

## EQUIPMENT

Take a look at a 16mm mini-SLR produced by the Russians in the 1960s

You probably don't think of the Russians as being great innovators in camera design. But over the years they have chalked up quite a few originals. It was the Russians who came up with the world's first 35mm single lens reflex (the Sport in 1935), a year before the German Kine Exakta which more often takes the credit. The Russians gave us one of the smallest and neatest 35mm panoramic cameras (the FT2 in 1958). And in 1960, they produced the world's first (and, as far as I can discover, last) 16mm SLR.

According to a report in a 30-year-old *British Journal of Photography*, the Narciss was originally tested on the Russian market, but failed to catch on, possibly due to the low quality of 16mm film available at that time. The Russians decided to abandon the idea, but a few test cameras got out of the country and generated interest in Europe, and the design was resurrected in 1965.

### Specification

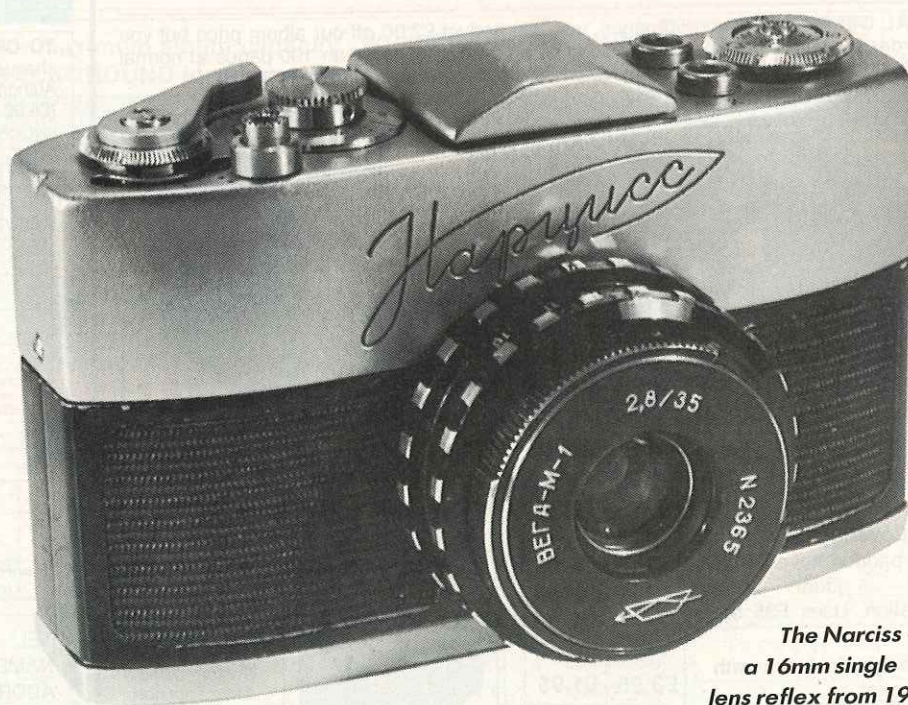
There was quite an interest in 16mm cameras in the 1950s and early 1960s, but the image size, usually set at around 14x17mm, wasn't very practical. The makers of the Narciss, however, made their image size 14x21mm, the same ratio as a standard 35mm frame and only a little smaller than a 35mm half-frame camera turns out.

The Narciss looks like a small 35mm SLR, but with one big difference: the pentaprism, rather than standing proud of the body in the traditional place, is sunk into it. The result is a fairly flat top plate for an SLR.

The pentaprism is removable and looks as if the camera was originally planned to have an interchangeable waistlevel finder. But this seems never to have been made. In any case, because removing the pentaprism

*The quality of pictures from the Narciss was remarkably good, considering the size of the negative*

# THE NARCISS



*The Narciss — a 16mm single lens reflex from 1960*

reveals the focusing screen shielded deep inside the body, it can quite easily be used for waistlevel viewing if needed.

Also on that top plate is the shutter speed control, set by lifting and turning a knob. The speeds run in the usual increments from half a second to 1/500sec plus B, but have the unusual feature of slotting the 1/30sec setting between  $\frac{1}{2}$  and B.

The top plate is completed by the

shutter release, a lever wind, frame-counter, rewind knob which incorporates a film type reminder, and two flash sync sockets for X and M synchronisation. Pressing and twisting the shutter release on B locks the shutter open for time exposures.

Focusing and aperture controls are in the conventional places on the screw-fit lens, which is interchangeable — though not with others made specifically for the camera. Instead,

the Narciss was originally sold with an adapter ring that allowed it to use the full range of Zenith 35mm SLR lenses. It must have made the Narciss the most versatile 16mm camera ever.

## Handling

The Narciss takes 16mm film in its own miniature cassette, from which it is wound onto a take-up spool and later wound back into the cassette in exactly the same way as with a 35mm SLR. Originally the film was unperforated, but the only 16mm film readily available today is perforated and made for the Minolta 16 camera. I used this type of film to reload the Narciss cassette, doing so in the darkroom.

Using the camera is surprisingly easy. The viewfinder, which has its own focusing adjustment for individual eyesight, is a little dim by today's standards, but the size of the image is large for such a small camera.

Since there is no automatic iris stop-down, you have to focus at full aperture, then manually set the lens to the taking aperture before shooting, but even with the lens at f/8, I found the viewfinder image quite bright enough in normal daylight.

After the first few minutes, using the Narciss seemed little different from using a 35mm SLR — except for the size of the body in my hands. The only problem came when I finished shooting, to find the film hadn't been winding on, a hitch that I eventually traced to the rewind button on the baseplate. After depressing it in the usual way, it can be turned to lock it in position. The problem was that the last owner of the camera had left it locked and I had been winding the film with the button permanently depressed. I freed the button, reloaded the film and, the second time I went out to use the camera, everything worked perfectly — or so I discovered later.

## Conclusion

I've used 16mm cameras before, but rarely have I seen such good quality from the minute negatives. They were pin-sharp and, at an average enprint size of enlargement, gave prints of a remarkable quality.

That *BJP* report from the 1960s suggested the the Narciss may well have been a prototype of the camera of the future and, when you see how seriously the makers took the design, you can understand the reason for that assumption.



*The Narciss had a removable pentaprism, but there is no evidence that an alternative waistlevel finder was ever made*

It doesn't stretch the imagination too far to consider that 16mm might have done to 35mm in the 1960s what 35mm did to rollfilm and plates in the 1920s.

You can't help wondering what would have happened if the Japanese had taken up the idea, rather than the Russians.

**John Wade**

### FACT FILE

**Camera:** Narciss  
**Type:** single lens reflex  
**Film:** 16mm  
**Format:** 14x21mm  
**Country of origin:** Russia  
**First manufactured:** 1960

### SHUTTER

**Type:** focal plane  
**Speeds:** 1/2-1/500sec  
**Flash sync:** X and M

### VIEWFINDER

**Type:** eyelevel or waistlevel reflex  
**Focusing:** on ground glass screen

### OTHER FEATURES

**Depth of field:** scale on lens  
**Dimensions:** 10x6x5cm  
**Weight:** 300g (12oz)

### STANDARD LENS

**Type:** Industar  
**Focal length:** 35mm  
**Maximum aperture:** f/2.8  
**Minimum aperture:** f/16  
**Closest focus:** 50cm

### PRICES

**1925:** £29 19s 6d (£29.97½)  
**Today:** around £300

*The Narciss took 14x21mm pictures on 16mm film*

