Wolverhampton, M Brogan 07946 309255
14 May	PHOTOGRAPHICA, London 01920 821611
21 May	Beaconsfield, Peter Levinson 0208 205 1518
11 June	Coven (Wolverhampton), Mike Haunch 01723 375167
18 June	Guildford, Peter Levinson 0208 205 1518
25 June	Manchester, Mike Haunch 01723 375167

for Prince Philip to appear at a royal visit. The year was 1973. With nothing better to do for a minute or two, the press man surveyed my Mamiya C3.

'Bit agricultural, in 'it?' he said. And, in a way, I suppose he was right. Later the same day, I fell off a substantial wall while photographing the Prince and the C3 took a heavy blow as we hit the ground. The camera was fine. I was rather more bruised. The Mamiyaflex can take it.

Getting better

In 1965, the C3 was replaced by the C33, an essentially similar-looking camera but with the great improvement of automatic shutter cocking when the film was wound on. This was accomplished by an arm which moved in an arc around the base of the lens mount on the left-hand side of the shutter (as you look down at the camera when using it), and this in turn introduced a

problem for existing owners of the 180mm f/4.5 Mamiya-Sekor. The earlier 180mm lens for the C2 and C3 would not fit the C33 because the shape of the back of the lens mount fouled the cocking arm. A new version of the 180mm lens was therefore introduced at the same time as the C33, with a flattened profile to the back of the lens mount. Thirty years ago, all camera dealers knew about this, and were careful how they described 180mm Mamiyaflex lenses when offering them second-hand. Nowadays you have to be careful to get the right lens. The shutter cocking mechanism of the C33 also developed an initial reputation for unreliability and this is a model that needs to be checked carefully before you buy it to ensure everything works properly without jamming. A camera-collectors' website on Mamiyaflex (www.btinternet.com/~g.a.patterson/mfaq/m_faq.html) states that the design of the

C33 'was under aggressive development' during 1965 and 1966, well after the model was launched, which presumably relates to the company creating fixes for known design faults. A sheet-film back for 6.5x9cm cut film was offered for the Mamiyaflex C33 and was reputedly used extensively by some scientific users. This replaced the normal camera back.

The C2 was replaced in 1966 by the Mamiyaflex C22, an improved lighter-weight camera for which there were interchangeable backs for 120 and 220 film. The C22 retained the knob wind and manual shutter cocking of the C2, but was equipped with double-exposure prevention. A neat accessory wind knob with a fold-out lever was available to replace the standard knob, rather in the manner of the lever-knob on the Hasselblad. Then, in 1968, the C22 was itself replaced by the C220, still with manual shutter cocking but with automatic film counter reset. The wind knob on the C220 had a built-in fold-out crank, so no accessory was necessary, and, with the advent of 55mm wideangle and 250mm telephoto lenses, the focusing scale on the side of the bellows base for the first

time offered scales for all the focal lengths made for the Mamiyaflex range – 55mm, 65mm, 80mm, 105mm, 135mm, 180mm and 250mm. Also introduced was a budget-priced standard lens, the 80mm f/3.7 Mamiya-Sekor, which never gained much popularity but helped keep the price down for first-time users.

Coming of age

The Mamiyaflex C system, in the view of most people who have used it, came of age in 1969/70 when the Mamiyaflex C330 was introduced. This was not because of any massive advance in capability or function represented by the C330, although there were considerable improvements, but mainly because it looked right. The introduction of all-black lenses, without the bright steel shutter bezels of Mamiyaflex lenses made until about 1968, and an overall appearance that looked as though it had been designed from scratch, gave the C330 a confident professional style that endeared it to users, amateur and professional alike.

However, the C330 did offer the considerable benefits of interchangeable focusing screens,

'The Mamiyaflex C system, in the view of most people who have used them, came of age in 1969/70'



LEFT The uncommon Mamiyaflex C22, fitted with 80mm f/2.8 Mamiya-Sekors

ABOVE The Mamiyaflex C33, the first model fitted with automatic shutter cocking, here fitted with a set of later black 135mm f/4.5 Mamiya-Sekors



BELOW A Mamiyaflex C330 fitted with a Porroflex eye-level viewfinder and the scarce 250mm f/6.3 Mamiya-Sekors, the longest focal-length lenses made for the Mamiyaflex C series

a pistol grip. One or two particularly important accessories are worth mentioning. One is the Paramender. This gadget fits on to a tripod and consists of a geared column operated by a crank, capable of raising the camera by exactly the distance between the axes of the viewing and taking lenses. So, when shooting close-ups – something for which the Mamiyaflex is superbly well equipped because of its bellows – the camera is mounted on the Paramender and the Paramender on the tripod. With the Paramender in its low position, the subject is composed and focused on screen. The Paramender is then wound to its upper position, and the picture taken. You can be confident that the view shot on film is that which was composed on screen.

