

Cameras We Use:
The Kodak Stereo 35

Cameras We Use - The Kodak Stereo 35 by Ray Moxom



The Kodak 35 mm Stereo Camera came on the market towards the end of 1954 and remained in production until 1959. This camera was by no means the first stereo camera that Kodak ever made. Back in 1901 Kodak released the “No 2 Stereo Kodak” and continued to market stereo models of both Kodak and Brownie cameras until 1925. An early Kodak stereo box camera and a Kodak Hawk-Eye Stereo are shown below.



Vintage stereo camera photos courtesy of Ralph Johnston's Stereo New England Website at:

<http://phsne.org/stereocameras/35mm-rollfilm/35mm-rollfilm-2.html>

The significance of the Kodak 35 mm Stereo was that, unlike previous Kodak stereo cameras, this camera was designed for colour film and more importantly for Kodak, it was designed for Kodak Kodachrome film. In the 1950s Kodak even introduced a special 20 stereo exposure pre paid Kodachrome film that included stereo mounting in the purchase price. This film was known as type K335. The then type K135 standard 20 and 36 exposure films, yielding 15 and 28 stereo pairs respectively, could also be stereo mounted by Kodak for an additional cost.

My first stereo camera was a Kodak Stereo 35. I purchased it second hand in the late 1970s. While I eventually started using an SLR twin rig, acquired a f2.8 Realist, a Belplasca and later an RBT, the Kodak stayed in the family and Nancy used it for 15 years before switching to an Olympus XA twin rig. The Kodak is probably the easiest to use of all the realist format stereo cameras. Important controls - shutter speed, aperture, frame counter and focus are all visible from the top of the camera. Components are identified below.



The Kodak Stereo is cleverly designed to cater for both the experienced and novice photographer. For example, the coupled focusing can be operated from either lens. The right lens is calibrated in feet and has a depth of field scale. For those not skilled in estimating distance, the left lens indicates distance by picture type, ie 'close ups' 'groups' and 'scenes'- photo below. The double lens cover in this photo also covers the viewfinder, ensuring that the cover will not be accidentally left in place when taking a photograph.



The built in exposure guide to simplify the selection of shutter speed and aperture is innovative, but of little use as the calibrations are for the slow speed Kodachrome film of the 1950s.

Advancing the film cocks the shutter. Intentional double exposure is possible, but only by re-cocking the shutter with a lever at the bottom of the camera, an operation that can not be performed if the camera is in its case - photo below. The camera also needs to be removed from its case to rewind the film - the rewind lever is on the right in this photo.



The camera is of reasonably durable plastic construction and is very light (630 grams compared with 790 grams for a f3.5 Realist). It has a clear viewfinder and the built in spirit level should ensure that we keep our horizons level.

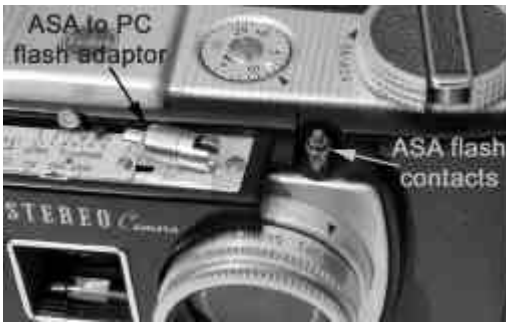
Film loading is easy - just drop the cartridge into the film chamber, extend the film over the take up drum and close the camera back. When the winding knob is turned, a tooth in the take up drum will engage one of the film perforations locking it to the drum. The film rewind knob has a folding handle to speed up the rewind process - photo right.



The right photo shows the large diameter take up drum and the film sprockets. The shutter is cocked by the mechanical action of the film rotating the film sprockets. It might be argued that it is wrong to use the film as part of the mechanical process, however I am not aware of any problems relating to this.



Also in the above photo can be seen a small flat spring that is used to keep the film in horizontal alignment, a feature I have not noticed in other stereo cameras.



The Kodak Stereo has the old American ASA bayonet flash contacts. If you intend to use an electronic flash, an ASA to PC adaptor is essential. Fortunately, many cameras come with this adaptor - photo left.

The photo of the opened camera below shows the highly polished pressure plates. In all the years that Nancy and I used Kodak stereo cameras, we never experienced a scratched film.



Shutter speeds are $\frac{1}{25}$ to $\frac{1}{200}$ sec. The lenses are f3.5 Kodak Anastons - a Cooke type triplet of reasonable quality.

