

WIN! A Canon digital kit worth over £1,100 in APOY

AMATEUR

6 OCTOBER 2001

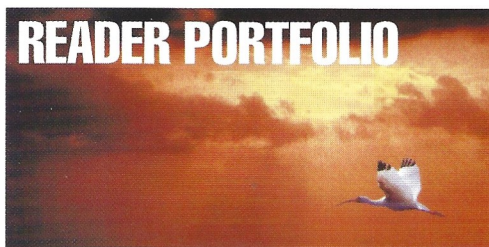
£1.85



TOP EOS GOES DIGITAL

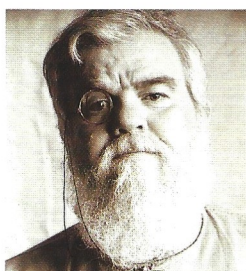
We unveil **Canon's** high-end entry into the digital market on pages 4-5

READER PORTFOLIO



WET & DRY

Roger Hicks tells you how to get the best results from scanning b&w



INFRARED IN AFRICA

Geof Kirby explains why infrared film works for him in Africa and Asia

Photographer

THE F90X FACTOR

One reader explains how and why he made the change from his manual **Nikon** to the 'auto' **F90X**



CAREER PEAK



We get on the trail of **Dave Willis** - a specialist in mountain sports photography



NEWS Ricoh updates its popular GR1s compact

No metering system can cope with white boats. Manual exposure with plenty of bracketing is the only way to guarantee a useable result

ME AND MY CAMERA

HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BLOB

Alan Harper, editor of *Motor Boat & Yachting*, sails into the sunset with the feature-packed autofocus **Nikon F90X**



I'M AN FM2 MAN, really: a fully manual, professional-standard, robust, beautifully engineered mechanical miracle. The camera's pretty impressive, too. It was our office photographer who first drew my attention to the Nikon FM2. *Motor Boat & Yachting* has long had a full-time snapper on staff and one day many years ago, when all the Hasselblads and Nikon F3s were in for repairs (salt water is tough on kit), he was down to just two cameras. One of them was his own Nikon F2, which he used for magazine work only begrudgingly, and a battered, standby FM2. 'This one doesn't break down,' he told me.

I had a go with it and was smitten. My much-loved Nikkormat FTN had recently disappeared from my south London flat (along with a guitar, a bicycle and much

of the front door), and now I knew what I wanted to replace it with.

TRADE-IN

A man's mid-life crisis can take many forms. Never a fan of Harley-Davidsons and too busy to have an affair, I recently decided it was time I entered the autofocus age. In the years since buying my FM2 I'd acquired a collection of Nikkor lenses. I had always bought the best I could afford and, with so many excellent second-hand ones available, I'd never had to buy one new. Some, indeed, were quite long in the tooth: my 85mm f/1.8 was an artefact of 1970s vintage, but it was still a superb piece of kit – and, I hoped, worth something.

Choosing a camera body was difficult because I was out of touch – there had been so many new Nikon models since I had last been in the market that it ►



ABOVE Lake Maggiore for a new model launch. Directing the subjects on over-subscribed press jaunts is usually out of the question, making a zoom invaluable

RIGHT An early effort, using shutter priority. These Devon geese seemed as suspicious of the F90X as I still was



BELOW Shutter priority again. A big complex zoom like the Tokina makes lens flare very obvious in the viewfinder, so you can position yourself to avoid it



It took time to figure out where things like the F-801 fitted into the scheme of things.

But first I needed to know my budget. On the fringes of London's Bloomsbury, branches of Jessops and Jacobs sit facing each other across the street, and it was here that I lugged my lenses for some tentative market testing. I was duly disappointed, but their valuations at least gave me an idea. For my Nikkor 24mm f/2, 35mm f/2, 85mm f/1.8, 135mm f/2 and TC-200 teleconverter, Jacobs offered £500. Meanwhile, Jessops weighed in with £485 – though it wasn't interested in the teleconverter. The two stores were more or less singing from the same hymn sheet, and it looked like I'd have enough for a used F90X body.

