



# Film Wars Create GREAT New Films

## Testing films into the new millennium

by Jack and Sue Drafa

With any good story, you need a beginning. We have been testing film for almost two decades and thought it was high time to tell you just how we do it. Our first film test was in May 1981 for a sister Petersen publication, *Skin Diver Magazine*. The magazine wanted a comparison of Kodachrome and Ektachrome films for underwater wide-angle and close-up photography. We suffered through a trip to the Bahamas to conduct this first test. It was a tough job, but someone had to do it.

In March of the following year, *PHOTOgraphic Magazine* asked us to evaluate an extremely fine-grain black-and-white film still in use today called Kodak Technical Pan Film. For the next few years our film tests were sporadic because few new film emulsions were introduced. Instead,

we concentrated our literary efforts on extensive how-to articles. Because of increased competition among film manufacturers, now several new film families are introduced yearly, which constantly challenges us to stay ahead of them all.

### THE DRAFAHL FILM TESTING PROCESS

The key to keeping readers informed is to find out which films are due for debut and get our hands on as many rolls as possible. Sometimes this even means signing a non-disclosure statement so we can be involved in the Beta testing stage of a film. More often though, we go to trade shows such as PMA, and arrange for new films to magically appear on our doorstep. We are in constant contact with all the film manufacturers to make sure that *PHOTOgraphic* readers

hear about it first.

Once we receive a batch of the new emulsion, we try to run one test roll to ensure we won't run into any problems. We added this step after we once received a batch of fogged film from a manufacturer. Halfway into the test, we found the results unsatisfactory and called the manufacturer for clarification. Immediately we were sent a new batch of film and the test continued without a hitch. It seems the film sat in a delivery truck with temperatures over 100° for hours.

In order to carefully research the technical information regarding changes in any new film, we wade through PR releases, tech sheets, and constantly surf the Web. Electronic communication enables us to obtain detailed information in minutes instead of waiting weeks. We try to



house. In order to obtain the best, most consistent results possible, we use a computer-controlled one-shot processor called the Pro V from Wing-Lynch Corporation. This processor uses new chemistry for every roll of film, constantly checks the chemistry levels, maintains the temperature to  $\pm 0.1^\circ$ , and automatically adjusts the time/temperature curve anytime there is a change in the process. We always test the chemistry with a single

test roll, and then run the remaining film in several batches to check consistency from roll to roll. In all the years of testing film using this processor, we have never lost a test due to bad processing.

#### TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF EVALUATIONS

Every time we put a roll of film in a camera, we are testing the film, review due or not. We process the

film and evaluate the results in order to gain additional knowledge and add credibility to our reports.

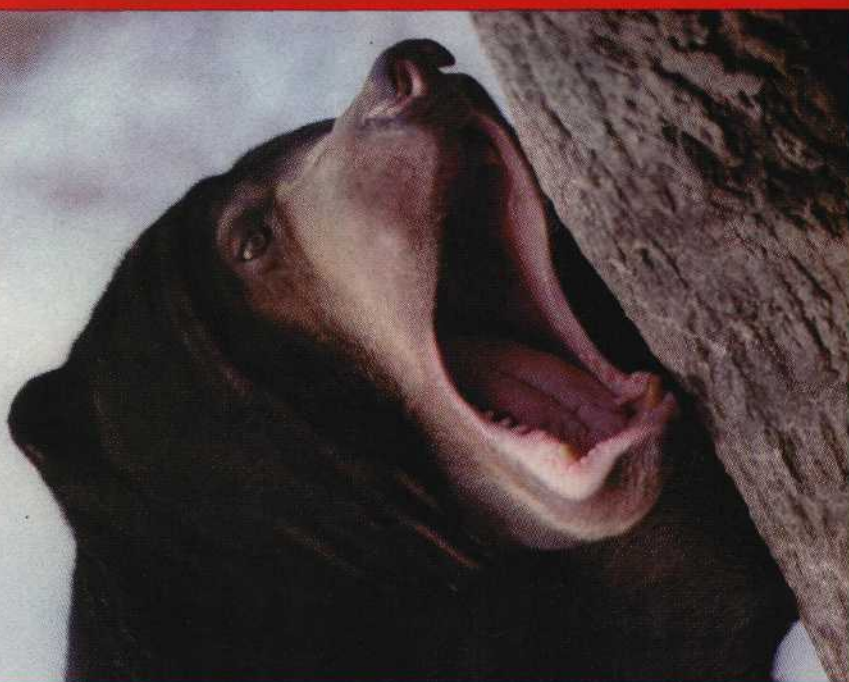
The overall quality of films today is excellent. The range of ISOs is vast and the grain structure minimal. Each company is constantly conducting research and development to devise new, innovative technology to put their films on the leading edge. According to all the PR information, each new film is leaps and bounds



