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Undercover 35

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As a "beta" tester of the Lubitel 166-U camera, I decided to investigate an application for a 2 1/4 camera that related to a long-standing interest in panoramic photography. In its simplest form, a definition for a panoramic photograph might be that it is an image significantly longer in one dimension than the other. This is a justification for some point-and-shoot cameras to be called panoramic when in reality all that is done is masking down a regular 35mm frame to a format approahing 1:3; while the normal 35mm format has an aspect ratio of 1:1.5. The lens placed on these cameras is often a short focal length lens, but it does not need to be so.

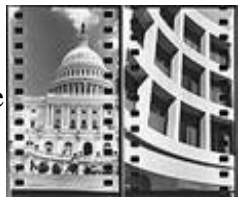
Anyway, the manner in which I decided to explore the panoramic possiblities of the Lubitel 166-U was to attempt loading the camera with 35mm film that was re-spooled onto a 120 spool and making an exposure that was a frame (or 24mm) wide by 65mm long and thus about 1:2.5 in aspect ratio. Almost panoramic.

To re-spool a used paper backing spool, I first inserted an empty spool in the camera's take-up mechanism. Then I attached the trailing end of the used paper to it and turning the winding knob a few turns took up enough paper on it to make sure it was not going to come loose later.

I then took a 35mm cassette of ILFORD HP5 Plus and cut the tongue square. I inserted it into the film supply chamber of the Lubitel 166-U and pulled out sufficient film to reach the nip area on the spool, taking care to make sure the film would feed straight onto that spool.

The rest of the process I performed in the dark. This consisted of turning the film winding knob, taking up both paper backing and 35mm film simultaneously onto the empty spool. When I felt the location where the original 2-1/4 film had been attached to the paper reach my fingers, I cut the 35mm film and attached it with a piece of tape to the backing material. Finally I completed the winding process and then proceeded to place the newly (re)loaded 120 spool in the supply chamber and used the camera pretty much in the normal way.

Making photographs with a spool reloaded in this fashion is a somewhat serendipitous affair. One simply needs to remember that the film runs vertically within the viewfinder, but the exact location is not well defined. To make photographs, I simply assumed the best and more often than not, I was not disappointed. It turns out that the negatives that I had expected to turn out as 24mm x 65mm actually were more like 35mm x 65mm, but they contained the sprocket hole area in this later case.



Although I had set out to make panoramic photographs (which by definition these could easily fit) it turns out that in the process I discovered a novel visual artifact that made the resulting photos acquire a "look" all of their own. This was the fact that the image produced by the lens extended right out through the sprocket hole area. While one would think that the appropriate thing to do would be to crop these areas out of the final print, I found a new visual "aesthetic" by simply leaving the sprocket holes in the final pictures and utilizing them as an element of composition.

In any case, one can leave in or crop them out at the printing stage depending on "your" vision. I hope the photographs speak for themselves.

Professor Andrew Davidhazy is a member of the Imaging and Photographic Technology Department of the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, NY. He is a teacher with over 20 years of experience and while specializing in scientific and technical aspects of photography, he is almost equally active in the application of technical imaging concepts to aesthetic purposes.