

# MINOLTA

## TEST DRIVE

# 7000i MAXXUMi

by Jack and Sue Drafaahl

### Taking the Turns with a Sleek, New, Souped-Up Maxxum

**W**hen our friends heard that we were test-driving a new Maxxum 7000i, with its sleek black body and hidden panel controls, computer tracking and complete automatic control system, they kept looking in our driveway. When we told them the 7000i was a camera, they looked surprised and asked, "What's so special about Minolta's Maxxum 7000i?" The best answer we found was to tell them the "i" in 7000i stands for intelligent. According to *Webster's*, "intelligent" is defined as: skillful, revealing or reflecting good judgment or sound thought, and clever. During this test drive, we will show why Minolta's intelligent 7000i Maxxum is a camera of the future.

#### INTELLIGENT AUTOFOCUS

The most impressive intelligence in the 7000i is the improved autofocus system. Minolta has gone out of their way to make the best autofocus system possible. When you pick up the 7000i and press the shutter release halfway down, the focus is so quiet and fast that you may not see it focus and assume something is wrong.

Because of a special AF illuminator that is activated when the light level drops very low, autofocus is fast and accurate in light levels so low that manual focus is impossible. This AF illuminator can project a beam of red LED light out to 30 feet, enabling the autofocus sensor to focus on extremely low-contrast subjects in low light.

The multi-sensor AF Module inside the 7000i allows the photographer to

switch from narrow focus to wide focus, or you can toggle back and forth. If the dominant subject is near the center of the photo, narrow focus should be used, and if the subject is off-center, the wide focus should be selected. If two subjects fall in the wide focus area, the sensors will select the subject clos-



est to the camera.

The wide focus area is especially handy for scenics with open blue sky and a subject that is to the left or right of center. If you used the narrow focus when taking this type of photo, the camera would get lost and have trouble finding a focus point. But if the wide focus is selected, the camera finds it easier to focus on moving subjects and off-center subjects.

The most impressive function of the 7000i is the predictive focus control. For optimum sharpness with moving subjects, focus must be adjusted right up to the instant of exposure. This system can track a subject and keep it in focus, even with the mirror moving up and down between shots. This system is so accurate that it computes the change in focus even after the mirror

has moved up for exposure, and shifts the focus slightly to compensate for subject movement.

We tested this system extensively on airplanes, cars, hang gliders, dune buggies, birds, and a variety of other moving subjects. For the first time, we were able to follow focus on a subject as it approached us, and when it got too large and filled the frame, we could zoom back and forth or pan the subject—all the while everything staying in focus. The 7000i's an action photographer's dream come true!

We were able to concentrate totally on composing the subject and not worry about focus. We just put our faith in Minolta, and the results were truly impressive.

#### INTELLIGENT EXPOSURE

While the autofocus system is constantly checking and adjusting focus, data on image magnification and focal length are being fed to a very sophisticated multi-pattern metering system. These patterns are made up of six areas, and have the ability to detect a variety of lighting conditions that vary from high-key to low-key subjects as well as average scenes.

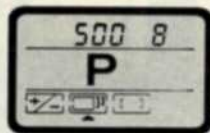
To understand how well the system works, we photographed a very small man on a very light sand dune. Normally a meter would see all the light sand and underexpose. With the 7000i, one part of the multi-pattern metering system picked up the small dark image, and assumed a high-key situation, making the necessary correction. We also took several photos directly into the sun or its reflections trying to fool the camera. The camera again recognized the small light object against a dark background and made the appropriate correction for low-key subjects.