## FUJI

Fuji's films are widely used by pros and amateurs alike for their beautiful colors and great image quality. Fujicolor Press 400 (top left) is a great color-print film for

photojournalists, offering accurate colors in a variety of lighting, and wide exposure latitude. The Fujicolor Superia consumer color-print film line, in ISO 100, 200, 400 and 800 (top right is 400), offers fine grain and great color. The Sensia II consumer slide films (middle right) come in ISO 100, 200 and 400, and offer great sharpness and fine grain along with the lovely colors. Super HG 1600 (bottom left) is a superfast print film. Velvia (bottom right) ISO 50 slide film is favored by pro nature photographers.





and specific niches. Only once in our film evaluation history have we refused to review a film. It was touted as one of the latest, greatest, but our initial testing divulged otherwise. When we contacted the manufacturer, they readily admitted they had rushed it to market too fast. It was withdrawn from the marketplace almost before it was introduced.

A constant problem we encounter

is keeping the film names straight. We are not sure, but we think the film manufacturers do it just to confuse us. It is not uncommon to hear the terms: plus, extra, II, super, or some odd name no one understands. One manufacturer changed the name of the film three times in one month during our testing. We ended up shooting the film box three times before the article went to press.

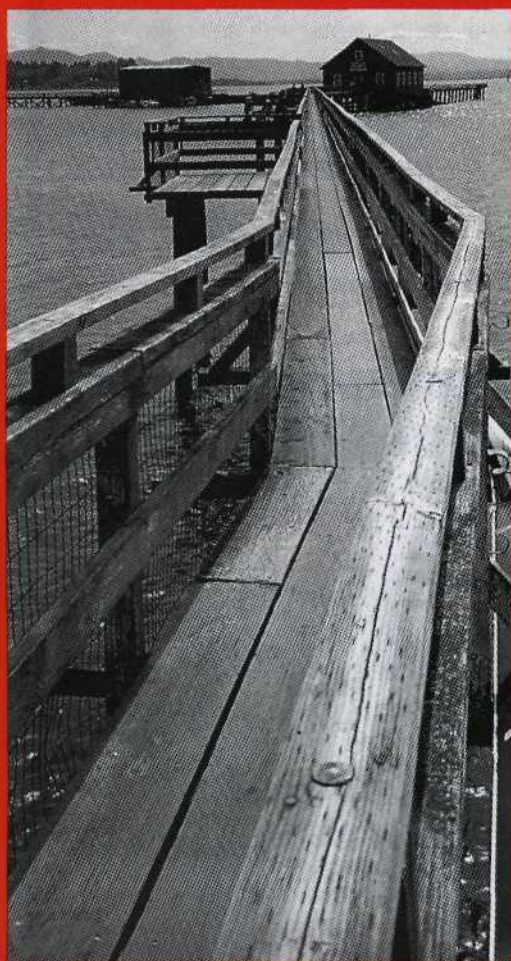
## REFLECTIONS AS THE CENTURY TURNS

As we close this century and turn a millennium, it is hard to believe that 35mm film is less than 70 years young. The photo industry has made great strides and film leads the pack. Slides, initially the front runner, now have a market share of less than 5%, but color negatives have soared to capture 94%. It is no wonder that manufacturers have new film families



# KONICA

Konica is best known for its color-print films—superfast SR-G 3200 (below), the Impresa pro line and the Centuria consumer line (400 at right; 200 at bottom right)—but also offers a fine ISO 100 color-slide film, an excellent black-and-white infrared emulsion, and a fine chromogenic black-and-white film called Monochrome VX400.



# KODAK

Of course, everyone is familiar with the name Kodak, which offers a wide range of films for pros and consumers. The Ektapress color-print film line comes in ISO 100 (top), 400, 800 and 1600 speeds, tailored for excellence in rugged conditions faced by photojournalists. Portra pro color-print films come in ISO 160 and 400 speeds, and normal and vivid-color varieties (the photo of the girl at left is on Portra 400NC), and is wonderful for portrait and commercial work. Kodak Black & White + 400 film (far left) is a chromogenic black-and-white emulsion that's processed in standard C-41 color-print-film chemicals. It was introduced as an APS film, but now is available in 35mm, too. Ektachrome EIR (bottom left) provides fascinating false-color effects, and can be processed in normal E-6 color-slide-film chemicals.



