Classic CAMERA





NIKON S3 OLYMPIC

Production was halted on the Nikon S3 in March 1961 after just over fourteen thousand had been built in order to leave room on the production lines for the Nikon F, then in great demand. For the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, just over two thousand Nikon S3 cameras with black finish were made, utilizing some of the components of the Nikon F such as its titanium curtain shutter, winder lever, rewind crank and self timer lever. Serial numbers range from 6320001 to 6322561. The lens equipment of the Nikon S3 Olympic was a new version of the 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S with long barrel and black finish, of which only two thousand were produced.

21mm f/4 NIKKOR O LENS

Production began on the extreme super wide angle lens for rangefinder Nikons in May 1959, just a few months before rangefinder Nikons went out of production. As a result, just a few hundred of these lenses were made. It was the last lens designed specifically for rangefinder Nikons, but was re-issued in November 1959 in a modified version with bayonet mount for the Nikon F.
Lenses with Nikon/Contax mount complete with finder, lens hood and caps are a truly rare item.



Photos by Luigi Cane



NIKON I

The 24x32mm format Nikon I camera first appeared in Hong Kong and Singapore stores in October 1948. Production was halted in 1949 to allow for the modifications that would transform it into the 24x34mm format Nikon M. Of the approximately seven hundred Nikon I cameras built, about four hundred were sold and the others were modified following assembly and transformed into Nikon M cameras.
Nikon I serial numbers range from 6090 to 609759, but in actuality, mass production started with the number 60921.
Some Nikon I cameras were equipped with the 50mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q lens with retractable barrel, while the others utilized the 50mm f/2 Nikkor H, also retractable. About three thousand of the latter were made, the early ones bearing the same serial numbers as the cameras with the initial number 609 followed by two or three digits.

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SPECIAL ISSUE
RANGEFINDER NIKONS

Nikon S3, chrome finish with S36 motor (photo Tony Hurst)



250mm f/4 Nikkor Q lens



Nikon no. 6091 (Mother One).



Chrome finish finders for 85mm, 105mm and 135mm

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RANGEFINDER NIKONS



Nikon S3, chrome finish with S36 motor (photo Tony Hurst)

As everyone knows, the camera system concept was developed in the Thirties in Germany where they manufactured versatile cameras equipped with a choice of lenses and accessories to meet a wide range of photographic requirements. At the center of these systems were sophisticated, easy to handle cameras that were sturdy and versatile, in medium or small format and preferably equipped with reflex finders, but also normal finders with or without rangefinder.

Among the medium format reflex cameras built in Germany in the 1930s were the 6x6cm Korelle and the 6x6cm Primarflex, as well as the 4x6.5cm Exakta VP. Small format reflexes included the 35mm Exakta and Praktiflex, while among the small format with normal finder were the Leica, Contax and Robot.

All these cameras survived the storm of the second world war and were reissued after the war virtually unchanged. During the Fifties, they also became the models on which numerous imitations were based, continuing in the same tradition but also incorporating many changes and improvements, as well as some enhancements that proved decisive.

In far off Japan

In the pre-war period, simultaneously with the birth of the first German camera systems, in far off Japan a number of cameras were made for the domestic market that were the spitting images of their German counterparts. The 6x6cm Korelle and 35mm Leica were heavily imitated, but the small format reflexes, such as the Exakta, were completely ignored.

During the 1930s, the basis was also laid in Japan for an independent photographic industry to meet civil, and more importantly, military needs that would become of primary importance following Pearl Harbor and this Asian power's entrance into the second world war.

Immediately after the war, in the context of reconstruction and conversion of war industries, the Japanese photographic



Nikon I with 50mm f/2 Nikkor S retractable lens (photo Tony Hurst)

industry was developed to its maximum, but the camera models from which it drew its inspiration were still German, primarily the 6x6cm twin lens and screw mount Leica, while the 35mm reflex was still not taken into consideration.

The decade following the war saw the economic consolidation of the Japanese photographic industry in general and the success of the major Japanese firms in this sector in domestic and foreign markets, especially in the most affluent and promising market of the day, that of the United States.

The 1950s saw the birth of new companies and the growth of pre-existing ones. It saw the opening of Japanese sales offices in New York and the spread of names such as Asahi, Canon, Fuji, Konica, Mamiya, Miranda, Minolta, Olympus, Topcon and Zunow. But, among all Japanese brands, the one that would soon become a household name in the US and Europe was Nikon.

Nikon cameras

The first Nikon camera with interchangeable lens appeared on the domestic market in March 1948 and the first 110 24x32mm Nikon cameras were tested on the Hong Kong and Singapore markets during 1949. After a few changes in format and performance, 24x34mm

Nikon SP, black finish with S36 motor (photo Tony Hurst)



Nikon S2, chrome finish (photo Tony Hurst)

rangefinder Nikon cameras began to be exported to the US on a regular basis in 1950.

In reality, the fame of the Nikon cameras was preceded by that of the Nikkor lenses which were marketed with a Contax bayonet mount as well as a Leica screw mount. They were especially esteemed for their optical quality by American military photographers stationed in Japan.

At the end of 1954, the Nikon S2 with rapid winding lever, standard 24x36mm format and shutter speeds up to 1/1000sec was released. The success of the Nikon S2 led to the creation in 1957 of the professional model Nikon SP with multi focal finder, self timer and single speed selector that could be attached to an exposure meter and used with an electric motor. With its state of the art performance levels, even superior to those of German cameras, the Nikon SP was recognized as one of the best rangefinder cameras of its



Nikon S2, black finish with 25mm f/4 Nikkor lens (photo Tony Hurst)



Olympic Nikon S3, black finish (photo Tony Hurst)

generation and became the symbol of the most sophisticated and reliable in Japanese optical and mechanical technology.

The Nikon SP was followed in 1958 by a simplified version called the Nikon S3 that utilized many of the same structural elements of the Nikon SP as well as its accessories, including the electric motor drive. The Nikon rangefinder series was completed between 1959 and 1960 with two other, decidedly ill-fated models, of which only a few were made. The Nikon S4 was an even more simplified version of the Nikon S3 and was rejected by the American importer, while the Nikon S3M, which could be motor driven for rapid shooting, utilized the 18x24mm half frame format and failed to gain significant recognition.

The year 1959 also saw the beginning of production of the 35mm reflex Nikon F that first complemented the Nikon SP and Nikon S3 rangefinder cameras, and later definitively replaced them. However, production of the Nikon rangefinder did not cease completely because a limited number of Nikon S3 cameras were produced in 1964 for the Tokyo Olympic Games.

Collecting Nikon rangefinder cameras

Nikon rangefinder cameras were emblematic of the 1950s, the symbol of advanced Japanese technology and its overtaking of German models. They also opened the way for Nikon's triumphant commercial success. For these reasons, as well as others tied to their history, technical features and design, Nikon rangefinders have become among the most sought after cameras among collectors.

Entire books and pamphlets have been written about the Nikon rangefinder, clubs have been founded in honor of this camera and it has been at the center of multi-million auctions and levels of speculation common to the world of collecting. In the last two decades, Nikon rangefinder collecting has become sensational with its own special features and characteristics that are impossible to ignore and merit attention.

The fairly recent discovery in Nikon trade magazines of a no. 1 model and a number of prototypes, has also rekindled interest in this camera. A special issue of the Nikon S3 in 2000 to celebrate the new millennium only fed collecting zeal for this brand and type of camera.

The limited number of cameras manufactured (just over 35,000 Nikon S's, just over 56,000 Nikon S2's, just over 22,000 Nikon SP's and just over 14,000 Nikon S3's, together with less than 6,000 Nikon S4's, 3,000 Nikon M's, a few hundred Nikon I's and fewer than 200 Nikon S3M's), together with the growth in collecting interest, has pushed prices of these cameras, their lenses and accessories to levels that are generally high, with very high peaks for models that are rare or in mint condition.

More in-depth knowledge of these cameras can only be a plus for the market and for collecting as a whole.

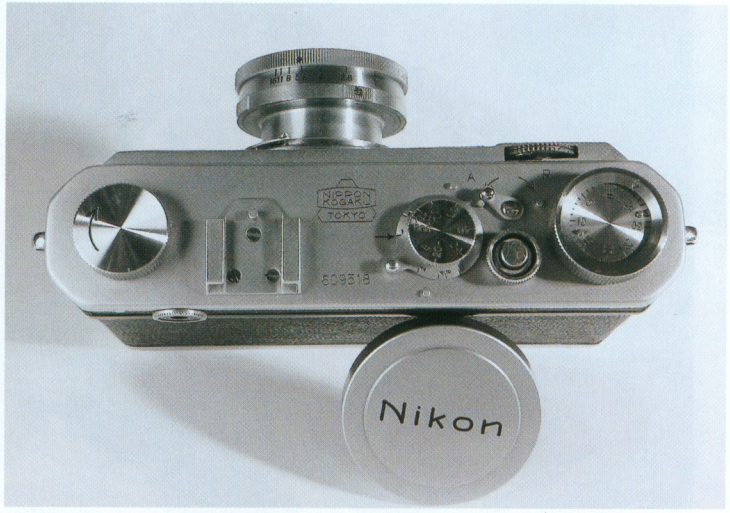
Danilo Cecchi

Thanks go to Massimo Bertacchi, Luigi Cane, Angelo Calanni, Tony Hurst and Mario Muraro for their valuable assistance.

NIKON THROUGH HISTORY



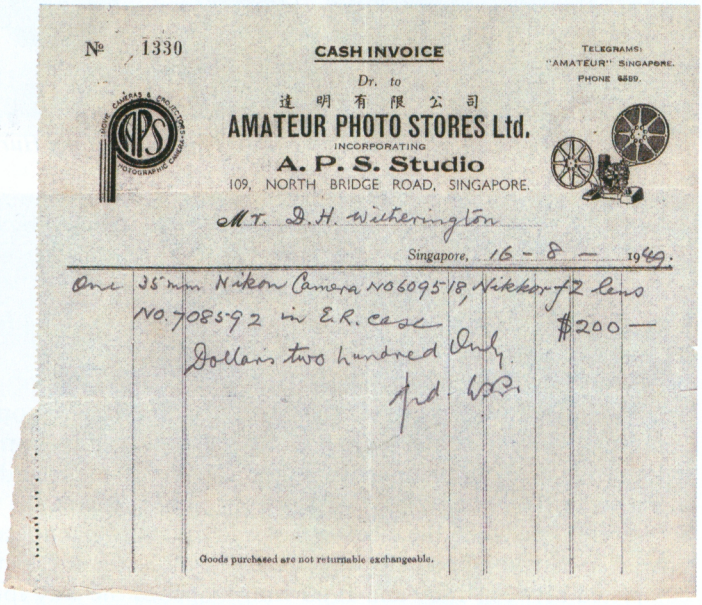
Nikon I no. 609518, format 24x32mm with 50mm f/2 Nikkor H lens (front view)



Nikon I no. 609518, format 24x32mm with 50mm f/2 Nikkor H lens and original lens cap (top plate)



Nikon I no. 609518, format 24x32mm with 50mm f/2 Nikkor H lens (from base plate)



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Mr. D.H. Witherington

Singapore, 16 - 8 - 1949.