For the photographer who wants more metering control, a spot meter is

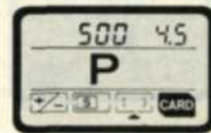




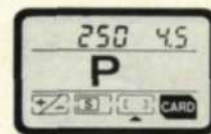
Predictive autofocus



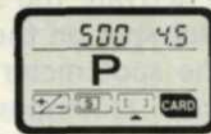
Sports card



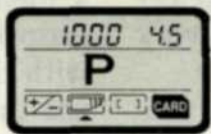
Conventional metering system



Multi-pattern metering



Action card

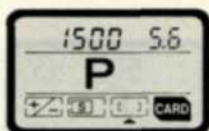


ALL PHOTOS BY AUTHORS

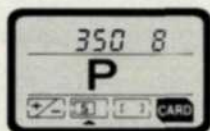




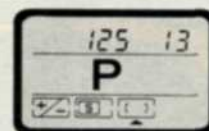
Sports card



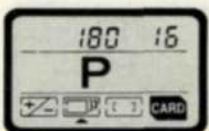
Normal



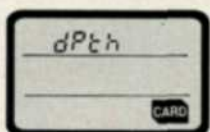
Normal, program mode



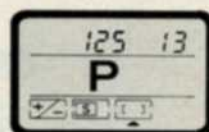
Depth-of-field card



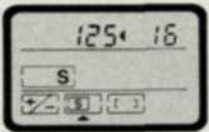
Depth-of-field card



Flash-fill, program mode



Multi-pattern metering



# 7000i

autofocus system will continue to monitor and refocus the lens, but the meter will stay locked as long as the button stays depressed. Even though the spot button is well placed, we found ourselves using the main metering system 99% of the time with very little loss of accurate exposures.

The Maxxum 7000i has three creative exposure modes: aperture-prior-

ity (A), shutter-priority (S), and manual (M) mode, which are accessed by pressing the mode button on the left and the up/down button on the right.

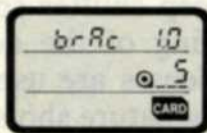
## EXPANSION CARDS

The Maxxum 7000i has its own unique look with Creative Expansion Cards. Each Expansion Card contains a memory circuit connected to a microprocessor. These cards interface with the camera's main computer and use the data in the memory circuit to control the camera's autofocus, expo-

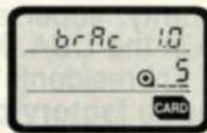




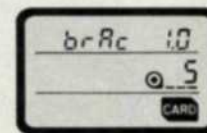
Bracket card, normal



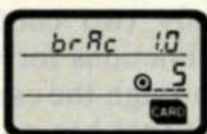
Bracket card, -1



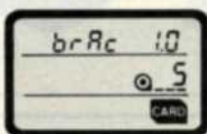
Bracket card, -2



Bracket card, +1



Bracket card, +2



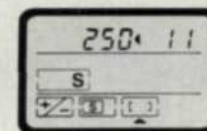
Narrow-band autofocus



Wide-band autofocus



Multi-pattern metering



sure, and film-advance systems. To activate a card, open the door on the right side of the camera and insert the selected card with the gold contacts toward you.

As we tested these cards, we realized they resembled photo assignments we have given in photo classes we have taught over the years. The depth-of-field assignment, for instance, was to show students how to get the subject and the background both in focus at the same time. Another assignment was to shoot an action photo at vari-

ous shutter speeds to see the end results. Now all you have to do is insert the card and the microprocessor does the rest!

**Bracket Card:** The bracket card allows the photographer to bracket three, five, or seven frames with  $\frac{1}{3}$ -,  $\frac{1}{2}$ - or full-stop increments. We found this card to be an invaluable tool for use with slide films that have narrow exposure latitudes, such as Kodachrome 25 and 64, and some of the high-speed Ektachromes. When you press the shutter release, the camera