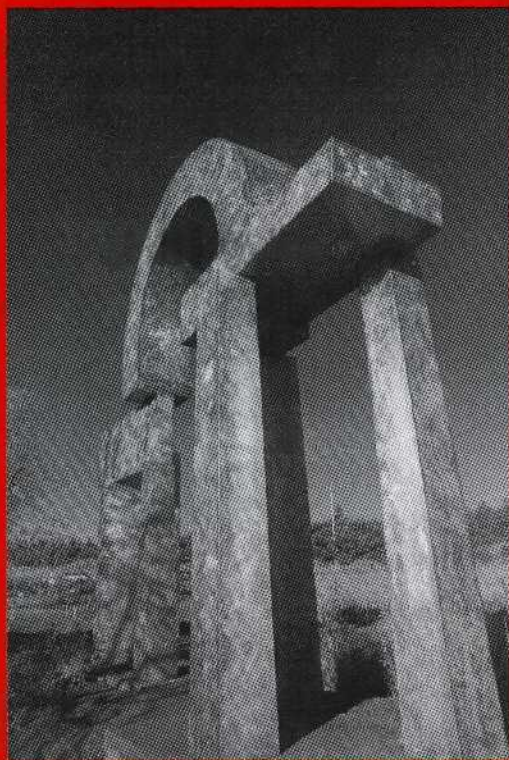


above its predecessor, when in fact, the changes are often minor. Our job is to carefully evaluate those minute changes and help you with your film buying choice.

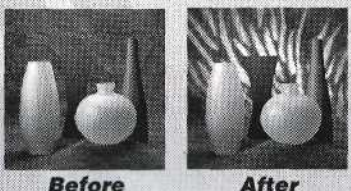
We are often chastised for giving glowing reports on all the film we report. Believe it or not, technological advancements have made it really tough to find a film that provides unsatisfactory results. They all have their good points

# ILFORD

Ilford has recently added color-print films to its lineup, but is best known for its excellent black-and-white emulsions, such as SFX 200 (top), which can produce infrared-like effects, and the superfast yet high-quality 3200 Delta (bottom).



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The PG4001ML Monolight is a 150WS unit with a Guide No. of 150 using 100 ASA, has a 3 F-Stop range, full, 1/2 and 1/4 power. It also comes with a color corrected flashtube and 40W modeling lamp with its own on/off switch. Other features include a built-in photo slave with on/off switch, ready light, test button, 10' PC cord, remote control capability and a universal 3/8" to 5/8" swivel stand adapter with umbrella holder.

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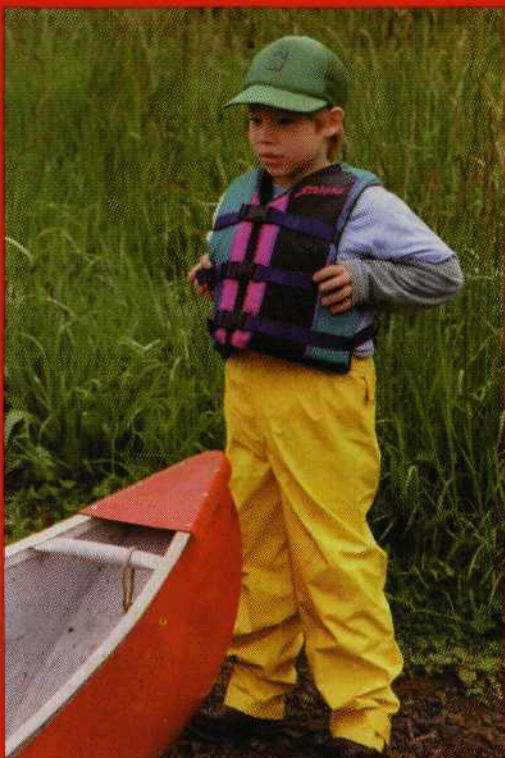




emerging yearly to compete in the "film wars."

The new buzz word for the millennium is digital. All the film manufacturers have made large investments in the digital industry, and are slowly moving in that direction. We look at film today as silver pixels, and just one of many ways to capture data for the digital world.