Months passed, during which I got

bogged down in a big editing job: an issue of *Jets* magazine. Then I got paid for it and decided to take my lenses to town again and buy myself an autofocus camera. Jacobs had a very clean second-hand F90X for £449 that looked new. Whether it was the weather, or because it was nearly lunchtime, or that I seemed keen to do business, I'm not sure – but Jacobs was feeling much more generous than last time. I was

ABOVE In Cowes, shops reportedly ran out of film during this summer's America's Cup 150th anniversary regatta and no wonder: pictures like this were there for the taking

BELOW Late afternoon, Lake Maggiore, last spring. I was still locked into matrix metering and shutter priority, and the camera has coped just fine



offered £650 for the same bag of lenses, so I was already £150 better off than I had reckoned.

This was a result. I'd intended to make do with my FM2's manual 50mm lens until I felt rich again, but now I didn't have to. In stock was the new Tokina 28-80mm f/2.8 ATX zoom, as praised so lavishly by AP's test team a little while before. It was priced £470. I made Jacobs an offer: all the lenses

plus £250, in return for the second-hand F90X I was holding, and that new Tokina in the box. 'Fine,' came the reply, a little too readily. Darn.

HYPERFOCAL ANGST

When your boat's electronic navigator packs up halfway across the Channel, you can still find France so long as you have a chart, a compass and you know what the tide is doing. Navigation is not rocket science: all you need to work out is which way to point the boat.

Photography isn't rocket science either. To take a picture you have just two tools at your disposal: the shutter speed and the lens aperture. But for a while I seemed to forget this simple fact.

Here was a camera unlike any I had

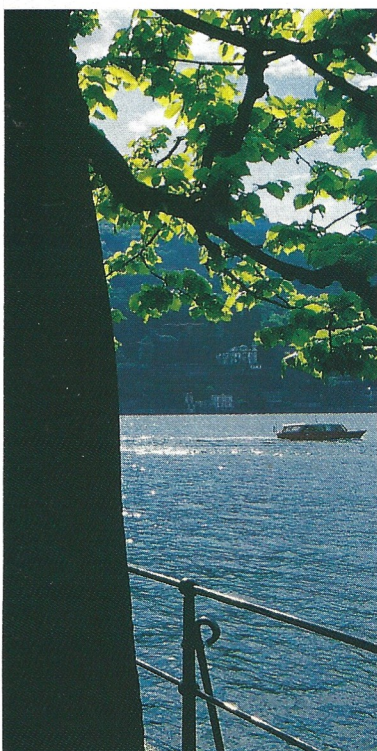
'This was not a learning curve: this was the north face of the Eiger. Obviously, I panicked'



LEFT An RAF Harrier poses during an air-to-air refuelling sortie. Not bad considering it was taken through the scratched Perspex window of a 35-year-old VC-10 tanker

BELOW LEFT Two studies of aircraft, taken from alongside the runway at Florennes air force base, Belgium. Manual exposure and the autofocus coped fine in 'continuous' mode

BELOW A typically gloomy early morning start for a Nimrod at RAF Kinloss ('Ice Station Kilo') near Inverness. Manual exposure plus auto TTL flash produced a picture I was quite pleased with



used before. What had I done? With its lens, you needed two hands to pick up the F90X. The manual ran to 148 pages, many of them devoted to such science-fiction concepts as the 'hyperfocal program'. This was not a learning curve: this was the north face of the Eiger. Obviously, I panicked.

The matrix metering, the crowded LCD panel, the 21 buttons, dials and switches (count them), even the myriad choice of modes – manual, aperture priority, shutter priority and program – totally befuddled me. For a while I found I was even using the autofocus lock button and the autoexposure lock button, often at the same time – a feat that requires the dexterity of a violinist and the strength of a gorilla – just because they were there.

GETTING A LIFE

But slowly it dawned on me that the F90X is just a camera, and it was me who was supposed to be in charge. I needed to know what it could do for me and what it couldn't, and grasp the fact that I shouldn't be asking it to do things that I could get it to do for myself.

