

**The**  
**Contax**  
**Technical Evolution**

**I**

**The Camera Body  
Variations**

*Luiz Paracampo*

# I – The Pre – War times

## The Beginnings

### I - The First German Era

Now, we Begin a technical analysis about Contax mainly in the era pre Kiev.

Although Leica cameras and accessories are much more known to the general public, the Contax system is a real fascination. The original Type I made in five versions, including a prototype with exposure meter, matured a whole generation of cameras. Using a basic metal an vertical focal plane shutter which was inherited from the large format Contessa Nettel reached the model II (and III) together with the extraordinary twin lens Contaflex, the Nettax I and II the Super Nettel and the lost Syntax.

All “Dinasty” begun with the Contax I.

We will show the development of these cameras cameras and the optics conceived for them, at first presenting the multiplication of the original project.

Since the beginning the Contaxes proved to be the most commercially accepted camera of the range, The Contaflex twin lens was extraordinary costly, heavy and a bit clumsy to use, although the first commercial camera to use a built-in exposure meter, soon adopted in the model III Contax. The Super Nettel I and II were the “poor’s man” (non changeable lens) with options of Triotar 3,5 and Tessar 2,8 camera designed to rival the recent Retina launching, but having Focal plane shutter and rangefinder. It’s relative high price for the model limited sales. The new Nettax was by itself a limited Contax with only two extra changeable lenses. Also limiting its sales. But Zeiss Ikon get experience in what would be the future top of cameras the Syntax thar reunited the best from Contax and Contaflex, towards a Single Lens Reflex pentaprism camera in 1942. The original camera prototype was lost but drawings found in France, for unknown reasons, and brought by Marco Kröger. Zeiss Jena already furnished lenses for Ihagee Exakta and K.W. Praktiflex, but had not his own camera.

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## Pictures:

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**Contessa Nettel Deckrullo (Leica Shop)**

**Contessa Nettel A.G. originally developed the vertical plane shutter (travelling the shorter side of the frame) and applied it first in their own top Deckrullo camera in 1909. The camera was born simply as Nettel but joined Contessa this same year.**

**Above the tropical model (no leather coverings).**

**The name came from Deck-Rouleau meaning "covering roller-blind". Its speeds go from 2 seconds to 1/2800 Seconds!**



The second one was the 1919 -Miroflex B- SLR version of the same camera.  
Above the Contessa-Nettel Miroflex B (9x12). -It existed in the smaller 6,5x9 format- .  
Above with Tessar 3.5 165mm.

There were options of 165/4.5, 165/3.5 or 165/2.7 Tessar lenses, and the 165/2.8 Bio-Tessar for the 9x12 format and 145/2.7, 135/3.5, or 120/4.5 Tessar lenses, plus the Bio-Tessar 135/2.8. for the 6,5x9 format –Miroflex A-.



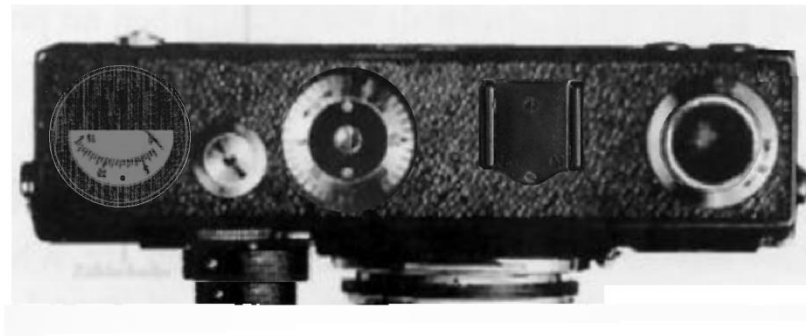
**Zeiss ikon Miroflex A (Catawiki Auction)**

**Above the Zeiss Ikon Miroflex B (9x12) from 1926, after the merging into Zeiss Ikon together Ernemann, Goerz and Ica .**