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Sales receipt for Nikon I no. 609518 from a store in Singapore dated Aug. 16, 1949

Nippon Kogaku was founded as an optics company on July 25, 1917, in the midst of the first world war, and expanded during the early 1920s with the assistance of specialized personnel from Germany.

In the period between the two world wars, it became the most important domestic supplier of lenses and optical glass for photographic, scientific and military applications. During the war, Nippon Kogaku had as many as 23,000 people employed in nineteen different factories, involved in the manufacture of binoculars, marine rangefinders, telescopes, collimators and other military optical equipment and photographic lenses. Until the loss of the war, Nippon Kogaku did not manufacture any type of camera for civilian use, only military aerial reconnaissance cameras and some military telephotography equipment.

With the surrender of Japan and the American occupation, the end of the war represented a period of major renovation for the entire country.

The bombing of Tokyo in 1945 caused the destruction of much of the city and the death of over 100,000 people. The atomic bombs of August 6 and 9, 1945 on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed 200,000 and destroyed any remaining resistance, thus bringing an end to a war that had cost Japan over two million deaths and the disintegration of its military and economic power.

On August 14th, the emperor announced Japan's surrender on the radio and on September 2nd, a Japan in ruins with its industry and economy demolished,



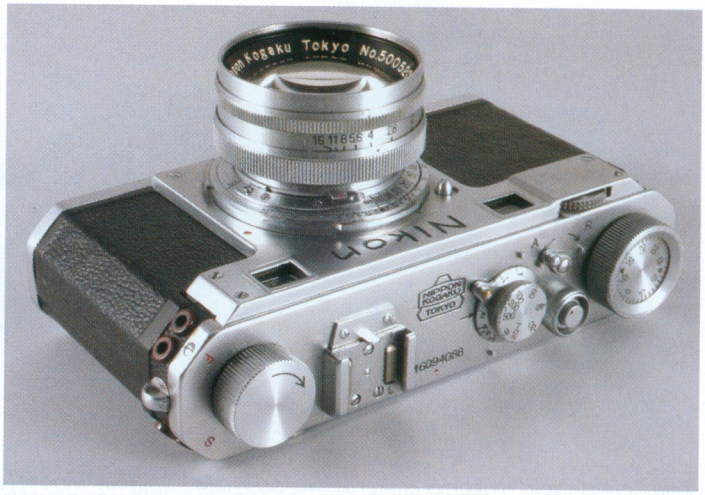
Nikon M no. 6092291 without synch socket with 35mm f/3.5 W Nikkor lens, chrome finish (top plate)



Nikon M no. 609221 without synch socket with 35mm f/3.5 W Nikkor lens and side removed (detail)



Nikon M no. 6092641 synchronized with 50mm f/1.5 Nikkor S lens and side removed (top plate)



Nikon MS no. 6094088 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lens (top plate)

officially surrendered to Gen. MacArthur. The country was occupied by the Allied military forces of the United States and Australia, and MacArthur was named Supreme Allied Commander. On January 1, 1946, the emperor publicly renounced his divine powers and on May 3, 1947, the new constitution drawn up by the Americans came into effect.

Under American control, a number of important reforms were instituted, the old concentrations of economic power dismantled, and radical changes in the Japanese economy and society were made. For their part, the Japanese willingly submitted to Allied requests because they, too, desired change and because they were aware that liberation from foreign occupation first required a period of full collaboration.

The post-war period and Nippon Kogaku

The rebirth of Nippon Kogaku must be seen within this historic and economic context. Nippon Kogaku was split off from the Mitsubishi *zaibatsu* and reorganized into a single company with 1400 employees. On October 16, 1945, orders were given for production to be restarted. To meet the post-war emergency, a study was made of the possibility of manufacturing a civilian camera and a special commission was formed to do this in November 1945.

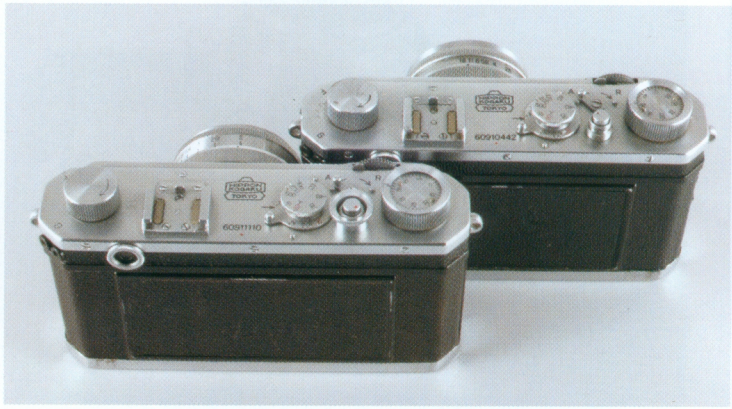
In April 1946 it was decided to build a 35mm rangefinder camera and plans were completed in September 1946. The plan to complete the prototypes no later than February 1947 was not met and the first two working cameras were not finished until November 1947. However, the official birth date of Nikon cameras is still considered to be September 1946, the date on which the project was finalized.

Mass production began slowly. The first 24x32mm Nikon cameras were only released on the Japanese market in March 1948, and early attempts at exporting were made during 1949. The American administration requested a number of changes in the camera. The 24x32mm format was not accepted because it differed from the standard used in American photo labs and was modified in July 1949 to 24x34mm. The flash synch was another "must" for the Americans, and in 1950 the Nikon S synch was finally exported on a regular basis to the US.

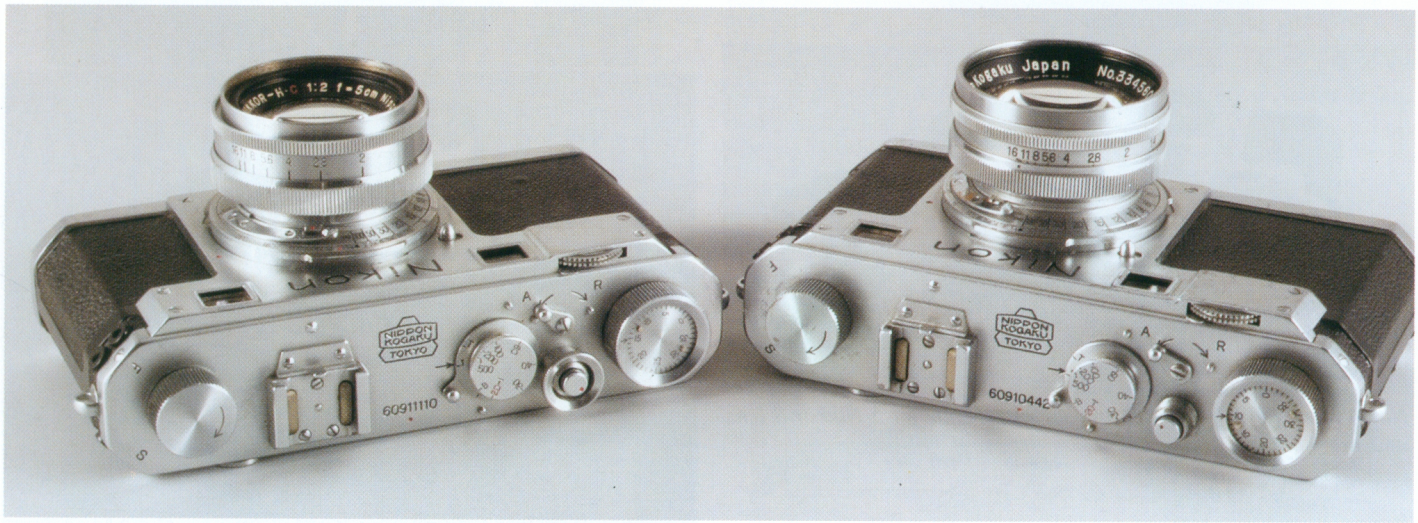
Between 1950 and 1954, of the just over



Nikon S no. 6094496 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lens, chrome



Two "eight-digit" Nikon S cameras, no. 60910442 and no. 60911110 (back)



Two "eight-digit" Nikon S cameras, no. 60910442 and no. 60911110 (top plate)



Nikon S2 no. 6157572, black finish, with 50mm f/1.4 Nikon lens in aluminum finish (top plate)



Additional element for 50mm f/2 Nikkor lens and rangefinder viewfinder mounted on Nikon S2 body no. 6177894 (detail)



Nikon SP, black finish, with 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor N lens with external bayonet and focusing helical (top plate)



Nikon SP no. 6200609, chrome finish, with 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor N lens with internal bayonet and without focusing helical



Nikon SP no. 6214998 with 50mm f/3.5 Micro Nikkor lens complete with aperture ring



Nikon SP no. 6214998 with 50mm f/3.5 Micro Nikkor lens complete with aperture ring (top plate)



Nikon SP with titanium curtain and lens

36,000 Nikon S cameras built, over 25,000 were exported. The Korean War found Japan on the front lines as a base of American operations and the Japanese economy benefited from the situation through the supply of goods and services to US troops involved in the conflict. In April 1951, MacArthur's term was ended and on September 8, 1951 the peace treaty was signed that marked the end of military occupation in Japan. On April 28, 1952, the country regained its national sovereignty following seven years of American control, but it continued to depend on the US for economic aid.

Production of the Nikon S2 with standardized 24x36mm format was begun in December 1954. The Nikon S2 had a rapid winding lever and improved shutter that ranged up to 1/1000sec.

In the mid-Fifties, Japanese industry had regained much of the ground lost through the war and pro capita income had returned to 1930s levels.