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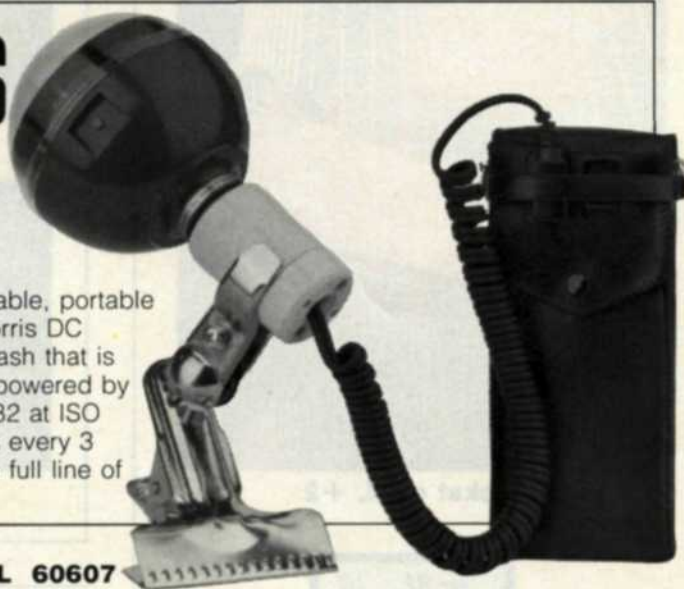
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# 7000i

will make a correct exposure, and then bracket on each side of the correct exposure, until all the desired exposures have been made.

**Depth Card:** The depth-of-field card is designed for the wide-angle shooter who wants to get everything in focus. With this card, the focus and aperture settings are adjusted automatically to provide maximum sharpness. After inserting the card, press the shutter release halfway down and the camera will focus on the subject. Depress the shutter the remainder of its travel and the lens will shift slightly and then take the picture.

**Sports Card:** The sports card is designed to keep shutter speeds high to allow stopping of the action even if wide-angle lenses are used. We found that shooting nature shots, where shallow depth of field was desirable, is another possible use of this card.

**Custom Card:** This card allows the photographer to change and fine-tune seven different functions on the 7000i. Functions include: (1) selectable exposure modes (combinations); (2) focus-hold button (lock, center focus, continuous); (3) shutter speed adjustment (1 or .5 stop); (4) slow shutter speed signal (on or off); (5) frame number countdown (up or down); (6) film rewind (automatic or manual start); and (7) film rewind (leader in or out).

The six other cards that we were unable to test include Shift, Highlight-shadow, Fantasy, Data, Portrait, and Close-up photography.

### 3200i FLASH

One of the most unusual devices introduced by Minolta is the companion flash for the 7000i camera. The 3200i flash has only two controls: on/off, and lo. All functions for the 3200i are controlled through the camera. The result is a flash that has no display panels, no charts, dials, or any type of function switch.

To use the flash, simply slide the flash cover off the top of the 7000i and slide the unique flash coupling base of the 3200i onto the top of the camera. The flash will immediately lock onto a heavy duty coupling. The advantage of the unique mount is less damage to the flash and camera, but, only specially designed Minolta flashes will work on the 7000i.

The 3200i is so intelligent that the photographer no longer needs to decide when flash is necessary. When there is more than a two-stop differ-



