Preview:

THE NEW SPOTMATIC

A tryout at the Tokyo Olympics

By **FRED SPRINGER-MILLER** Photographs by the author

Among the records set at the Olympic games in Tokyo last fall was a new mark for the greatest assemblage of heavy photographic artillery in history. The focal lengths, if taken together, might have reached from Tokyo to the moon.

But for me, the most important item was a trim and compact Pentax Spotmatic, which I tried out at the fast-moving athletic events. One of the most exciting developments in single-lens reflex technology is through-the-lens light metering, and that was why I was especially anxious to try the new Spotmatic. Just as the preview button helped free us from depth-of-field scales and charts, through-the-lens metering lets us "calculate" exposures and make settings with our eye glued to the viewfinder, looking at the picture.

Using the new Spotmatic, I found I could compose, shoot, and when necessary, meter in one smooth operation, without ever having to look away from my picture. Metering through the lens is also, in general, more accurate. And it makes no difference what sort of lenses, bellows, filters, attachments, or other contraptions you hang on the front end.

Tokyo Optical Co. with its Topcon was the first to offer this new flexibility. In the Topcon, photocells measure the light passing through tiny slits in the reflex mirror. More recently, the Alpa 9d appeared with three CdS cells that measure the brightness of the groundglass.

When I first learned that the Asahi Optical Co. had brought out the new Pentax Spotmatic or SP, the name aroused some false hopes in me. I wondered if they had combined a through-the-lens metering system with the features of the excellent Pentax Spot Meter. I had visions of a switch that would let you meter either the whole field of view or just a spot in the middle (say about the size of a focusing spot).

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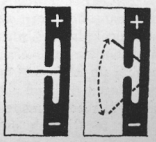
The American version of the Spotmatic will be available this year from the Honeywell Co., and the Denver firm says that it will be an improved version of the Japanese model, with certain changes being made for the American market. Nothing in the Honeywell Pentax line is being discontinued with the introduction of the Spotmatic to the American market, as it joins the growing Pentax family. (A complete test report on the Honeywell Pentax SP and the new f/1.4 Takumar lens will appear in a subsequent issue.)—THE EDITORS



Viewfinder of Spotmatic has meter needle on right-hand side. When needle is centered (far left), exposure is correct for most scenes. But for those that may fool meter, you can let needle ride up or down to increase or decrease it.

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However, the Spotmatic measures the whole field of view, or all but the very corners. Still, it's extremely helpful. Like the Alpa, it measures the brightness of the groundglass. Two CdS cells are concealed on each side inside the pentaprism housing, in such a way that they are little affected by stray light from the viewfinder window.

The meter is coupled directly to the shutter dial, with the resistors located directly underneath the dial. It's powered by a mercury battery housed in the baseplate. The meter itself is located under the top cover, in the same position as the self-timer on the SV (or H3v in the Honeywell line), while the self-timer has been moved down to the conventional front-right spot. The body cover has been made higher to accommodate the extra gadgetry, so that in appearance the camera is somewhat larger.

To operate the Spotmatic, you first set your film speed on a 10-800 ASA-calibrated scale built into the shutter dial. Then you push up a switch located on the left front of the prism housing. This switch simultaneously turns on the meter and closes the diaphragm down to the manual aperture setting (a separate switch on the lens barrel lets you close down the diaphragm to your taking aperture *without* turning on the meter if you just want to check depth of field). As a rule, it's best to focus before metering, because the brightness of the groundglass changes when an image goes out of focus.

Looking through the viewfinder, you can see on the right side a needle and centering arrangement similar to that on the Nikon Photomic, with a plus mark above and a minus mark below. Depending on the photographic situation you're shooting, you'll know whether it's the shutter speed or aperture you want to change to get the needle centered in the middle.

Or, you may not want to center the needle precisely. With backlighted subjects, for example, you might want the needle to ride up a bit closer to the plus mark to insure extra exposure for shadow detail. The viewfinder needle is active over a range of three full *f*-stops before coming to rest near the overexposure or underexposure marks.

When the meter is off, the needle is locked in the centered position. A battery check is made by turning the shutter speed below the measurability range, then turning on the meter. If the needle drops quickly, the battery is functioning.

The metering range is LV 3-18 at ASA 100. With this film-speed setting, the meter operates at 1/4 to 1/1,000 sec. A limitation of the mechanically shutter-coupled system is that at ASA 25-40, for example, the meter shuts off at speeds over 1/250. Conversely, at film speeds over ASA 400, you get no readings under 1/30 sec.

If you forget to turn off the meter before taking a picture, the shutter mechanism switches it off automatically. Under normal use, battery life is about one year.

The Spotmatic has a 50-mm Takumar *f*/1.4 speed lens, replacing the *f*/1.8 and *f*/2 55-mm optics that were standard on the previous Pentaxes. The new lens is lighter than others in its class, has a fine flat field, keeps its sharpness at smaller apertures, and goes just slightly diffuse wide open.

The new camera takes all Pentax lenses with the solid 42-mm threaded mount, but the new 50-mm lens can be used only with the most recent Pentaxes whose mirrors will clear the protruding rear element.

Along with the new camera, the Asahi Optical Co. is bringing out a number of new lenses for the SP and other Pentaxes. The 35-mm Auto-Takumar *f*/2 is the fastest Japanese wide-angle lens available for any SLR. It appears to be constructed on the same general pattern as the semi-automatic *f*/3.5 that it replaces.

And for close-up work as well as general picture-taking, Asahi has announced a short-mount 100-mm Takumar *f*/4 for use with bellows and a Gauss-type 50-mm *f*/4 "macro" lens in a special mount, both focusing from infinity to life-size.

In other respects, the SP is still very much a Pentax, with the only innovation being a concealed catch for the hinged cover. The Spotmatic is smaller and lighter than other SLR's, including those that have through-the-lens light meters. It's a fine camera for color shooting, well suited to all slow films with narrow latitude. I found the meter was extremely accurate.

Working with the Spotmatic during the Olympics was both fun and challenging. Surrounding me was a wide variety of equipment, such as the "tin can" lenses—catadioptric Nikkor 500-mm and 1,000-mm and 800-mm Canon mirror optics. One enterprising photographer even had a Canon television zoom lens hitched to an Olympus Pen F. Another zeroed in on the field events with an upside-down Bronica mounted on a huge surveyor's tripod that held a long lens high over the heads in front of him.

Many photographers roamed the stands, seeking out better vantage points for their zoom lenses. Actually, it was one of the few big events I've seen where well-equipped amateurs could compete on an equal basis with the pros. And for me, the Spotmatic helped to do the job with ease.—