Another major accessory is the Porroflex (left). This inexpensive lightweight eye-level viewing system uses mirrors rather than a prism to present an eye-level image, and the resulting image is dimmer than that of a prism. However, I found the Porroflex very effective for action shots with the 180mm lens in my Mamiyaflex-using days. Always try a Porroflex on

your camera before buying it – the initial type fits only the C2 and C3 because the strap lugs of later cameras foul it. A more expensive (and heavier) prism was available for the C330 and later cameras, as was a CdS metering prism.

Mamiyaflex lenses

When the Mamiyaflex series first appeared, only three lenses were available – an 80mm f/2.8, a 105mm f/3.5 and a 135mm f/4.5, all Mamiya-Sekors and all with the apertures and shutter speeds set on a bright steel shutter bezel – usually referred to by collectors as ‘chrome-bezel’ lenses. In 1960, the 65mm f/3.5, the first wideangle for the Mamiyaflex, appeared, and the 180mm f/4.5 was marketed either at the same time or shortly afterwards. Certainly, by the time the Mamiyaflex C3 was available in 1963, the lens range was 65mm f/3.5, 80mm f/2.8, 105mm f/3.5, 135mm f/4.5 and 180mm f/4.5.

When I was using a Mamiyaflex C3, I had a 65mm, a 105mm and a 180mm, all of that ‘chrome bezel’ series, and found their performance to be really good, with excellent contrast. I borrowed a 135mm f/4.5 to try, and was a little disappointed. On the only occasion that I borrowed an

automatic parallax compensation with all focal lengths and, for the first time, a frame counter that configured itself automatically for 120 or 220 film when the pressure plate was rotated to its 120 or 220 setting. This had major benefits, say, for wedding photographers, if they ran out of 220 film during a job and had to revert to 120 to finish it.

In 1972, a slightly upgraded version of the C330 appeared, the C330f, and the C330 and C330f were manufactured side by side until the original C330 was discontinued in 1974. The three key differences were that the C330f had a single-action focusing hood, which is much easier to use, a focusing lock, absent from the C330, and a film tab holder as a film reminder. The C330f continued in production until 1982.

Final round

By 1982, the medium-format market, both professional and amateur, had moved on. Cameras like the Bronica SQA (6x6) and ETR (6x4.5), Mamiya's own Mamiya 645 and others bristling with electronics and automation had captured the mass market's interest, and twin-lens reflexes of all descriptions were regarded by most as designs of the past. However, there remained a significant market for a relatively low-cost interchangeable-lens 6x6 TLR camera system, and Mamiya was still selling new outfits to wedding operators and amateurs with a liking for

manual control. So two new models, the final two models, appeared in 1982.

The first, rarely seen because relatively few were sold in Britain, was the C220f, essentially similar to the earlier C220 but with the automatic exposure counter changeover from 120 to 220 when the pressure plate was rotated. It also had a larger wind knob than the C220 and lacked the fold-out wind crank.

More likely to be remembered is the C330s, a very successful further development of the C330f with several useful improvements, not least to the mechanical design of the film transport, which is reputedly more rugged than that of earlier models. On the C330s, the focusing knobs are larger, which is a real help in handling, and the rear door latch is improved to reduce the risk of the back door of the camera coming open accidentally. The C330s also has the stronger stud mountings for the camera strap, borrowed from the Mamiya RB67.

Vital accessories

A considerable range of accessories was available for the Mamiyaflex C-series cameras, including all the filters and lens hoods that you would expect, flash brackets, a tripod quick release and

RIGHT This Mamiyaflex C220 is fitted with the 80mm f/3.7 Mamiya-Sekors that were the ‘low-budget option’ during the 1970s



80mm f/2.8, I found it to be less sharp than my 105mm f/3.5 – but perhaps that particular lens was not up to scratch. Certainly, other users have told me that the 80mm f/2.8 performs well.

When the C330 appeared, or possibly just before, the lens range was redesigned to be fashionably all-black, with the apertures and shutter speeds picked out in white. Two new focal lengths had been added to the range in 1968 – a 55mm f/4.5 wideangle and a 250mm f/6.3 telephoto. The 250mm Mamiya-Sekor C, one of which I owned for a while, is unlike the rest of the lenses in the range in that it has no automatic shutter cocking – you have to cock the shutter manually for each shot. Optically, it performs very well and is a very useful, if weighty, addition to the Mamiyaflex range.

The 55mm Mamiya-Sekor C seems to have been one of those lenses whose quality varied from individual lens to individual lens. I have used one only once, and the example I tried was less than brilliant. On the other hand, I have seen

wedding photographers using them, have asked about the image quality and have been told that it is excellent. I suspect that it is a lens where even the good examples repay use at a fairly small aperture.

One curiosity of the Mamiya-Sekor C range was the 105mm f/3.5 DS. This had a diaphragm in the upper (viewing) lens so the lens could be stopped down to assess depth of field – normally one of the things you just can't do with a twin-lens reflex.