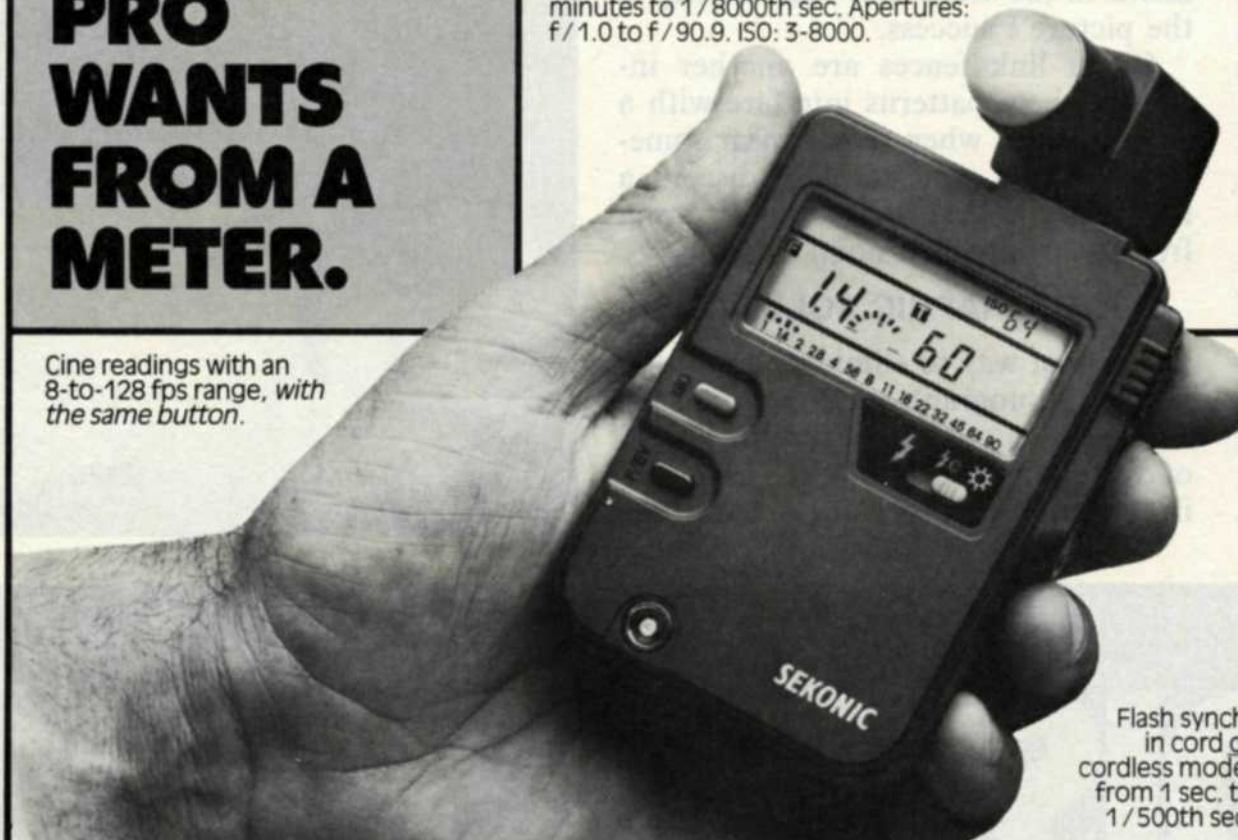
# WE ASKED WHAT THE WORKING PRO WANTS FROM A METER.

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## THE ANSWER: SEKONIC L328 DIGI LITE F.

ence between the background and the subject when using the P mode in sunlight, the flash turns on automatically and gives a proper flash fill. If the lighting ratio changes so that no flash is required, the 3200i will remain in a standby mode and not fire. If the photographer moves indoors or into a low-light situation, the 7000i meter system lets the flash know that it will be needed for all the photos.

Again, in P mode, if an even balance between the subject and background is desired, pressing the spot button changes the flash sync speed from normal to a lower shutter speed, allowing a correct exposure for the background. This is helpful in very late afternoon exposures where the light level is very low and you want to balance the background with an unlit subject in the foreground. If you don't want the flash to fire, simply press the off button. To return to the intelligent status, just press the on button.

The 7000i and 3200i flash in the S mode operate in a similar manner as in the P mode, except you must physically turn on the flash unit. If the photographer desires more control over flash fill in sunlight, the A mode can be used. This allows the photographer to take flash-fill pictures with ratios less

than the two-stop limit set when in the P and S modes.

For total control of flash and background ratio, you may want to select the M position on the 7000i. The 3200i output can be varied by changing the ISO on the 7000i and the background exposure can be changed to over or under by varying the f-stop and shutter speed. A  $\pm$  in the viewfinder will tell which direction you have shifted the background exposure. The lo button on the back of the 3200i is depressed when a quick series of flash pictures and low flash output per picture are needed. This is extremely handy for quick sequences where flash fill is needed. Because some of the expansion cards manipulate the f-stop and shutter speeds, the 3200i should not be used with them, and should be turned off using the card button.

### CONCLUSIONS

We can definitely say that the 7000i has one of the most impressive autofocus systems we have seen. The camera's futuristic sleek look and full automation make it a fine camera for the "intelligent" amateur photographer. Take Minolta's Maxxum 7000i for a test drive yourself and see what your friends have to say.

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