

Toronto Notes

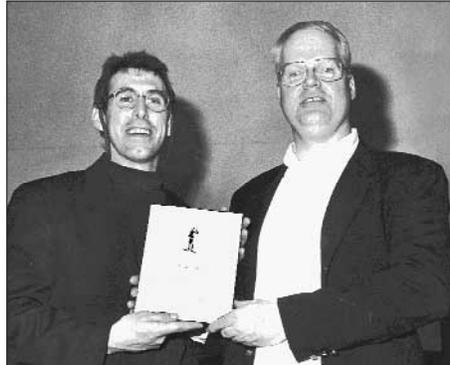
by Mark Singer

For our May program, David Jentz presented the intriguing history of the Retina Camera. Mr. Jentz is president of The Historical Society for Retina Cameras and has assembled a massive database on the camera's history.

Mr. Jentz related that Dr. August Nagel was a noted engineer of photographic devices. He worked for the Tessa metal works until it was bought up by Zeiss. Thereupon he formed his own company which in 1928 produced plate and film cameras in Stuttgart. With the advent of the Leica, Kodak began looking for a company to make precision metal-bodied cameras and in 1931 purchased the Nagel plant, retaining the name and expertise. The first camera was the Retina 117, unveiled in 1934; all cameras had a die-cast aluminum body. The cheaper cameras were finished in black lacquer while the more expensive units were polished and covered in a clear lacquer. It was the first folding 35mm camera to use the standard 35mm cassette (still used today).

Mr. Jentz concentrated on the era before and after the Second World War. Kodachrome arrived in 1936 and a high quality camera was needed to showcase this new product. A lower priced camera was added called *The Retinette*. The folding version was advertised to be small enough to fit into a lady's purse. The Retinette II was more sophisticated yet still was cheaper than the Retina. The Tessar lenses were of a good quality, with the camera bodies covered in plastic material rather than leather. The Retinas, on the other hand, had rangefinders and features that made them more expensive.

Early in the war a rare camera was produced in 1941 called the Retina 167. Very few were built before the factory was converted to war production of high quality timed bomb fuses; coincidentally, the Rochester arm of the company also made the same style of fuse for the American war effort. Dr. Nagel died in August 1943 and his son, who had been with the company since 1939, took over. Helmut Nagel, was in charge from 1941 until retiring in 1979; he died in 1996.



Program co-ordinator Michael Oesch presents guest speaker David Jentz with a PHSC citation

During the war the factory was damaged in bombing raids because of near-by targets. Production of the timers ended in April 1945 and, amazingly, the company was making cameras by September of the same year. It is believed that lenses and camera parts had been sequestered in a secret bunker so they were able to commence production quickly. Metals were hard to acquire so steel stampings were used instead of brass; this brought difficulties during plating so the chrome is often not of high quality. Zeiss lenses were used on the cameras until production could be re-established. Kodak took over direct manufacturing in 1946 by helping to repair war damage and getting new designs in production.

Serial numbers were used with abandon and detailed records were not kept by the factory so it is hard to date cameras. It is only by the assistance of some 7000 camera owners that any sense has been made of the numbering system. It is estimated that (overall) 1.5 million were produced so the database is far from complete. Pre-war models have a capital "K" stamped on them. Cameras that were imported to North America between 1948 and the end of production carry an "EK" suffix. Also, you can date cameras by minor alterations to finish and mechanical items since the cameras were constantly changing and improving. By September 1947 the 100,000th Retina had been produced in Germany. A special edition camera was created to celebrate that occasion. Of 30 produced only three have been accounted for.

September Meeting

September was a time of rekindling friendships and comparing the treasures acquired during the summer. It seems to have become a tradition at The PHSC to don funny glasses, dim the lights and explore the world of 3D.

This fall, the guide to the journey was Simon Bell, author of a series of science books illustrated with 3D pictures. Simon has been taking stereo images for 10 years and has, on occasion, incorporated stereo into professional AV presentations for corporate clients. One of our members, Les Jones introduced him to the world of stereo. He originally used 2 Canon AE-1 cameras to take the pair of images; now he uses Nikon F801 cameras with matching lenses. He has found that only one in every six lenses match properly, even within the same brand series.



Simon Bell shows stereo Exakta and one of his books before the multi-platform of projectors.

For both macro and hyper stereo effects you cannot use the standard eye-spacing; in some instances you have to take pictures several feet apart. For macro work you use a special camera with tiny lenses 18mm apart. Simon used an Exakta made in the 1950s. Also he uses an RBT which takes 18 pairs of 1/2 frame shots on a standard 36 roll film. He warns that with stereo pictures everything must be in sharp focus or else your eyes will become fatigued. Everything must be with maximum depth of field thus requiring flash and stopping down the lens to f32. With closeups especially, it is wise to have a backdrop to achieve depth. When taking