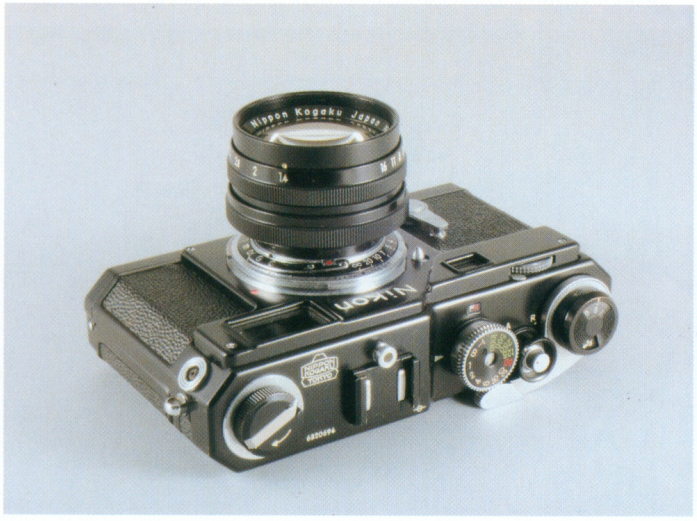
In September 1957, production began on the professional model Nikon, known as the Nikon SP, equipped with a double multi-focal finder for 28mm and 135mm lenses, and with the option of connecting a clip-on exposure meter and electrical



Nikon S3 no. 6305126, chrome finish, with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lens in black finish



105mm f/4 Nikkor T lens with original lens cap and finder shade



Nikon S3 "Olympic" no. 6320694, black finish, and 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor "Olympic" lens in black finish (top plate)



135mm f/4 Nikkor Q lens in chrome finish, of which less than one thousand were made before 1950, later replaced by the 135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q



Nikon S4 no. 6504800 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lens in black finish (top plate)



25mm f/4 W Nikkor lens complete with lens caps, finder shade and viewfinder



50mm f/1.5 Nikkor S lens with chrome finish, of which less than one thousand were made in 1950, later replaced by the 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S



Additional elements for 50mm f/1.4 lens and rangefinder viewfinder



Nikon multi-focal viewfinders with comparison between chrome and black finish



Nikon viewfinder for 35mm focal length, Minifinder-type for Nikon S2 compared with Nikon multi-focal viewfinder for Nikon M, format 24x34mm



Group of Nikon viewfinders



Cylindrical multi-focal viewfinder with black finish and rare add-on for 28mm focal length

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motor. In March 1958 the Nikon SP was joined by the Nikon S3 with simplified finder, but with the same exposure meter and electrical motor options as the Nikon SP.

As Japanese manufactured goods began to be admired abroad for their quality and competitive prices, the Nikon SP and Nikon S3 marked the zenith of rangefinder Nikon cameras. But this achievement was soon eclipsed in 1959 by the single lens reflex Nikon F and its overwhelming commercial success.

Following a brief period of overlap with the Nikon F, both the Nikon SP and Nikon S3 were taken out of production together with their line of lenses and accessories to leave space on the production line for the new type of camera.

In the early 1960s, Japan had already surpassed Germany on an industrial level and ranked as the third economic power in the world after the US and the USSR. The last Nikon rangefinder cameras were manufactured for the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. The Nikon S3 "Olympic" was a symbolic celebration of the years of reconstruction, emancipation and unprecedented growth.

All photographs in this article are by Luigi Cane, whom we thank for his invaluable assistance.

PROTOTYPES



Nikon prototypes on display in Tokyo in March 1999

Having been a researcher and historian of Nippon Kogaku (Nikon) and its rangefinder system of cameras since 1968, one of the more frustrating aspects has always been the near total lack of any information about the prototypes that preceded the original Nikon I of 1948. I thought that surely they must exist and hopefully had been preserved somewhere within the Nikon Corporation, just waiting for someone to discover them and bring them into the light of day. I had always been amazed at the volume of Leica prototypical equipment that had been documented over the years and even available on the open market for those willing and able to pay the price. Not so with Nippon Kogaku. Very little of anything in the way of photos or drawings has ever been available for researchers (at least in the West) and what was known often had to be discovered within the Japanese language publications seldom seen outside of the home islands and very difficult to get translated. Even Nippon Kogaku or its former American importer, Ehrenreich, never used, to my knowledge, photos of early or prototypical equipment in any English language literature. Therefore, the search for the pre-Nikon I prototypes (or any vintage for that matter) has been a difficult and slow task. This all started to slowly change nearly 24 years after my search began.

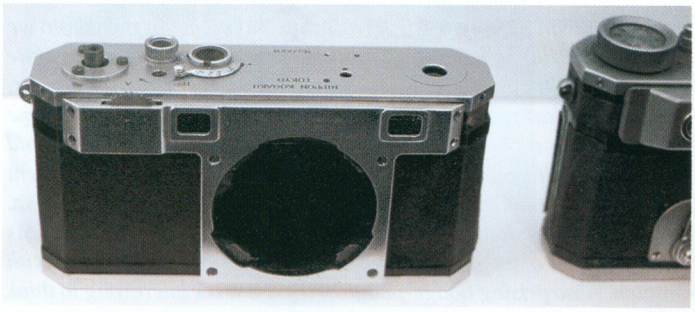
On my first trip to Tokyo and the Nikon Ohi factory in 1987, I was both privileged and delighted to be the first Western historian allowed to inspect and handle a selection of Nikon prototypes. On that February afternoon seven various cameras were placed before me and included both SP2 prototypes (shown in this article) as well as some Nikon S and S2 trial cameras. However, we were not allowed to photograph them, only to take copious notes and make a few drawings.

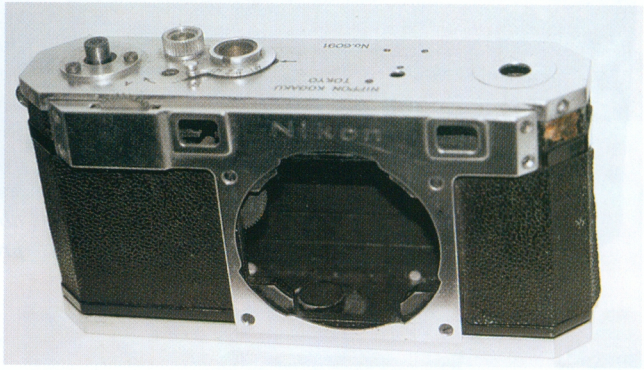
That visit was covered in issues #17 and #18 of my Nikon Journal. Finally information was beginning to come to light and I hoped that now more examples would be made available for study. However, it took another 9 years before the next chapter could be written.

The 5th International Convention of the Nikon Historical Society was held in Tokyo in February 1996 and was graciously hosted by Nikon. Unknown to us beforehand, Nikon decided to treat all in attendance to a significant collection of prototypes that they simply sat out on a long table for all to hold and enjoy! Even the Japanese collectors present that day had never seen in person what was before them. And although the seven cameras I had seen in 1987 were present, a great many more I had not been shown on that first visit were now on display. It included the nearly mythical SPX with TTL metering; the Nikon L; the 35mm f/1.4 Nikkor; as well as Nikon F, F2 and F3 prototypes. Again we were not allowed to photograph them but this event was covered in issue #51 of the Nikon Journal. However, up to this point, we had still to see any of the pre-Nikon I prototypes.

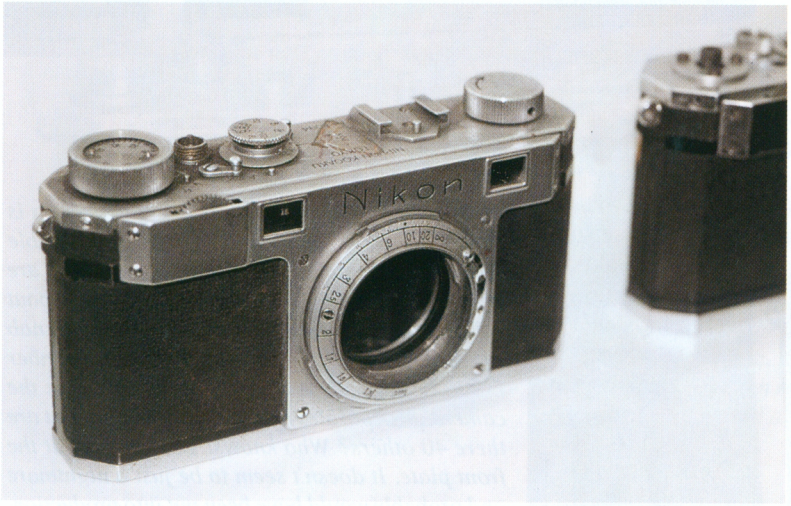
I had met Mr. Mikio ltoh, in charge of the Public Relations department at Nikon, during the 1996 meeting. He promised to do what he could to get me photos of the cameras we had seen and also keep me informed of any further finds. I never did get the photos but in time for our next convention in New York in 1998, he did have a surprise. He sent over a few small photographs of a camera he had recently discovered in a drawer in the Ohi factory! The camera was what we Nikon collectors have always referred to as "Mother One"! Before us was a photo of Nikon I serial number 6091! The very first Nikon and one used in the initial tests that led to the production camera. Photos of "Mother One" can be found is issues #60 and #61 of the Nikon Journal. However, just a year later we finally struck gold!

In March 1999 there was a show in Tokyo called the "Nostalgic Goods World" that dealt with all types of products made from the 1950s and on in Japan. Nikon had a booth at this exposition and chose this event to finally put on display a large selection of prototypes from the rangefinder through the Nikon F4! Thirty plus years after starting my search and 12 years after being shown the first small selection of prototypes, the powers that be at Nikon decided that the world just might be interested in the experimental





Nikon no. 6091 (Mother One). This is the "Mother One" camera, seen for the first time in public. If you look closely, you will see the number one on the top plate, proof that this is actually Nikon prototype number ONE. Although the body would appear incomplete with some parts missing, some of its features are recognizable. Not only are there eight front plate screws instead of the six found on standard-production cameras, but the four upper ones are located on the slanted sides and not flat on the front. The change to the front was made starting with camera no. 60924. The mount ring with focusing dial is missing and the lens lock is in the 10 o'clock position. In its place are a pair of screws. There is no ring or lock. Starting with no. 60924, the two screws were eliminated to make room for the lens lock. Also note on the top plate that instead of the logo, the lettering NIPPON KOGAKU TOKYO appears in block letters. The ring of the shutter release button is different and the frame of the rangefinder window also has a different shape. A drawing of this camera, not a photograph, was used in early advertising and promotional material.
This photo was taken by Sato and the quality is excellent, despite the fact it was shot through the glass of the display cases



Prototype no. 6094. If you look closely at the lettering on the top plate you will see the number 4. Yes, this is actually prototype no. 6094 being shown for the very first time. Sato writes that this is "Nikon Type I Prototype no. 4". Note the difference between the finder windows. The Nikon 6094 was used primarily for the shutter durability tests performed on November 28 and 30, 1947 (from page 60 of T. Arakawa's book, Bright Dark Box)



Here are photographs of both camera no. 6091 and camera no. 6094, a pair of photos I never even dreamed of being able to publish. According to Sato, the camera is in working condition. Camera body 6094 is one of the two utilized for shutter tests and is incomplete, but all that is missing is the lens block. There are still eight front plate screws and they are still located on the slanted side of the plate. NIPPON KOGAKU TOKYO is still in block lettering. Nonetheless, its appearance is already quite familiar. The controls, the Nikon name on the front plate and the lens mount are all like those on the mass-produced cameras