In the 1950s Kodak range of 35 mm “mono” cameras the lower cost Pony cameras were also fitted with Anaston lenses, while the more expensive Signet 35 mm cameras had the Tessar type Kodak Ektar lenses. It is a pity that Kodak did not offer a Kodak Stereo with the higher quality Kodak Ektar lenses that were fitted to the first of the f2.8 Realist cameras.

The Kodak Anaston lenses have an advantage over the lenses fitted to the f3.5 Realist and some other 1950s stereo cameras. The Anaston lenses do not vignette at small apertures (f16 and f22).

This camera has adaptor rings for ‘Series V’ filters (photo right). As the front elements of the lenses rotate when they are focused, the use of polarising filters are a bit awkward.



Like most 1950s cameras the shutters tend to get “Sticky” and require cleaning, lubrication and adjustment if they have not been used for some time. Also lenses may need to be cleaned if the camera has not been stored under optimal clean dry conditions.

A case was available at an extra cost of US\$9.50 (photos below). All operations other than film load/unload and intentional double exposure can be performed while the camera is in its case. Many of the Kodak Stereo cameras now in use still have the original case. As the camera body is made of bakelite, the protection offered by the case is more important than with metal bodied cameras.



When the Kodak Stereo was released in 1954 it sold for US\$84.50 at a time when the Realist was selling at \$159 for the f3.5 model and \$198 for the f2.8.



Above is the Kodak Stereo that Nancy and I used for many years. While showing signs of use and it probably needs a clean lube and adjust, it is still in good working order. On the other hand, the camera that has been used for the other photos in this article is in as new appearance, but due to lack of use, has a sticky shutter. The old saying ‘use it or lose it’ certainly applies to stereo cameras.

So what is missing from the Kodak? Well it does not have a rangefinder, something that is of doubtful use on a stereo camera. What is missed most however, is that the Kodak does not have an accessory shoe. To overcome this you can either use a flash bracket or epoxy an accessory shoe to the top of the camera.

Now he's twice the photographer

He knows that no one camera can do all things. So now he carries two.

For the round realism of color stereo he uses a Kodak Stereo Camera. For color transparencies to be projected big and bright, or for black-and-white negatives printed big and bold, he uses a Kodak Signet 35 Camera.

Go picture taking with these two and you'll come back with every scene caught as it should be. Chances are you can own both cameras for less down payment than the cost of some box-camera outfits. Ask your Kodak dealer about the small down payments and convenient terms he offers.

Kodak Stereo Camera (top). Kodak Anaston Lenses, *f/3.5 Lumenized*. Kodak Flash 200 Dual Shutter with 4 speeds to 1/200 second plus "B." Quick-action zone focusing. Unique selector prevents exposure errors. Spirit level in viewfinder. Simplified loading; rapid crank rewind; automatic shutter cocking. Double-exposure prevention. Price, \$84.50.

Kodak Signet 35 Camera (right). Kodak's finest miniature-camera lens—the Kodak Ektar Lens, *f/3.5 Lumenized*. Accurate coupled rangefinder combined with viewfinder. Kodak Synchro 300 Shutter with speeds from 1/25 to 1/300 second, plus "B." Ball-bearing lens mount; double-exposure prevention; automatic film stop; automatic film count. Price, \$75.

Prices include Federal Tax and are subject to change without notice.

EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY, Rochester 4, N. Y.

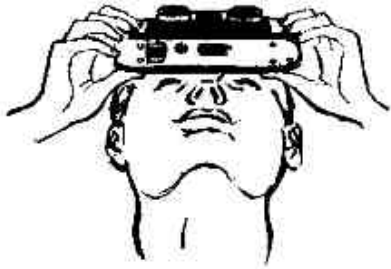
The above Kodak advertisement is from the November 1955 issue of Popular Photography magazine. The full advertisement included a photo of a man using a Kodak Stereo camera and also included a photo of the Kodak Signet 35 Camera shown on the right.



Many 3Ders are passionate about their Kodak Stereo cameras and sight ease of use, image quality and the spirit level in the viewfinder as just some of the reasons why they remain loyal to a camera that was well designed and built to a low cost.

The Kodak Stereo is one of the easiest cameras of the '50 era to use. It is a good beginners camera, while experienced photographers also appreciate its simplicity and ease of use.

In the mid 1950s Kodak was very committed to stereo photography with its stereo camera and specially packaged K335 film. Kodak also published a 36 page booklet titled 'Picture it in Stereo' which sold for 35 cents. The very sensible tip below is from that Kodak booklet.



you can tilt it up



you can tilt it down



but don't tilt it sideways

An earlier, unillustrated and much shorter article by Ray Moxom on the Kodak Stereo camera was published in the May 1996 edition of 3D Window. This later version, also by Ray, incorporates and expands on the earlier article.