Once I began to realise that huge sections of the manual could be ignored, I felt I'd turned the corner. My confidence

returned and I started to take better pictures. The manual's laudable efforts to avoid blinding novices with science merely succeeded in bamboozling people like me. The hyperfocal program ('the program to use if you want both your main subject and the background to appear sharper') means the camera is trying to obtain the maximum depth of field. The landscape program ('with both far and near objects appearing more

sharply focused') sounds rather similar; while the sports program is, I presume, something to do with fast shutter speeds.

What for me was an intuitive process of matching the right sort of shutter speed with the right sort of aperture involves the unfortunate novice in participating in the following procedure:

1. Remembering what vari-program means.
2. Remembering that on the camera the vari-program button is marked Ps.
3. Pressing the Ps button and at the same time rotating the thumb dial until Ps appears on the screen.
4. Letting go of the button and rotating the dial until the program you want is shown on the screen: Po (portrait); rE (portrait with redeye reduction – actually that one can be useful); HF ▶

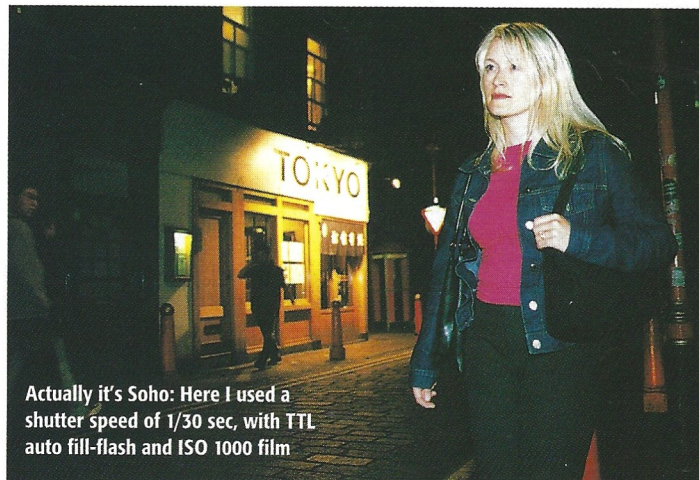
'It dawned on me that the F90X is just a camera, and it was me who was supposed to be in charge'



TOP AND TOP CENTRE
Aircraft cockpits are perhaps the sternest of tests for fill-flash, but manual exposure plus auto TTL fill-in can produce results

ABOVE Apollo astronaut Frank Borman gets some help putting the cover on his F-86. TTL fill-flash again, but less obvious in the Florida sunshine

RIGHT Taken at arm's length as I walked beside my friend Sue, relying totally on autofocus to do its stuff. Exposure was 1 sec at f/5.6, with fill-flash and rear-curtain sync



Actually it's Soho: Here I used a shutter speed of 1/30 sec, with TTL auto fill-flash and ISO 1000 film

◀ (hyperfocal); LR (landscape); SL (silhouette); SP (sport); CU (close-up). 5. Taking the picture – too late, it's gone. Finally understanding that all this nonsense is, indeed, just nonsense invariably meant that, after dutiful experiments with aperture-priority and shutter-priority, I started using the camera almost exclusively on the manual setting. Ironically, using the manual mode means you don't actually need to refer to the manual. This seemed all wrong until I asked my photographer how he was getting on with his shiny new Nikon F5 cameras – the F3s having finally been scrapped after 15 years of salty spray. 'I just use it on manual,' he replied. So that's OK, then – and every professional photographer I've questioned has said the same. I wish I'd asked before.

'Ironically, using the camera in manual mode means you don't need to refer to the manual'

AUTOFOCUS

I'd worried about autofocus. Apparently Canon's AF system is quicker, and I'd been told that the Nikon F90X was a bit too slow for fast-action work. When I tried it in the shop all I could really establish was that it was about 100 times faster than focusing manually. Since then, standing perilously close to the end of a runway in Belgium not long ago photographing fighters taking off at 150 knots

for Jets, I found that the 'continuous' autofocus setting coped effortlessly.

I also found that it quickly became instinctive to maintain light pressure on the shutter release to hold focus in 'single servo' mode, and in either mode the 'spot' focusing area is extremely precise.