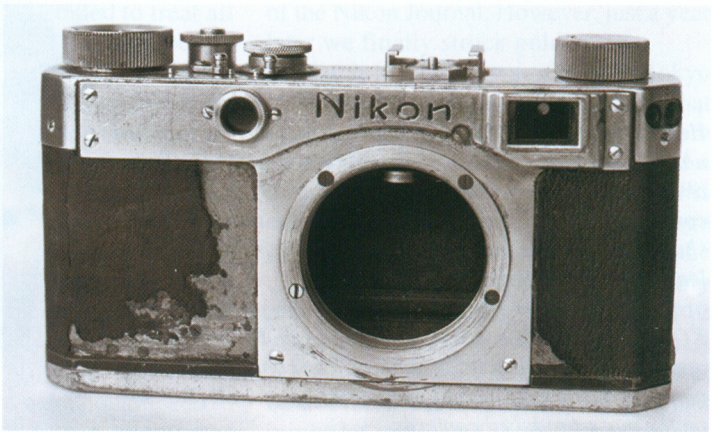
Screw-mount Nikon prototype #1. A truly unusual piece. In this photo we can see the non-chrome brass finish. Even the controls on the top plate are in unfinished brass. It is also much taller than the other prototypes, very unusual lettering for the name (thank goodness this did not become the final choice!), a front plate very similar to that of the Contax and housing for the self timer mechanism, although the latter is not present here. There is a lever under the rewind knob, perhaps for dioptric correction. But the most notable feature is the screw mount. Of all Nikon cameras ever built, it is the one that most closely resembles the Contax, but with screw mount. A surprising hodge-podge of features. It's interesting to think about how close Nikon came to using the screw mount. What a fascinating prototype!

Screw-mount Nikon prototype #2. Another tall specimen with a front plate very similar to that of the Contax. This camera is chrome-finished like all the rest (with the exception of the prototype above), and includes a self timer lever that seems to have been lifted right off the Contax. The controls on the top plate are Nikon-style, however, with the exception of the very flat shutter speed dial and there is no serial number. The Nippon Kogaku logo does appear on the front plate in very small lettering. This camera is complete, including leather lining. Once again, it has a screw mount. What does this mean? Is it a rangefinder camera attempting to be an exotic Contax copy, or is it just a Leica copy? A tantalizing enigma





Screw-mount Nikon prototype #3. This camera is not as tall as the other two and does not resemble a Contax. It has no self timer and its controls are 100% Nikon. But there is something unusual about it. The top plate has a scale under the rewind knob with the Nippon Kogaku logo and serial number L-50041.The "L" is easy to explain because the camera incorporates a Leica screw mount. But are there 40 others? Who knows. Look closely at the front plate. It doesn't seem to be just a nightmare and probably would have been put into production. It seems a lesser Contax, but it has the screw mount



Prior to 1999 and the discovery of the three screw mount prototypes (published in this article), it was thought that the Nikon L was the only Nikon body equipped with Leica screw mount. Now we know this is not true, but this camera remains unique. The other four SM prototypes obviously preceded the Nikon S and the Nikon L dates from much later. In essence, it is a Nikon S with screw mount. All its controls and camera body features are not those of a prototype, only the screw mount is. I was able to examine this camera personally in Tokyo in 1966. (Photo: T. Arakawa)



Nikon SP2 prototypes. And finally, here are the prototypes of the Nikon SP2. For me, it was like meeting old friends since I had examined both first in 1987 and again at the convention in 1996. The top plates bear the serial numbers 6800004 and 6800005. As was established in 1987, both prototypes function perfectly and can even be used with an electric motor. Sato writes that they make use of a 1966 prototype Zoom finder, the definitive evolutionary stage of the rangefinder cameras. The finder covers focal lengths from 35mm to 135mm. The shutter curtain is made of titanium. The chrome finish of the lenses is clearly ill-matched and previously I had seen the 35mm f/1.4 Nikkor mounted on one of these SP2s—certainly a much more appropriate match





Modified Nikon S2 prototype. Looking at this photo, one could easily mistake this for a common Nikon S2, but they would be wrong. We saw this camera at the convention and were able to examine both the camera and lens. It might seem like an absolutely unremarkable standard Nikon S2 no. 6136958, but take a close look at the shutter speed dial. Sato tells us to note the single dial that does not turn the same way as those utilized later on the Nikon SP dating from 1957. It is possible that flash synchronization was controlled using the same dial, given the fact that the "synchro" ring has been eliminated on this camera. Now look at the lens. It is the 35mm f/1.4 Nikkor we saw at the convention. The serial number is 631001 and is perhaps the only one of this prototype ever made. I saw it mounted previously on one of the Nikon SP2 prototypes, which made more sense because the finishes were the more recent type. What a shame it was never mass produced

models that led to their production cameras. Not only did they put on display (behind glass of course) those I had seen in 1987 and 1996, but they added "Mother One" as well as another of the original 21 prototype bodies, and a selection of three prototypes never before even hinted at in any literature anywhere. They had had them all the while but it is not known at this time if they were recently discovered (as Mother One had been) or if they were simply forgotten.

Finally we had some real information about the prototypes of the Nikon I after 31 years of searching. But information cannot hold a candle to photographs and we would not have those you see here without the work of Nikon Historical Society member Tad Sato of Tokyo.

Sato-san was present at the exposition and took the photos you see here through the glass, not an easy task, as any photographer very well knows. He made these available to me for issue #64 of the Nikon Journal Published in June 1999 and also used for a speech before the October 1999 meeting of the Leica Historical Society of America and our own Nikon Historical Society convention in Rotterdam in March 2000. We may someday be allowed to photograph them under better conditions, but till then they are the best available images of the prototypes thus far put on public display by Nikon to be published in the West.

Each photograph is accompanied by a detailed caption containing as much information as possible so the reader can understand the relative importance of each item. We hope to someday have even more information on these prototypes plus any others that might surface in the future. Research into the subject is an ongoing project for the Nikon Historical Society and this and others that might surface in the future. Research into this subject is an ongoing project for the Nikon Historical Society and this author.

Robert Rotoloni
Photos by Tad Sato

NIKON I - NIKON M NIKON S



Nikon I no. 609518, 24x32mm format with 50mm f/2 Nikkor H lens and original lens cap (photo Luigi Cane)

The beginnings

The Nippon Kogaku company initiated a study of the possibility of producing cameras as early as October 1945 with the formation of a "Special Camera Commission" and November of the same year saw the formation of the "Camera and Projector Committee". The objective of this Committee was to evaluate all the concrete possibilities offered by this new type of product and a planning department was formed for this purpose.

In April 1945, two different possibilities for cameras were proposed. The first called for the manufacture of a twin lens, Rolleiflex-type camera with twelve 6x6cm exposures using 120 type roll film, with 80mm f/3.5 lens. The second involved the manufacture of a 35mm Leica type rangefinder with interchangeable lens with forty 24x32mm exposures.

Only a few twin lens cameras, called the Nikoflex, were ever built and this option was later abandoned in favor of the 35mm camera which then underwent a more in-depth study. The 35mm camera study group was headed by Masahiko Fuketa and the Nippon Kogaku 35mm was designed on the basis of the popular pre-war German Leica screw mount as well as the contemporary Contax, at the time considered to be state of the art, thanks to a number of its technical innovations.

The 24x32mm format was looked on favorably by Japanese engineers because it was more economical than the 24x36mm and corresponded more closely to print paper sizes and Ministry of Education guidelines.

In June 1946, under the guidance of the new "Camera Committee" which included the members of the research department, planning department and engineering and production department, detailed design and the realization of the first camera began on the basis of the specifications previously decided at the drawing board.

From prototype to production

A model of the camera was produced in short time and was presented together with the twin lens Nikoflex on July 26, 1946, the anniversary of the company's founding. It was decided to proceed, setting December 1946 as the completion date for the prototypes and February 1947 was planned as the date for production start up. The projects were finally completed in September 1946, ahead of schedule. However, a series of organizational problems and some changes in the project caused a significant delay in preparations for mass production, preparations that were not completed until November 1947 with the realization of twenty odd prototypes.

Mass production of these cameras only began on a regular basis in March 1948 with the production code 6FB. At first, Nippon Kogaku called this camera the Nikorette, but was almost immediately changed to Nikon which became its official name in March 1947. Nikon is a variation on "Nikko", taken from the combination of the first letters of the company name, NI-ppon KO-gaku. Nikko had been used in the pre-war period for a number of Nippon Kogaku products, but the new name, Nikon, was judged preferable because it had a nicer ring and was very similar to the word Nippon, contributing to a sense of national pride.

The Nikon

The Nikon was born following a tormented period of study and experimentation. It utilized a curtain shutter in rubberized silk with horizontal traverse and speeds from a second to 1/500s plus B and T settings. The shutter speed was selected using a dual level knob on the top plate, the upper level for speeds from 1/20s to 1/500s, and the lower level for speeds from 1/20s to 1 second.

The Nikon format as established in the study phase was 24x32mm with up to 40 exposures. The normal viewfinder covered 85% of the field actually framed by the 50mm lens, with an enlargement factor of 0.60 and was connected to a rangefinder that overlaid the image, with a geometric base of 60mm and an actual base of 36mm. For film advance and rewinding, there were two knurled knobs on the top plate. The Nikon did not have either a self timer or flash synch socket.

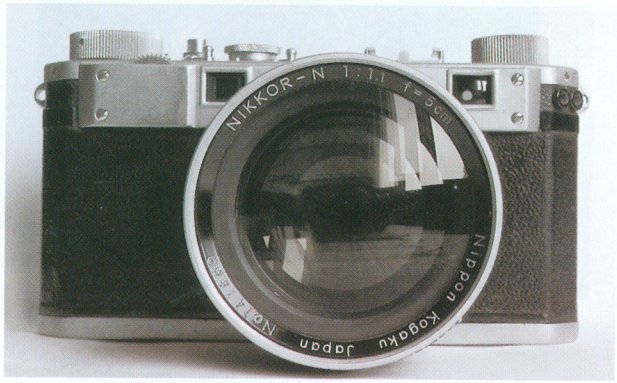
Initially, the interchangeable lenses used a Leica 39x1mm screw mount, but this was soon abandoned because of its widespread use, including a large number



Nikon M no. 6091538 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in chrome finish—front



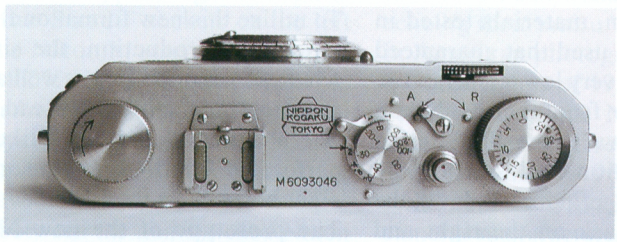
Nikon M no. 6091538—detail of controls



Nikon M no. 6093046 synchronized with 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor lens—front



Nikon M no. 6093046 with 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor lens—top plate



Nikon M body no. 6093046 synchronized—top plate



Detail of Nikon M changing catch identical to that on Contax

of Japanese cameras. Instead, it was decided to utilize a rapid bayonet mount identical to that of the Contax. But the mount was not the only thing taken from the Contax. Its focusing system with the rotation of the entire lens cylinder was identical and controlled by a notched dial next to the rangefinder window, exactly the same as on the Contax.