Should you buy one

If you are itching to shoot portraits, landscapes or studio close-ups on rollifilm, a decent Mamiyaflex is still about the least expensive way of getting into interchangeable-lens medium-format photography. Built like the proverbial tank, a Mamiyaflex, once you know your way around it and have stopped making silly mistakes (like overriding the interlock to take the lens off without the lens baffle in place), is a camera to rely on. Bear in mind that the knob that actuates the light baffle for changing lenses also locks the shutter

button. Camera repairer Ed Trzoska (0116 267 4247) tells me that he has seen quite a few Mamiyaflexes with the shutter-release mechanism damaged after people have tried to force it when locked.

The older Mamiyaflex models have not attracted major collector interest and an outfit of early equipment can be found very cheaply on the eBay internet auction site or via ads in the press. As I type this, an eBay auction that offered two Mamiyaflex C2 bodies with 80mm, 105mm and 180mm lenses, an exposure meter and an aluminium case, has just closed at £127, which I think was absurdly cheap.

Several dealers have been advertising Mamiyaflex in AP recently. SRS in Pinner has a Mamiya 330s with 80mm f/2.8 at £299 and a 135mm f/4.5 pair of lenses at £125. Wey Cameras has a 180mm f/4.5 Mamiya-Sekor C at £99. KP Professional Sales has a C220 with 80mm f/2.8 at £147. Ffordes at Beaulieu, Inverness, has quite a list of Mamiyaflex C equipment, including a C330f with 80mm f/2.8 at £195. You should find it possible, over a

few weeks, to build an outfit consisting of a C330 of one type or another, with 65mm, 80mm and 180mm lenses (for example) for about £500 or so, buying from respected retailers who you know will have checked the equipment properly, and with the benefit of a guarantee. That's a lot of photographic capability for your money.

My own experience of Mamiyaflex cameras is that they are mechanically very reliable. If you want to shoot medium format with interchangeable lenses inexpensively, buy a Mamiyaflex – and support the new Ilford company by buying some film. You could even buy it at Photographica in the Lawrence Hall in London on the 14 May. See you there! **AP**

● My thanks to Barry Toogood for the loan of equipment and to Ed Trzoska for help with information.

● *Collecting and Using Classic Cameras and Collecting and Using Classic SLRs*, by Ivor Matanle, are both published by Thames & Hudson at £16.95 each.

Buying a Mamiyaflex

Always check a Mamiyaflex by loading it with a 120 film. This enables you to check the shutter-release mechanism and the film transport. Open the back and look carefully at the light-trapping foam around the film door. This has often rotted, and can be expensive to replace. If the light traps are OK, put the unused film in the lower chamber and the empty spool in the upper, attach the backing paper to the upper spool, then wind the camera until the arrow on the backing paper is opposite the red dot. Close the back. Wind the camera until it stops. Check that there is a '1' displayed in the exposure counter window.

Check the lens optics

Set the lens baffle knob to 'Lock'. With the camera on its back, press the knob at the end of the lens retaining spring to release the spring from the slot, and pivot the spring away from the lens panel. Remove the lens unit, cock and fire the shutter at 'B', holding the shutter arm down so that the shutter stays open. With the lens set at maximum aperture, check the condition of the lens optics by looking through from the back. Before replacing the lens, check that the light baffle is firmly placed against the lower lens aperture in the body and that its plush light-trapping surface is intact and in good condition.

Check the focus

Focus the camera using the knob at the base of the front of the camera. Make sure the focusing screen is clean and not scratched or damaged. View and focus a subject as close as the lens fitted will focus, making sure that the bellows look clean and undamaged when extended and that the focus travel is smooth yet taut – there should be no free play.



Check the viewfinder

It is common for the lugs that retain a viewfinder (Porroflex, prism or waistlevel) to be broken or bent, and this is not usually apparent until the viewfinder is removed. Unscrew the retaining screw at the back of the finder, and ease it back and then up to remove the finder. Check the slots in the finder base and the pins that they engage for damage.

Check the shutter speeds

On a C2, C3, C22 or C220, or if a 250mm lens is fitted, cock the shutter using the lever at about 2 o'clock to the shutter housing. In other cases, the shutter will have been cocked by the winding of the camera. Set 1 second and the smallest aperture (usually f/32), then watch the taking lens from the front as you fire the shutter using the body release on the side of the camera. If it won't fire, check whether the lens baffle knob (top left-hand side of the camera) is on lock and, if so, set it to unlock. Never force anything. Make sure that the shutter runs evenly and that the diaphragm is evenly circular and free of oil. Wind the camera to the next exposure, ensuring that the wind is smooth without grinding noises. Check that the exposure counter is working. Test each shutter speed similarly, listening to the camera as you wind after each exposure. If you are checking more than one lens set, you can cock and fire the shutters independently off the camera. Ed Trzoska tells me that it is normal for the slow speeds on Seikosa shutters to deliver shorter than marked speeds, and that it is rarely possible to set them to be correct.

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