**The Contessa-Nettel one of the factories of the Zeiss Ikon Foundation badged the Contax and Nettel/Nettax camera generation.**

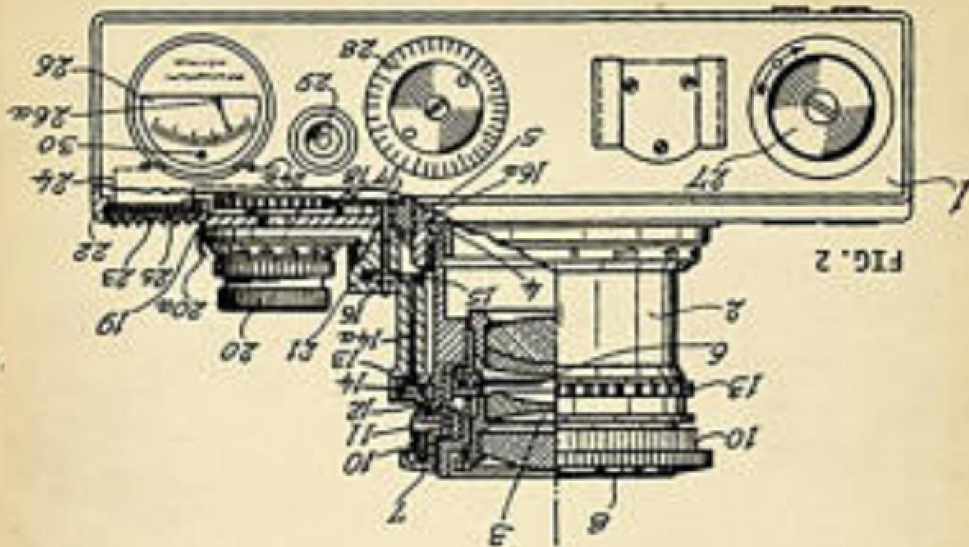
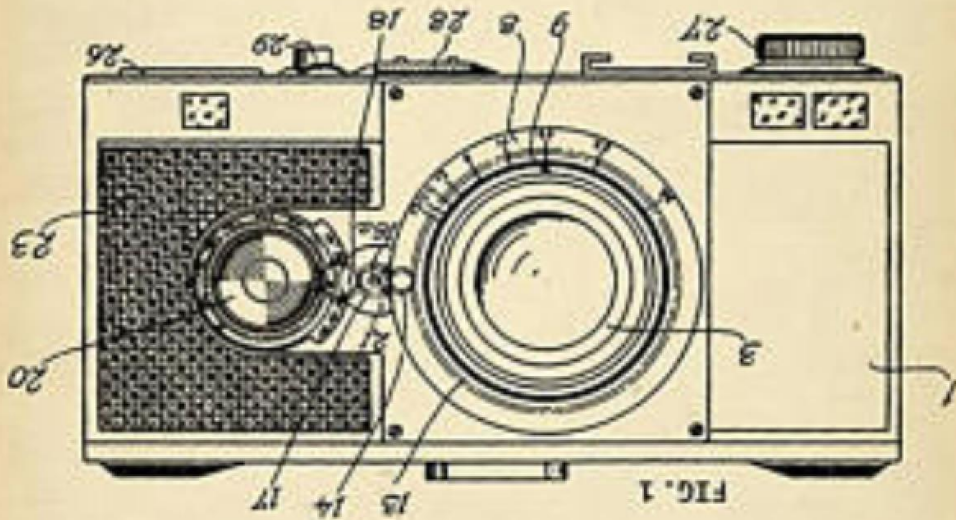


**Contax I first series –no slow speeds (Marco Cavina)**



**Contax I with exposure meter (prototype -1934) - Heinz Kuppenbender USA Patent**

**Photocell under the speed knob. This same arrangement was to be seen in the Contax IV prototype aborted by the advent of the Contarex.**



Patent Drawings

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# Pre War Contax Family

Together Contax, chronologically appeared:



(Photo Arsenal)

**1934 Super Nettel** initially coming with Tessar 2,8 or 3,5 50mm. From 1935 had the option of Triotar 3,5. It was a combination of the Super Ikonta folding 120 cameras, sharing several parts from Contax. The film winding foresees the future Contax II and III. The rangefinder was an adaptation from the first model Super Ikonta with separate viewfinder and rangefinder windows, The removable back has the Contax style. It was produced up to 1937.