The front of the Nikon was very similar to the Contax, and even the shape of the body with its rounded corners and removable back attached to the base plate took their inspiration from that camera.

The top plate, however, was completely original with the frame counter inside the winding knob, the shutter release button set apart from the other controls and set back as on the Leica. The accessory shoe was screwed onto the top plate, off center in respect to the lens.

The standard lens offered was the six element 50mm f/2 Nikkor with retractable barrel, very similar to the Sonnar lenses used on the Contax. With the 50mm f/2 Nikkor, the Nikon weighed 765 grams and measured 136mm long, 78mm tall and 42.5mm thick.

Nikon numbering had the prefix 609 that stood for the completion date of the project: "6" for the year 1946 and "09" for the month of September. Following the production of the twenty experimental cameras which bore the numbers 6091 to 60921, the numbering of the actual production of the Nikon for commercial distribution started with serial number 60922.

Once production started, sales of the Nikon cameras began almost immediately with the delivery of the first batch of 200 cameras which, lacking the f/2 lens, were equipped with Tessar type 4 element 50mm f/3.5 Nikkor lenses with retractable barrel.

In October 1948, fifty of the first lot cameras were exported to Hong Kong and in March 1949 another 110 Nikon cameras were exported to Hong Kong and Singapore, as well as Europe and the United States.

In that period, Japanese camera production was very definitely aimed at the export market, but the general headquarters of American occupation forces commanded by Gen. MacArthur declared itself against exportation of 24x32mm format cameras to the US, a format that was not compatible with American labs or suitable for use with Kodachrome film. Therefore, the Nikon was modified after just over seven hundred had been produced up through August 1949, up to serial number 609759.

Some of the cameras already built and warehoused were modified to the 24x34mm format and only four hundred retained the original format. Of all Nikon 24x32mm format cameras, only one was produced with black finish on customer request. Following the format change, first generation 24x32mm Nikons were called Nikon I, while the second generation



Nikon S body no. 6124484—front



Nikon S body no. 6124484—top plate



Nikon S no. 6124484 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens



Nikon S no. 6099639 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in chrome finish—front

24x34mm were known as the Nikon M. To differentiate between the two models, the letter M was engraved in front of the serial number of those cameras starting with the number M609760.

The Nikon I

The Nikon I is not just a copy of the pre-war Contax II. It is an original camera that stands out within the panorama of post-war 35mm Japanese cameras thanks to a number of special features.

The Contax mount made it possible to use original German lenses, but the rotating focusing unit was not exactly the same as the one used on the Contax and the connection with the rangefinder was different. The external focusing dial was moved towards the outside to avoid interference with the rangefinder window during focusing, and the infinity release button was placed on the right instead of the left of the lens changing catch.

The fabric curtain shutter with horizontal traverse on the Nikon was completely different than that of the Contax, but very similar to that of the Leica, except that it utilized an original unified double control located on the top plate. The selector had an upper part for high speeds of 1/500 - 1/200 - 1/100 - 1/60 - 1/40 - 1/30 - 1/20 and B setting, and a lower part for slow speeds of 1/20 - 1/8 - 1/4 - 1/2 - 1 and T setting. Curtain traverse speed along the long edge of the frame was approx. 18/1000s, similar to that of other curtain shutters of the day, but the design of the rotation bearings and flat spring was all new, as was the curtain anti-rebound mechanism. For the lubrication of the shutter mechanism, materials tested in military labs were used that guaranteed functioning even at very low temperatures. Aesthetically, the front of the Nikon resembled the pre-war Contax II, differing only in the position and size of the viewfinder and rangefinder windows, the less prominent mask on the right and conspicuous absence of the self timer lever. The Nikon offered a totally original design and layout of the controls on the top plate. The corners on the body were rounded in a more decisive and characteristic way than on the Contax body, the advance and winding buttons were different, as were the accessory shoe and shutter release button that was also in a different position. Completely different were the speed selector and the A-R lever to release the film advance mechanism. Even the base plate and back were different, although similar to those used on the Contax.

The Nikon M

Modifying the Nikon to correspond to the 24x36mm format requested by the Americans would have required a complete overhaul of the project and the dimensions and structure of the camera itself, including a new mold for the aluminum alloy shell. But rather than throw to the winds the years of work and capital already invested, Nippon Kogaku managers preferred compromising by proposing an intermediate 24x34mm format. The 24x34mm format was judged acceptable for both the Japanese and American markets.

To utilize this new format on the Nikons already in production, the size of the windows was modified as well as the film advance mechanism. Instead of every seven holes as on the Nikon I, the perforated film lock was inserted every eight holes as on the Leica.

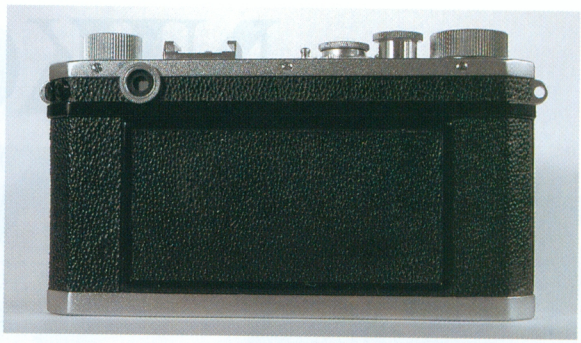
The prototype of the new Nikon was completed in July 1949 and production began in August. As identification of the new camera, entirely the same as the Nikon I and still marked with the production code 6FB, the letter M was engraved on the top plate in front of the serial number. The letter M stood for "medium" to indicate the intermediate format between 32mm and 36mm, but it was also the "middle" letter in the Roman alphabet between the letter L (Leica format) and the letter N (Nikon format).

The Nikon M was released on the market in October 1949 and included a number of minor enhancements, such as the double rubberizing treatment of the curtain both inside and out, the use of a stationary, non-removable spool for exposed film and a new accessory shoe on the top plate.

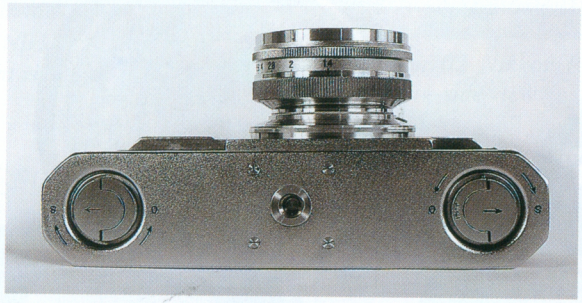
The serial number that marked the beginning of Nikon M production was M609760 and approximately 200 cameras a month were produced. The road for exportation to the United States now seemed open, but a further complication materialized. American photographers were used to working with flash and complained about the lack of the synch socket on the



Nikon S no. 6099639 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in chrome finish—top plate



Nikon S no. 6099639—back



Nikon S no. 6099639—base with two Contax-type catches



Nikon S body no. 6099639—front

Nikon cameras. Nippon Kogaku designers inserted two S and F sockets on the left side of the Nikon M starting with serial number M6092350, while older Nikon Ms were later modified on request. The Nikon M with synch socket was also known as the Nikon MS, but these ID letters were not engraved on any part of the camera. Overall, between the non-synched Nikon M and synched Nikon MS, just over 3300 cameras were built.

Nikon S

At the end of 1950, the letter M disappeared from the Nikon serial number and production continued starting with the new serial number 6094101. The cameras manufactured starting in January 1951 had a synch socket as standard and were sold under the name Nikon S.

The Nikon S was regularly exported to the United States through the Nikon Camera Company with headquarters in San Francisco, California, but starting in 1953 Nikon sales were handled by Joe Ehrenreich and the headquarters of Nikon Incorporated were moved to New York City, first on Fifth Avenue and later at 251 Fourth Avenue, the same street on which Leitz New York has its offices.

The fame of Nikon cameras and Nikkor lenses preceded the arrival of the Nikon S on the American market. Many American photo journalists who had worked in Japan during the Korean War had come to know and appreciate Nikkor lenses and spoke about them in enthusiastic terms, and a number of articles echoing their praise were also published in American photography publications over the course of 1950.

Production of the Nikon S continued uninterrupted for five years from January 1950 to January 1955, and ended with serial number 6129520 with over 36,000 cameras manufactured at an average rate of 600 cameras per month. In reality, from the 200 cameras constructed per month in 1950, the rhythm gradually increased to 450 cameras per month in 1951 to close to 700 a month in 1952 and over 1,000 cameras per month in 1953.

Nikon S serial numbers continued with the same 609 prefix up to over number 60910000. In fact, eight digit serial numbers are known up to the number 60911215. Later, the numbering was recommenced starting with seven digit numbers beginning with 6100000. Nikon S cameras built before September 1951 have the initials "MIOJ" or the full "Made In Occupied Japan" engraved on the base plate. This inscription was eliminated and replaced by the simple "Japan" or "Made in Japan" following the departure of American troops on September 8, 1951.

Aesthetically and operationally identical to the synched Nikon M, the Nikon S incorporated a number of small changes, such as the higher rewind button, threading on the shutter release button collar for a cable release, two small fastening springs on the accessory shoe and a red dot on the top plate under the serial number to indicate the precise location of the film plane.

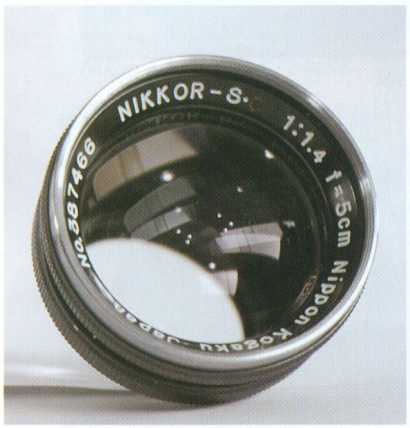
On the request of *Life* magazine photo journalists, some Nikon S cameras were built with larger film advance and rewind buttons. The obsessive attention paid to requests from photographers on the other side of the Pacific was justified by the fact that most Nikon S cameras were destined for export, and most of these for export to the US. Between 1950 and 1954, over two thirds of the entire output was exported, totaling in this four year period to over twenty thousand Nikon cameras.

