

LUBITEL 166U

Built in Russia and costing only £25, the cheapest medium format camera on the market represents excellent value for money



It may not be the most modern camera, or the most highly specified or even the best quality — in fact, it must number among the worst in all these categories. However, the Russian-made Lubitel 166U has one saving grace — its £25 price tag.

It is less than half the price of better specified Chinese medium format cameras and a fraction of the price of any German or Japanese medium format camera.

The Lubitel is based on a twin lens reflex (TLR) design, which has changed little since it was invented over a century ago. Two boxes with lenses attached are mounted one on top of the other. The upper box is for viewing and the lower box contains the film, and the lens is fitted with a shutter and aperture diaphragm.

The Lubitel contains no automation to help the photographer and a separate lightmeter is recommended to check exposures. Both the shutter speed and the aperture must be set manually. Shutter

speeds range from 1/15sec to 1/250sec and apertures — which aren't click stopped — range from f/4.5 to f/22. When tested, the faster shutter speeds weren't found to be accurate, although the 1/15sec was spot-on. The 1/125sec was found to be closer to 1/60sec.

Vignetting

The 75mm anastigmat lens, first used in the 1900s, isn't good compared to medium format cameras many times the price. It demonstrates more flare than is usual and some vignetting — but what can you expect for £25?

The camera takes 120 medium format film producing 6x6cm negatives, but a mask is provided which gives 6x4.5cm negatives and this has the added benefit of reducing vignetting. The smaller format size is achieved by placing the appropriate-sized gate in the back of the camera before loading the film.

For those used to the point and shoot cameras which are currently so popular, the 166U will come as quite a shock. The

manual frame wind-on mechanism has no click stops and the user must watch the back of the film through a red window to see when the next frame has been reached. Multiple exposures are easy to produce — a little too easy, in fact, for those cosseted by the built-in winder common on modern SLRs.

The scene in the waistlevel finder is laterally reversed and a magnifying glass is attached to

the hood for close inspection of the screen for fine focusing. The focus setting is changed by turning a knurled ring on the upper lens which also turns the bottom lens.

The Lubitel 166U offers an encouragingly cheap entry point into the delights of manual photography and medium format-sized film. With all its shortcomings the camera is excellent value for money. ■

FACT FILE

Camera: Lubitel 166U
Country of origin: Russia
Format: 6x6cm or 6x4.5cm
Price: £25

SHUTTER

Type: mechanical between the lens shutter
Speeds: 1/15-1/250sec plus B
Flash sync: at all speeds

EXPOSURE CONTROL

Modes: manual
Metering: no

VIEWFINDER

Type: waistlevel laterally reversed reflex finder

Information: none

FOCUSING

Type: manual focus on ground glass screen with magnifier

OTHER FEATURES

Self-timer: 7-15sec
Multiple exposures: yes
Remote release: yes, cable supplied
Power: no

LENS

Type: three element anastigmat T-22
Focal length: 75mm
Maximum aperture: f/4.5