

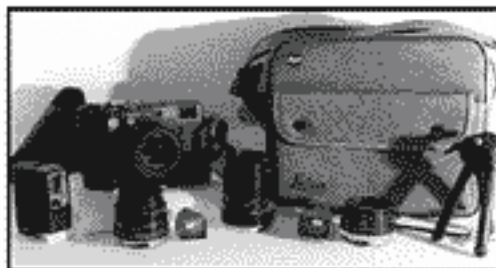
My Favourite Leica

Derek J. A. Rathbone
(Travelling Light with the CL)

When I first saw the LEICA CL in the late 1970's I considered it to be a most unattractive little camera and unlike my M4 it did not have the look, feel, or charisma of a true LEICA. To a certain extent I still have the same feelings about its appearance, but in every other respect it suits my purpose almost to perfection. It is a greatly underestimated camera, has a meter, which is superb, and a range finder quite good enough for use up to my maximum need of 90mm. The 40mm lens I find excellent in definition and for me this focal length has become ideal on a standard lens. The viewfinder is very good although I must admit to favouring that on the CLE.

I have four LEICA CL's, one ordinary model and three Anniversary models. All, but one, have been bought second-hand over the years. Owning models which bear the '50 JAHRE' logo makes them more 'LEICA' and sets them apart from the basic camera, making them a little more unique and satisfying to own and use. This logo is also a constant and welcome reminder of 1925, Oskar Barnack and the long and great Leitz history that is unlikely ever to be equalled.

All the CL's have been used at some period over the past 20 years but to a varying degree. The ordinary model has seen the heaviest, although careful, use at home and each year on touring holidays in Europe and on some occasions in the Far East travelling on foot, by car, boat or plane over many miles is a good test of any camera if constantly in use at varying temperatures and different climates. Despite this use I would still classify the condition as close to Exc.++. The Anniversary models, one of which has seen limited use, range from Mint to Exc. only. However, that is the condition in which they



The "Travelling Light" outfit.

were bought and which has been maintained. Following these years of good faithful service and although almost still in its prime my ordinary CL is about to take well earned retirement and as happens so often in life these days, it will be replaced by a much more attractive 'Anniversary model for future everyday use.

When in use the camera is always well protected in a case but not the pouch for I much prefer a proper E.R.C. The case, made for the old 'Olympus Trip', carefully modified to take the CL is used. Yes, it can be done and I have worn out one and am now using the second. It gives almost perfect protection although I admit that like the camera its looks leave something to be desired.

I would not suggest that the cameras have been trouble free. Most have necessitated some repair over the years although the major problem has been replacement of the white plastic take up spool which appears to be a weakness in this model. On a 'once in a lifetime' excursion a spare body would be taken but I would take this precaution whatever my main camera. Having said this, none of the cameras have let me down when being used in the field.

Other than for family photography, and for some copying use, my main interest has always been travel photography and with advancing years my

outfit needs to be very compact but above all as lightweight as possible. Only by this means can I continue to enjoy photography. I can, if necessary, walk around all day with the CL fitted with 40mm Summicron around my neck and this I could not do with an 'R' model or even an 'M'. This covers some 95% of my photographic needs but with a 90mm 2.8 Tele Elmarit in my pocket it is closer to 100%.

However, if possible, I do prefer to carry a small yet fairly comprehensive outfit in a small holdall. In addition to the CL, 40 and 90 lenses on occasions it also carries a 35mm 1.4 Summilux where the extra stop is useful for interiors or the 28mm 2.8 'Rokkor' (which MINOLTA made for the CLE). This lens gives excellent results and is almost half the weight and size of the 28mm Elmarit and it is, of course, particularly useful for tall buildings in confined areas, almost a must in the older European towns that I love to photograph. A small flash is carried and a very small pocket tripod and cable release for night use also finders for the 35 or 28 lenses and a spare film. All this can be accommodated in a holdall measuring approximately 10x6x4 (inches of course). I have a choice of three favourites made by LEICA, TENBA, and SAMSONITE. The cases have all been very precisely tailored and customised to fully utilise the limited space. There are other bags which I have modified for a CL outfit - LEICA old and new, different sizes of BENSER bags, etc. But that is another story.....

I would not consider a change from my faithful workhorse CL unless LEICA were to introduce a new lightweight interchangeable lens replacement, hopefully with a bright chrome finish. How about a 'Panda' CL? With, of course, a quality shiny brown leather E.R.C. I would buy at least one and put it to good and careful use hopefully, but doubtfully, for another 20 years of travelling light! 