Nikon S cameras were sold on the Japanese market at a higher price than previous models. In 1948, the price tag for a Nikon I with f/2 lens was almost 58,000 yen, and in 1950 a Nikon M with the same lens went for 50,000 yen, or 66,500 yen with the new f/1.4 lens. In 1951, the Nikon S with f/2 lens was sold for over 54,000 yen and over 74,000 yen with the f/1.4 lens.

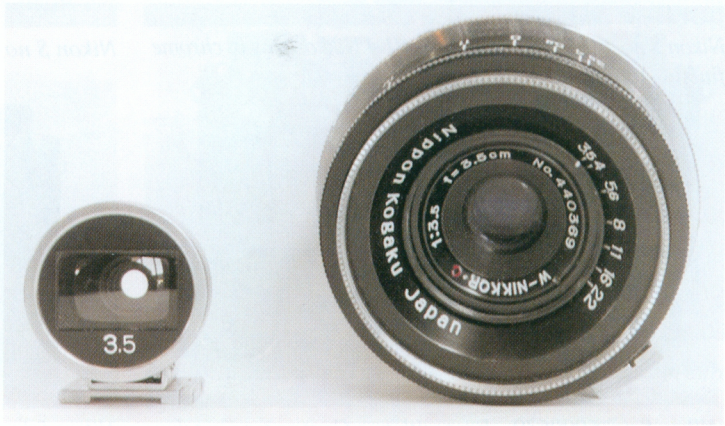
Between 1951 and 1954 there was a price increase followed by a subsequent realignment. In 1952 the Nikon S with f/2 lens increased to close to 61,000 yen, falling to just over 59,000 yen in 1953. The same Nikon S with f/1.4 lens cost over 81,000 in 1952 to settle at 79,000 yen in 1953.

In the United States, the Nikon S was marketed by the Camera Corporation of San Francisco at $259 with the 50mm f/2 Nikkor H lens and at $359 with the 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S.

NIKON S LENSES



50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lens



35mm f/3.5 W Nikkor lens with chrome finish



35mm f/3.5 W Nikkor lens with black finish



35mm f/3.5 W Nikkor lens with chrome finish



28mm f/3.5 W Nikkor lens with black finish

Post-war production of optical glass was restarted in the Nippon Kogaku Ohi plant and the first photographic lens put into production, in 1946, was the **50mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q** with retractable barrel, the lens that was to become the standard one used on Nikon cameras for both domestic and foreign markets. The 50mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q was built on the basis of pre-war projects and utilized a four element Tessar type optical scheme which stopped down to f/16. Like standard Contax lenses, the 50mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q for Nikon did not have a focusing helical and utilized an internal bayonet connected to the moving cylinder on the camera body. Use of the 50mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q as a standard lens on Nikon rangefinder cameras was quite limited.

The Nikon production plan called for the more prestigious **50mm f/2 Nikkor H** as its standard lens, a lens that had been on the drawing boards since 1946 and on which production began in 1947. The 50mm f/2 Nikkor H used a 6 element optical scheme similar to the pre-war Sonnars of the same focal length and speed. It stopped down to f/16 and did not have a focusing helical. In the early years, the 50mm f/2 Nikkor H was built with a retractable barrel, but in 1950 was replaced with a new version which kept the same optical scheme, but utilized a fixed barrel that made it impossible to retract the lens into the body for carrying. The 50mm f/2 Nikkor H used 40.5mm filters and had a brass chrome finish.

Nikon lenses built between 1948 and 1950 had a light anti-reflection coating made of cryolite and magnesium fluorate. Starting in 1950, the anti-reflection coating was improved to provide better, more effective results.

Like the camera bodies, lenses built before September 1951 are inscribed with the letters "MIOJ" and those built up through 1951 bear the inscription "Nippon Kogaku Tokyo", while those constructed later are marked "Nippon Kogaku Japan". The chrome finish was replaced around 1955 with a black finish. From a collecting standpoint, there are four different types of lenses: retractable barrel, chrome barrel, "Tokyo" marking; rigid mount, chrome barrel, "Tokyo" marking; rigid mount, chrome barrel, "Japan" marking; rigid mount, black barrel, "Japan" marking.

In 1950, alongside the standard Nikkor H, a faster, 7 element lens made its appearance, the **50mm f/1.5 Nikkor S** built using an optical scheme similar to that of the pre-war Sonnar of the same speed. Like the 50mm Nikkor H, the 50mm f/1.5 Nikkor S was built with rigid mount, brass chrome finish, used 40.5mm



85mm f/2 Nikkor P lens with chrome finish—front view



85mm f/2 Nikkor P lens with chrome finish—side view



85mm f/2 Nikkor P lens with chrome and black finish compared—side view



85mm f/2 Nikkor P lens with black finish—front view



85mm f/1.5 Nikkor S lens—front view



85mm f/1.5 Nikkor S lens—side view

screw-in filters and did not include a focusing helical, closing to just f/11. The arrival in December 1950 of a new **50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S** caused production of the 50mm f/1.5 Nikkor S to be halted after only a few hundred (perhaps as few as 800) had been made.

The new 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S turned out to be a very popular lens and offered a valid alternative to the 50mm f/2 Nikkor H. It was built with rigid mount without focusing helical, used 43mm screw filters and stopped down to f/16. Like the 50mm f/2 Nikkor H, early 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lenses were manufactured with brass chrome barrel with the "Tokyo" marking, later changed to "Japan".

In order to lighten Nikon S cameras with f/1.4 lenses used by professionals, a number of 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lenses were built using aluminum instead of brass chrome for external parts. These lenses, of which just a few hundred were made between 1954 and 1955 had raw aluminum or black finish.

After 1955, the use of aluminum and black finish was the standard for all Nikkor lenses. Variants of the 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S include the "Tokyo" chrome, "Japan" chrome, "Japan" aluminum and "Japan" black.

In the early 1950s, the price difference between the 50mm f/2 Nikkor H lens and 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S was 20,000 yen in Japan and $90 in the US.

A number of wide angle lenses, known as **W-Nikkor**, were built for the Nikon S and for which special viewfinders were also produced. The first wide angle lens for the Nikon S was put into production in 1948 and was a 4 element Tessar type 35mm f/3.5. The **35mm f/3.5 W-Nikkor Q** stopped down to f/16, had its own focusing helical and was locked onto the external bayonet of the camera, hooking on to the focusing cylinder for rangefinder coupling.

In 1952 the 35mm f/3.5 W-Nikkor Q was modified, bringing the minimum aperture down to f/22, but without changing the optical scheme. Even subsequent modification in 1954 left the 4 element Tessar type optical scheme unaltered and consisted solely of a new barrel complete with screw mount for 43mm filters.

Chrome lenses built until 1951 included the "Nippon Kogaku Tokyo" inscription and the letters "MIOJ", while chrome lenses produced after that date were marked "Nippon Kogaku Japan". Lenses built after 1955 had a black finish and bore the "Japan" inscription.

The 35mm f/3.5 W-Nikkor Q were the lowest priced of Nikon rangefinder lenses and in the US were sold for less than $90.

In September 1952 a second W-Nikkor lens with 35mm focal length, based on a 6 element symmetrical scheme and with a speed of f/2.5 was produced. Like the other 35mm lens, the **35mm f/2.5 W-Nikkor** used the external bayonet mount, had its own focusing helical, stopped down to f/22 and used 43mm screw mount filters. It was manufactured with a brass chrome barrel, later changed to the lighter aluminum alloy with black finish.

For correct framing using 35mm lenses, a conical shaped brass chrome optical finder, to be attached to the accessory shoe was produced. A ring near the eyepiece permitted parallax correction for distances between 90cm and infinity. The



135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q lens with chrome and black finish compared



135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q lens with chrome finish—front view



250mm f/4 Nikkor Q lens with second model focusing unit—side view



250mm f/4 Nikkor Q lens with second model focusing unit—front view

price of the 35mm f/2.5 W-Nikkor wide angle in the US was around $140.

Simultaneously with the 35mm f/2.5 W-Nikkor, a 28mm f/3.5 wide angle lens was also put into production. The **28mm W-Nikkor** had six elements in a decidedly asymmetrical double layout drawing on the dimensions of the German Orthometar wide angle lens. The 28mm W-Nikkor was mounted on the external bayonet, used 43mm screw filters, stopped down to f/22 and was first made using the heavy brass chrome barrel, later replaced with the lighter black aluminum.

The original price of 30,000 yen was later reduced to around 20,000 and was sold in the US for approx. $170.

For this 28mm wide angle a special conical optical finder with parallax correction ring for short distances was also produced. In addition, a lens accessory to produce the corresponding framing if mounted on a universal finder was also marketed.

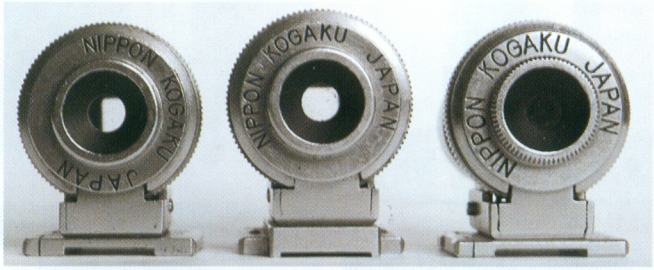
For medium and long focal lengths, up until 1948 Nippon Kogaku built a 5 element portrait telephoto (the 85mm f/2 Nikkor P) and a 4 element medium telephoto (135mm f/4 Nikkor Q). Both lenses resembled the corresponding pre-war Sonnar lenses, and were made with brass chrome barrels, mounted on the external bayonet and stopped down to f/16. The **Nikkor P 85mm f/2** used 48mm screw filters, while the 135mm Nikkor Q used 40.5mm screw filters. The Nikkor P 85mm f/2 portrait telephoto was offered with the same optical scheme in a number



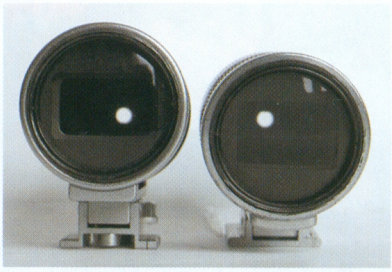
Multi-focal finder for 35mm to 135mm lenses and parallax correction



Pair of first and second type multi-focal finders - side view



Chrome finish finders for 85mm, 105mm and 135mm - rear view



Pair of multi focal finders - front view

of subsequent versions and different barrels at a price of $175.
Until 1951, it was produced with chrome finish and "Nippon Kogaku Tokyo" marking, and after that date with chrome finish and "Nippon Kogaku Japan" marking. In 1953 the barrel was modified and minimum aperture was changed to f/32. The new version was built with chrome finish and after 1955 with black finish. Production of the Nikkor Q 135mm f/4 was interrupted at the start of 1950 to make room for the new 135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q.