One of the photos selected for



# METZ

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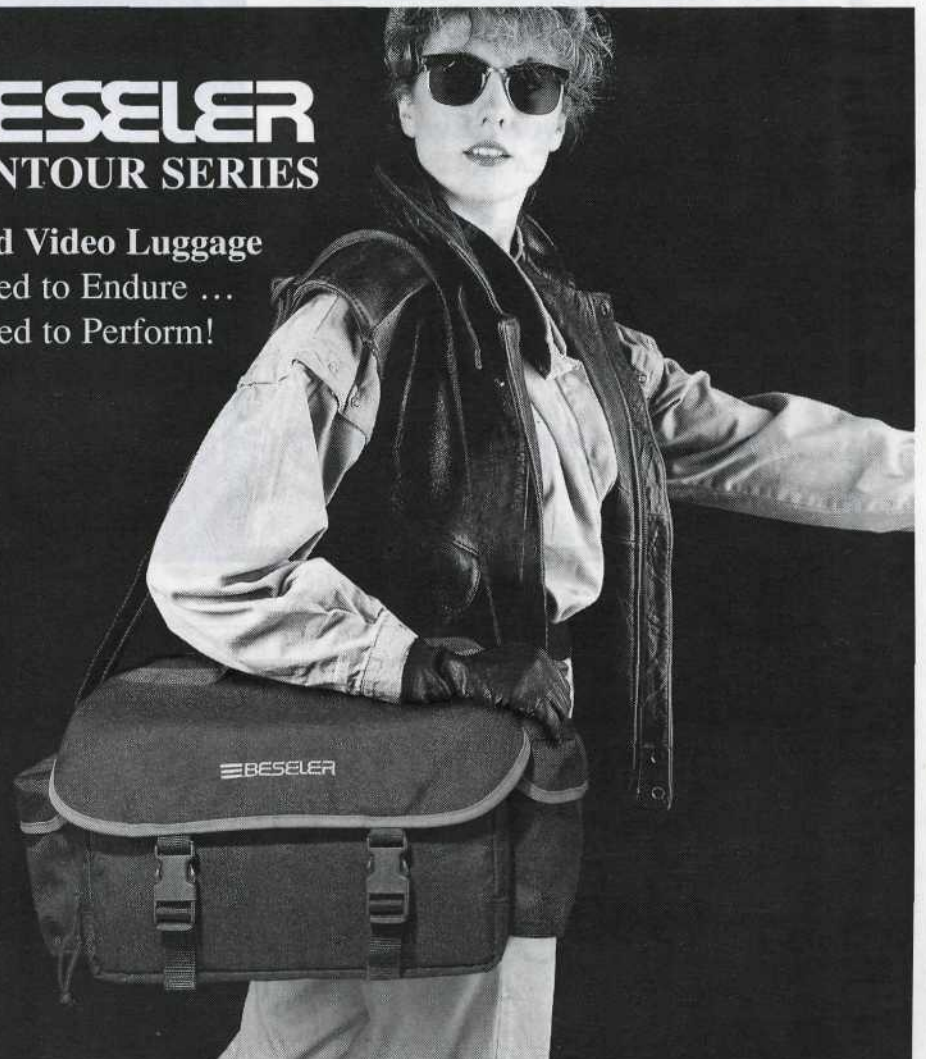
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our first film test for *PHOTOGRAPHIC* Magazine was of our daughter, Kristy, shortly after her first birthday. Several thousand rolls of film later, Kristy is off enjoying college life and she still is a reluctant participant in our film tests. Sorting through the vast rolls of film and reflecting on a few of our favorite images, only shows us just how far film has really come. ■



## POLAROID

Polaroid is famous for its self-processing "instant" films, but also offers conventional-process color-print films in ISO 100, 200 and 400 speeds (above). It also offers 35mm "instant" films—black-and-white and color-slide emulsions and special-purpose films.

After all these years, the authors (and the editors) are amazed by how much films have improved since they first started testing them for *PHOTOGRAPHIC*. In fact, today's films are by and large quite excellent—the color-print films, the color-slide films and the black-and-white films. And it's also interesting to note that a few of the films that were popular back then are still available after all the years—Kodak's Plus-X, Tri-X and Technical Pan, for example. Jack and Sue have greatly enjoyed testing all of those films, and look forward to trying out still better films in years to come.