(Photo Arsenal)

**1936 Super Nettel II** only with Tessar 2,8 50mm. A De Luxe version of the previous model using chrome technology applied in the new models Contax II.

**Curiosity:** The original black lacquer of previous Contax were made from fossil amber resins came from Russia.





(Kitamura Tanekiyo)

**1936 Nettax.** This lower priced Contax alternative that could be called the Super Nettel III was an interchangeable lens version of the two previous models. The name Nettax came again from Contessa Nettel using “Nett” from previous models and “ax” from Contax. Came originally with two normal lens options: The Tessar 2.8 or Tessar 3.5 both 50mm, both collapsible. Had the same Contax external bayonet mount, but in different register and the only Contax lens that should be used on Nettax cameras was the wide angle Tessar 8 28mm via a special adapter and no rangefinder coupling. As accessory lens could receive Triotar 5.6 105mm with rotating wedges for rangefinder focus.

- Carl Zeiss Jena 5cm f/3.5 Tessar standard lens;
- Carl Zeiss Jena 5cm f/2.8 Tessar standard lens;
- Carl Zeiss Jena 10.5cm f/5.6 Triotar tele lens.



Tessar 2.8 50mm and Triotar 5.6 105mm (Pacific Rim)



(e Bay)

Tessar 8 28mm coupling ring and auxiliary finder

**1935 Contaflex**, - This year saw the birth of the most advanced (and costly) camera up to then, and the first one to have a built-in exposure meter. The research and built costs are unknown, and it is believed to be one of the elements of the “German Propaganda” in those days. Although built with the extreme of known technologies of the era, its use was somewhat awkward and clumsy and so was sold in small quantities. The new camera shared the same array of new objectives developed for the Contax but had a different bayonet mount, which was the forerunner of several post war Dresden cameras like Praktina, Praktisix, Pentacon Six, Altix, Werra, and some other with interchangeable lenses. The short lived Contaflex was a kind of test balloon of the next Contax III.



Contaflex TLR with 1.5 Sonnar lens

The Contaflex has a special bayonet lens mount, incompatible with the rangefinder Contax models, once all lenses carry its own helicoids. The range of lenses includes:

- Biogon 3.5cm f:2.8, with a special right angle finder
- Orthometar 3.5cm f:4.5
- Sonnar 5cm f:1.5
- Sonnar 5cm f:2
- Tessar 5cm f:2.8
- Sonnar 8.5cm f:2
- Triotar 8.5cm f:4
- Sonnar 13.5cm f:4

### -1935 TLR Contaflex Lenses-



**135/4 Sonnar**



**85/2 Sonnar**



**85/4 Triotar**



**Bayonet Sun shade**



**50/1.5 Sonnar**



**50/2 Sonnar**



**50/2.8 Tessar**



**Angle Finder for 35mm lenses**



**35/2.8 Biogon**



**35/4.5 Orthometar**

Pictures by Johannes Geier



**At left Contaflex TLR with Biogon 35mm lens and accessory W. A. reflex finder. At right with 1.5 Sonnar normal lens, down the Contaflex reflex finder with engraved 8.5 cm and 13.5 cm lens field area limits.**



**Pictures: Johannes Geier.**

Oct. 20, 1936.