More successful and longer lived than its predecessor, the **135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q** used 43mm filters and was built in a variety of successive versions with chrome or black finish. Lenses manufactured before 1951 were chrome with the "MIOJ" and "Nippon Kogaku Tokyo" markings and stopped down to f/16. Lenses built after that date stopped down to f/32 and were first produced with the standard chrome finish, to be changed after 1955 to black. The price of the 135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q in the US was around $135.
At the beginning of 1951 a new 85mm lens was created that did not replace the 85mm f/2 Nikkor P, but was offered alongside it with almost twice the speed. The new portrait telephoto, the **85mm f/1.5 Nikkor S** matched the German 85mm f/1.5 Summitar and 75mm f/1.5 Biotar lenses, was composed of seven elements, stopped down to f/32 and used 60mm screw filters. In the US, the price of this fast portrait lens was set at $400, one of the most expensive of the entire system. To keep weight down, right from the beginning, the barrel was made of light weight aluminum alloy with black finish.
In order to utilize the 85mm and 135mm lenses, two additional cylindrical finders in chrome finish and with parallax correction were offered. Until 1950, a multi-focal optical finder was also marketed with 35mm, 50mm, 85mm and 135mm frames. The **Nikon Variframe** finder was similar to the corresponding Leitz Vidom and was comprised of a cylinder with rotating ring to select the focal length and a conical eyepiece. As for other finders of the day, it was first produced in chrome finish, later changed to black for the same finder.

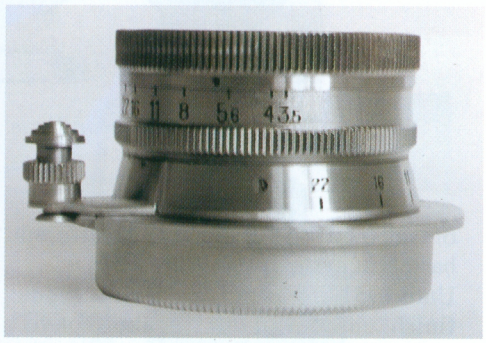
The 85mm f/2 Nikkor P, 85mm f/1.5 Nikkor S and 135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q telephoto lenses with Nikon mount were built with a slight modification to permit precise focusing on German Contax cameras. The **Contax-modified lenses** were marked with the letter C inscribed on the base of the lens, not to be confused with the letter C on the front ring that indicated anti-reflection coating. Lenses with standard 50mm focal length or shorter did not require any special modification for correct use on Contax cameras.

In imitation of the focusing units used with long telephoto lenses on Leica and Contax cameras, starting in 1951 Nippon Kogaku began production of a **focusing unit** to be mounted on the Nikon S for use with long telephotos for coupling with the rangefinder.
The first lens made to be utilized with this unit was the **250mm f/4 Nikkor Q** with four elements that stopped down to f/32 and in 1951 was produced with a light alloy barrel and black finish. The 250mm f/4 Nikkor Q weighed almost a kilogram, focused from three meters to infinity and used 68mm screw filters. The price for the US market was set at $225.
The focusing unit connected to the 250mm telephoto was square with black finish and had an adjustable eyepiece for viewing from above. Given the special features of this accessory, production was very limited and may only have totaled 200 pieces. At the end 1952, a second long telephoto lens was also put into production with a 500mm focal length comprised of 3 elements and with maximum aperture of f/5 that stopped down to f/45. The long **500mm Nikkor T** telephoto weighed eight and a half kilograms, focused from seven and a half meters to infinity and used 110mm filters. It would seem that very few of these lenses were produced, perhaps as few as 300, and its price tag of $550 contributed to making it an "exclusive" item.
When production of the Nikon S was halted in the mid 1950s, it was already the center of a fairly developed photographic system comprised of three wide angles with focal lengths from 28mm to 35mm, two standard 50mm lenses with speeds of f/2 and f/1.4 and three rangefinder coupled telephoto lenses with focal lengths of 85mm and 135mm. Also available in limited numbers were two long telephoto lenses of 250mm and 500mm and the focusing units that betrayed the concept behind the rangefinder, but which at that time offered a still credible alternative to true single lens reflex models.

BETWEEN NIKON AND LEICA



50mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q lens with screw mount on Canon



35mm f/3.5 W Nikkor lens with screw mount



50mm f/2 Nikkor H lens, chrome finish, with screw mount

As is well known, rangefinder Nikon lenses utilize a bayonet mount based on the Contax mount and are fully compatible (with rare exceptions) with the pre-war Contax cameras built in Dresden and the Soviet copies made in Kiev, as well as the rangefinder Contax manufactured during the Fifties in Stuttgart. To further underscore this compatibility, the 85mm f/2, 85mm f/1.5, 105mm f/2.5 and 135mm f/3.5 Nikkor telephoto lenses were slightly modified to maintain the exact focusing on Contax bodies and were identified with a letter C engraved on the base.

In their just over ten year presence on international markets, Nikkor lenses for rangefinder cameras were also manufactured with Leica-type 39x1mm screw mounts that could be used not only with German Leicas, but also the Japanese made Leica copies that were built and sold in large numbers between 1948 and 1960. Almost all Nikkor lenses for Nikon rangefinder cameras, except for those designed and produced after 1958, have a corresponding screw mount version. American ads for the Nikon during the early 1950s even seemed to put more emphasis on the lenses than the cameras. Nikkor lenses were offered with the Leica/Canon and Contax/Nikon mount with the slogan: *"bring your old camera up to date with the new Nikkor lenses, tested and judged to be the best"*. 50mm Nikkor lenses were offered on the American market in 1952 at the price of $107 for the f/2 version and $198 for the f/4. The 35mm f/3.5 wide angle sold for $89.50 and the 85mm f/2 and 135mm f/3.5 telephoto lenses for $175.50 and $154.50 respectively, the same price asked for the same Contax bayonet mount lenses. The zoom finder had a price tag of $37, while the multi-focal finder sold for $46.

The standard 50mm f/2 Nikkor lens was built with a focusing helical and screw mount, both in the first version with retractable barrel as well as the fixed barrel version that followed, and both in the chrome finish version with "Tokyo" or "Japan" inscription and in the black finish version. Also manufactured with helical focus and screw mount were the 50mm f/1.5 Nikkor S and subsequent 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S, the latter with chrome finish inscribed "Tokyo" and subsequent chrome version inscribed "Japan". In 1954, the 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lens with screw mount sold on the US market for $189.50, twenty dollars more than the same lens with Nikon/Contax mount. Later, the price of this lens was reduced to $159.50. Even the fast 50mm



85mm f/2 Nikkor P lens, chrome finish, with screw mount



135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q lens, chrome finish, with screw mount



135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q lens, black finish, with screw mount

f/1.1 Nikkor N was manufactured with a screw mount, obviously with its own helical focus, but with narrow barrel, and sold for $315. The 50mm f/3.5 Micro Nikkor was also manufactured in a chrome version with screw mount.

Among the wide angle lenses manufactured: a 35mm f/3.5 W Nikkor with screw mount in both chrome and black finish inscribed "Tokyo" and "Japan"; a 35mm f/2.5 W Nikkor with screw mount in chrome finish, first offered at $139.50 then upped to $143; the fast 35mm f/1.8 W Nikkor in black finish which sold for $183.50. Even the extreme wide angles, the 28mm f/3.5 W Nikkor and 25mm f/4 W Nikkor were manufactured with screw mount and chrome finish, the former selling for $149.50, later increased to $153, and the latter including finder for $169.50, later increased to $172.50.

Also built with screw mount were coupled rangefinder telephoto lenses such as the 85mm f/2 Nikkor P portrait lens, both in chrome finish with "Tokyo" or "Japan" inscription and in black finish, and the screw mount extra fast 85mm f/1.5 telephoto Nikkor S with black finish, sold first at $299.50 and later at $309. The popular 105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P lens was made with screw mount and sold for $159, as were all Nikkor Q lenses with 135mm focal length from the f/4 model with chrome finish and "Tokyo" inscription, to the subsequent f/3.5 version with chrome finish and "Tokyo" or "Japan" inscription together with a black finish model. The popularity of the 135mm telephoto prompted Nippon Kogaku to manufacture this telephoto lens also with a bayonet mount for Exakta, both in the f/4 and f/3.5 versions.

As would be expected, reflex focusing units were made with screw mount and for use with this accessory, also with a screw mount, were the long 180mm f/2.5 Nikkor H (price: $399.50) telephoto, the 250mm f/4 Nikkor Q ($224.50) and even the 500mm f/5 Nikkor T ($550), plus $99.50 for the focusing unit.

For those lenses designed to be used with rangefinder cameras, a number of auxiliary finders were made to be used on a wide range of cameras including Nikon, Contax, Canon and Leica. But the multi-focal Nikon Variframe finders were built in a version that also included frames for 63mm and 90mm focal lengths. Given that Nippon Kogaku never made lenses for its rangefinder Nikons with those focal lengths, these finders were designed to be mounted specifically on Leica or Japanese copies of Leica cameras.

In 1959, following the overwhelming success of the Nikon F, through its American importer, Nippon Kogaku placed a paid advertisement in which it informed the public that it had suspended the production of screw mount lenses and was offering the lenses remaining in stock, with focal lengths from 25mm to 135mm at half the current market price.

More than thirty five years after the suspension of production of rangefinder Nikons, the lenses with Nikon/Contax mount were offered anew, not by Nikon or Zeiss, but by the Japanese company Cosina that, under the Voigtländer name, started production on three Skopar wide angle lenses with Nikon/Contax bayonet: an eight-element 21mm f/4 with finder, a seven-element 25mm f/4 with viewfinder and a seven-element 35mm f/2.5. These three lenses, that also appeared in the Cosina/Voigtländer catalog in screw mount version, were offered not only for Nikon and Contax collectors, but also enthusiasts of modern mechanical cameras. In fact, Cosina also began production on a Bessa R2 35mm rangefinder version with Nikon/Contax mount, as well as new lenses with Nikon/Contax bayonet mount, such as the 28mm f/3.5 and 50mm f/2.5 Skopar and 85mm f/3.5 Apo Lanthar.

NIKON S2



Nikon S2 no. 6160027 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in black finish—front

The Nikon S was a successful camera sturdily built and well made, but even its own manufacturers were all too aware that it was spoiled by its unusual 24x34mm format, maximum shutter speed of 1/500s, small viewfinder without frames and slow loading and rewinding speeds caused by its two traditional knobs.