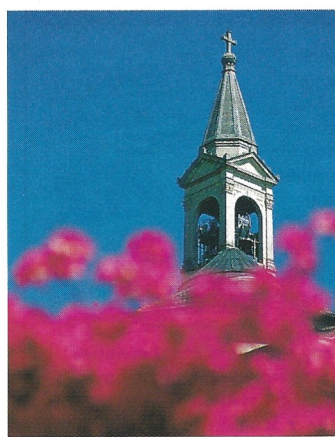
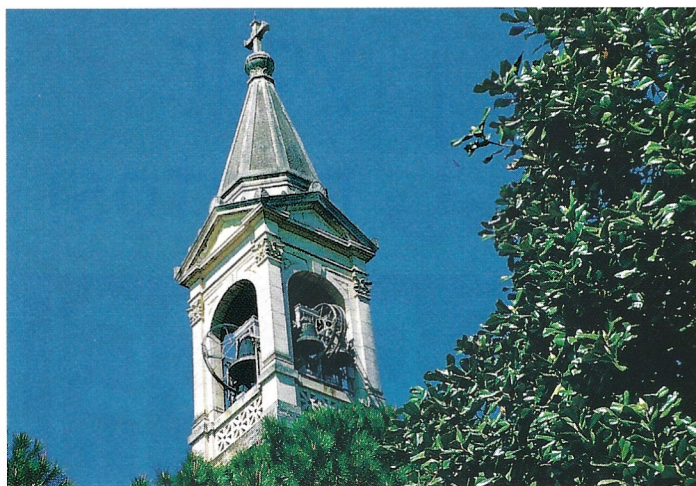
SPEND, SPEND, SPEND

Once I'd realised that the Tokina zoom was a truly excellent lens and that the

world doesn't fall apart when f/2.8 is as fast as things go, I bought myself a new 70-210mm Sigma zoom. This has proved equally satisfactory, although the 1.4x converter that I got at the same time seems rather prone to vignetting when down at f/4.

As all this spending was merely the outward expression of a renewed passion for photography, I thought I could probably do with a decent flash for the first time as well. So, for reasons which are still unclear, I spent close on £300 on the Nikon SB28. This is fine, as it talks to the camera as advertised, and its ability to provide perfect fill-in flash with the camera on manual mode has helped me produce some great pictures.

That's as much as the bank balance will cope with for now – although I do



ABOVE AND LEFT Two views of the church tower at Solcio, on Lake Maggiore in northern Italy. I seem to remember selecting aperture priority mode for the shot on the left, instead of just whacking the aperture ring over to f/2.8 and getting on with it. It was early days with the camera...

BELOW AND BELOW LEFT Two touristy shots of Palma, Mallorca. A huge set-up like an F90X and ATX zoom can never be discreet, but such snapshots are easy enough in shutter-priority mode



find myself looking at the prices of 20mm lenses...

BRASS TACKS

So has all this expenditure made me a better photographer? I don't think so – but the capabilities of the new equipment have inspired me to try things I'd never tried before, and I'm quite pleased with some of this work.

Is it as much fun? Actually, no. Six months and 80-odd rolls of film later, I still can't pick up the F90X and use it instinctively, as I can with the FM2. The need to think gets in the way of the photographs, and that's still a source of frustration. But I'm getting there.

Did I do the right thing? For a while, after I realised that I was using the F90X as if it were an overweight FM2 – that is,

'Although I miss the speed of my old prime lenses, I like my new zooms and I love autofocus'

as a manual exposure camera with centre-weighted metering – I didn't think so. But in use it has gained my respect. It may be a little encumbered by gimmickry, but underneath all that is a superbly engineered machine which is the equal of the FM2 in many respects and measurably superior in others. And although I miss the speed of my old lenses, I like my new zooms and I love autofocus: it's been a fair trade.

And what about the FM2? It lives in my camera bag as a spare, with a 50mm f/1.4 lens permanently attached. I take it out occasionally to play with, and handling it now gives me the same sort of pleasure I get from using my Leica III(c). But it's the F90X that is the working camera now, which has to earn its keep. And it's doing just fine. **AP**