H. KUPPENBENDER

2,058,086

PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA

Filed May 31, 1935

2 Sheets-Sheet 1

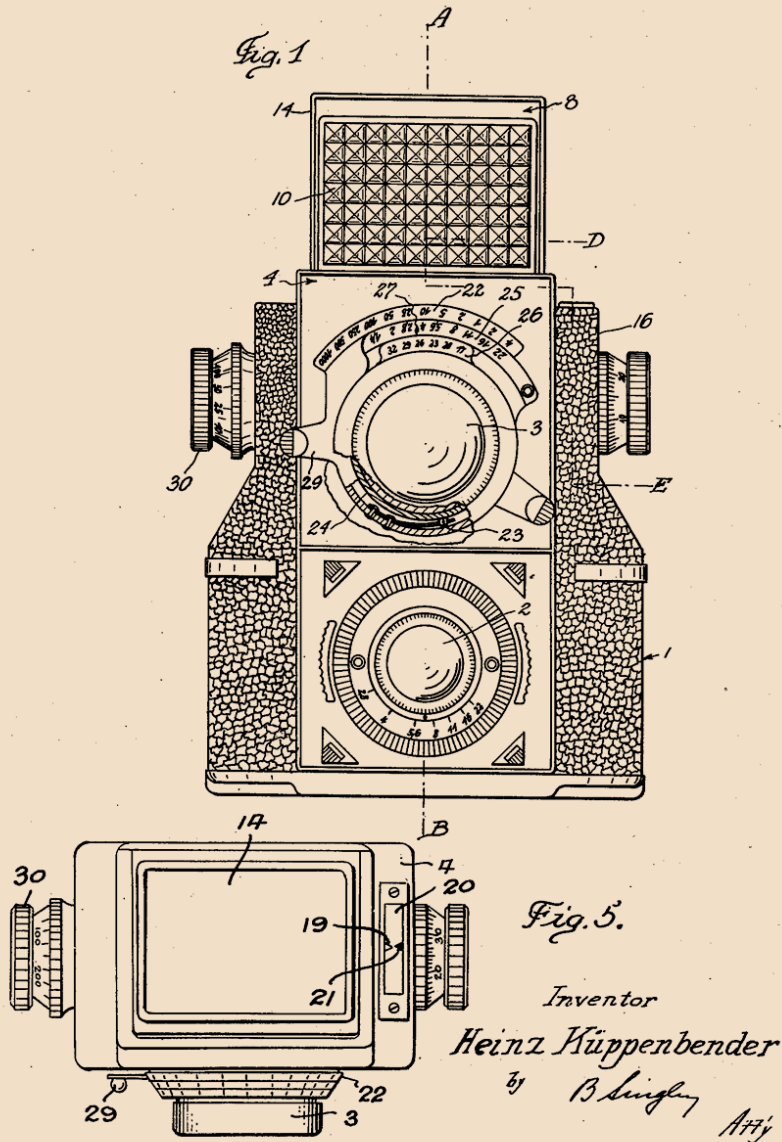


Fig. 5.

Inventor

Heinz Kuppenbender

by B. King Attorney

Oct. 20, 1936.

H. KUPPENBENDER

2,058,086

PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA

Filed May 31, 1935

2 Sheets-Sheet 2

Fig. 2

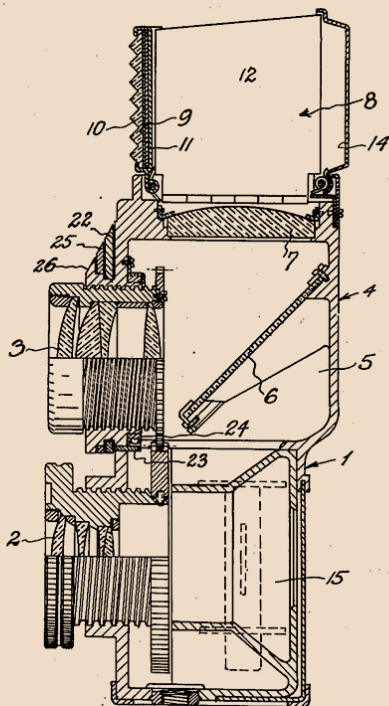


Fig. 3

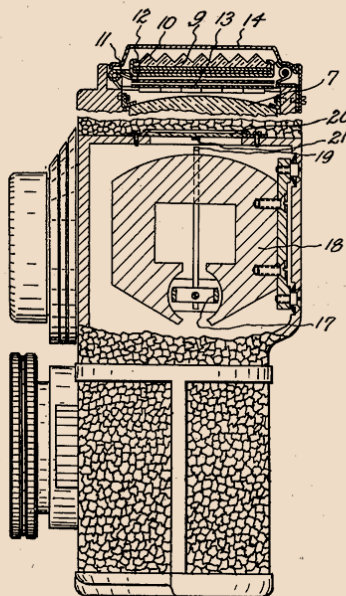
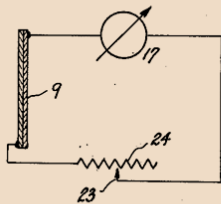


Fig. 4



Inventor  
Heinz Kuppenbender  
by B. Langer Atty

June 22, 1937.

H. KUPPENBENDER

2,084,618

PHOTOELECTRIC EXPOSURE METER

Filed Feb. 8, 1936

Fig. 1

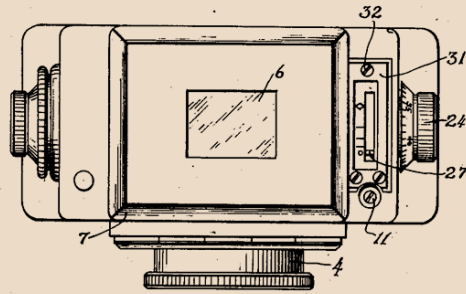


Fig. 2

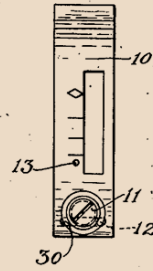


Fig. 3

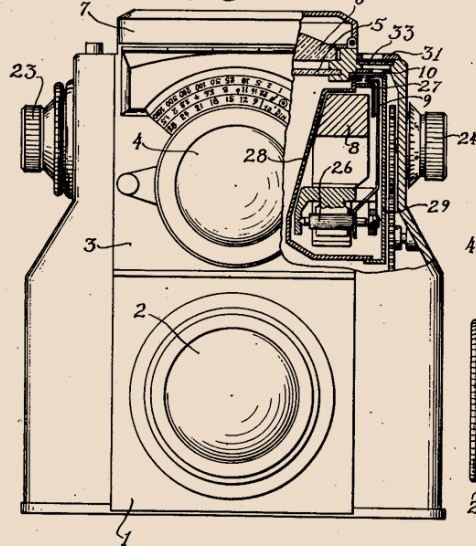
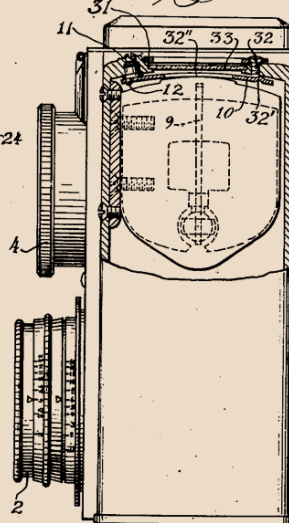


Fig. 4



Inventor  
Heinz Küppenbender  
By  
B. Singer  
Attorney



The Contaflex bayonet mount and normal lens



Contaflex using wide angle Biogon 2,8 35mm and auxiliary finder at right finder detail.





The system included a special sunshade, a pentaprism and a removable accessory shoe for Contameter use upside down in the camera bottom. (Pacific Rim)



Contaflex with Contameter 1343 near focus device, rangefinder and close up lens

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