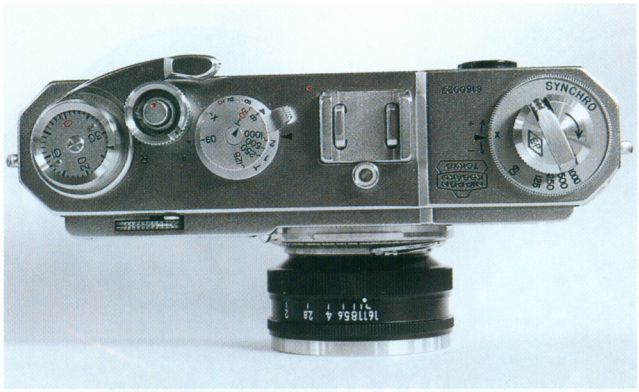
To remedy these problems, in late February 1951 Nippon Kogaku began study on a new 24x36mm format camera with improved characteristics. The prototype of the new Nikon was completed in June 1953 and production of its components began in October of the same year. The unveiling of the Leica M3 at Photokina in April 1954 provoked considerable interest among photographers and forced Nippon Kogaku designers to modify their plans. Among its various functions the Leica M3 offered a rapid winding lever and a large multi-focal viewfinder coupled with a wide base rangefinder. The new Nippon Kogaku camera was immediately modified to offer similar features, at least in part.

In December 1954, in two press conferences held simultaneously in Tokyo and New York, the new Nippon Kogaku camera was presented with the name Nikon S2. The Nikon S2 appeared on the American market in February 1955 and *Popular Photography* dedicated an enthusiastic article to it in its March 1955 issue. *Modern Photography* and *US Camera*, normally not that friendly to Japanese products, were enthralled by the new camera which made a triumphant showing at the Japan Photo Show in San Francisco in May 1955 and at the Japan Camera Show the following December. The Nikon S2 was the first Nikon camera to have also been marketed by Willoughby, the most important camera store in New York City.

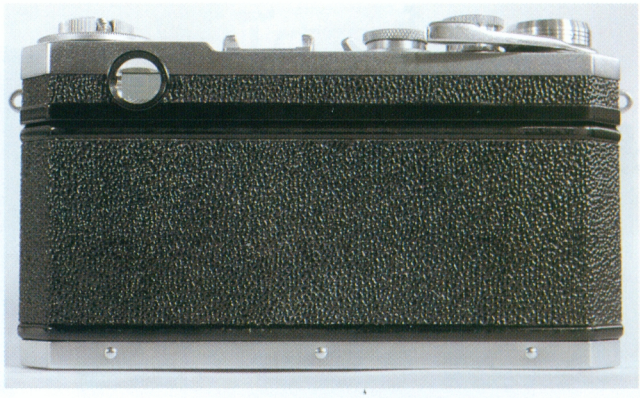
The Nikon S2 shutter was a traditional fabric curtain shutter with horizontal traverse, but with a completely renovated mechanism reaching speeds of 1/1000s. Traverse speed of the curtain was increased, allowing it to cover the distance of the long edge of the frame in 16/1000s and a new brake system prevented curtain bounce back, creating a characteristic "click". Shutter speed selection was still on two levels, but the scale utilized was the modern geometric progression. High speeds were 1/1000 - 1/500 - 1/250 - 1/125 - 1/60 and 1/30, and low speeds were 1/15 - 1/8 - 1/4 - 1/2 and 1 sec. B and T settings were also possible and X synch speed was 1/50s. A single synch socket on the left side of the camera could be switched to FP and X functioning and a ring around the rewind crank made millisecond adjustment possible.

A second synch contact on the top plate in front of the accessory shoe made it possible to use compact BC4 and BC5 flash without cable and, in a certain way, presaged the concept of a hot shoe.

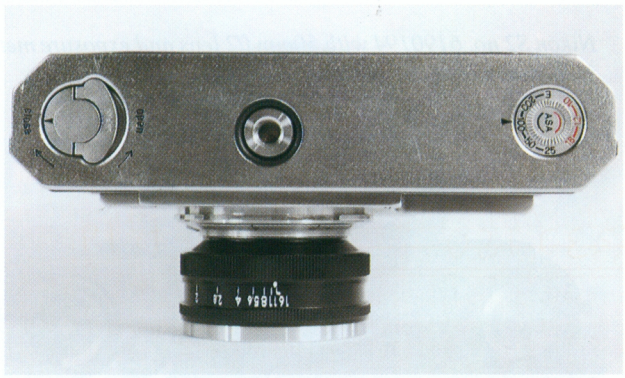
The Nikon S2 also utilized a handy rapid wind lever that could either be cocked in



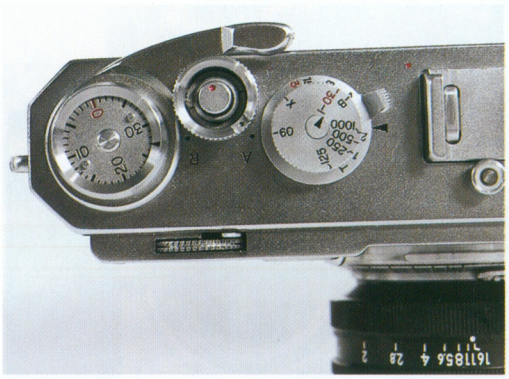
Nikon S2 no. 6160027 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in black finish—top plate



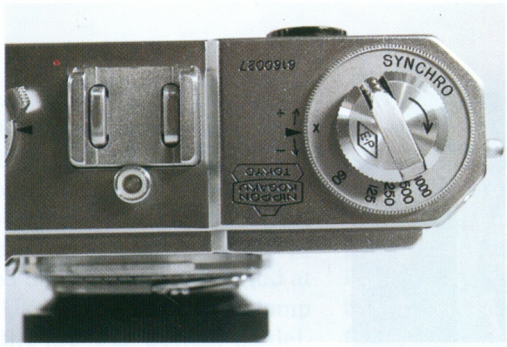
Nikon S2 no. 6160027—back with round finder eyepiece



Nikon S2 no. 6160027—base plate with single catch and memo dial



Nikon S2 no. 6160027—detail of winding lever and speed selector



Nikon S2 no. 6160027—detail of shoe with synch socket and rewind crank with synch adjustment



Nikon S body no. 6160027—front

a single motion or gradually, an extractable rapid rewind crank and a ring around the shutter release button for A-R selection.

The frame counter built into the winding lever was still reset manually.

The normal viewfinder was large and bright and made it possible to view actual dimensions with both eyes open. The finder contained only the bright line for the standard 50mm focal length that covered approximately ninety percent of the framed area. The rangefinder base was larger, increased to an effective length of 60mm.

The Nikon S2 did not have a self timer mechanism and continued to make use of a removable back attached to the base plate, but it opened with a single catch. The base plate included a dial for indicating film speed.

In appearance, the Nikon S2 differed from previous cameras for the new layout of controls on the top plate which was also multi-sectioned and tiered on the far left to leave space for the larger optical finder.

The front of the Nikon S2 was also partially modified and more closely resembled the pre-war Contax than the Nikon S had. The T shaped chrome mask mirrored that of the Contax with the classic overhang on the right to allow room for the focusing wheel that was shifted to the outside compared with the one on the Contax, a detail that makes it possible to differentiate the fronts of the two cameras immediately.

Also evident are the absence of the synch socket and self timer, but overall, the



Nikon S2 no. 6190194 with 50mm f/2 lens and exposure meter incorrectly coupled — front



Nikon S2 no. 6190194 with 50mm f/2 lens and exposure meter incorrectly coupled — top plate



Nikon S2 body no. 6190194 — front



Nikon S2 body no. 6190194 — top plate



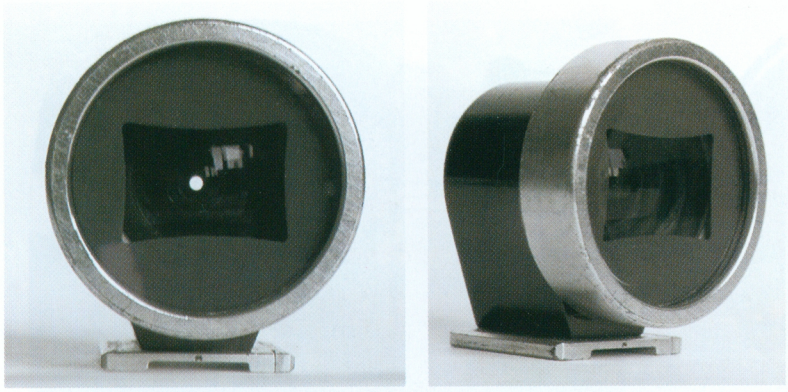
Nikon S2 — detail of changing catch with black ring and white numbers



Nikon S2 no. 6167394 (repainted) black with 50mm f/2 Nikkor lens in black finish — front



Nikon S2 no. 6167394 (repainted) black with 50mm f/2 Nikkor lens in black finish — top plate



Wide angle finder for 25mm



25mm f/4 W Nikkor lens with chrome finish



Wide angle finder for 25mm—rear view

resemblance between the two cameras is more marked than their differences. While the Contax built in Stuttgart during the Fifties did not undergo any significant change over the course of its production, and while the Contax copies manufactured during the same period at Kiev in the Ukraine were rubber stamp versions of the pre-war Contax model, the Nikon S2 bore testimony to the way the Japanese had learned well from their German teachers and had begun to surpass them.

Production on the Nikon S2 began on December 10, 1954 using production code 16FB and starting with serial number 6135001. Output continued until March 1958 with over 56,000 cameras made, up to serial number 6198380. More Nikon S2 cameras were made than any other Nikon rangefinder. Starting with serial number 6180001, some parts of the Nikon S2 had black finish, such as the distance scale around the focusing ring on the internal bayonet, the speed selector, the frame counter dial and the dial for adjusting flash synchronization.

Alongside the Nikon S2 with silver chrome finish, a thousand Nikon S2 cameras in black finish were produced for each of the first and second series.

During 1956, a number of experimental Nikon S2 prototypes to be used with electrical film advance motor were produced. These prototypes were shown in March 1957 at the IPEX in Chicago but were never mass produced.

On the domestic Japanese market, the Nikon S2 equipped with 50mm f/2 Nikkor H lens had a price tag of 68,500 yen and with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lens 83,000 yen, compared 59,000 yen and 79,000 yen respectively for the Nikon S with the same lenses.

In the US, Nikon Inc. of New York marketed the Nikon S2 with 50mm f/2 Nikkor H lens for around $300, rising to $345 with the 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S.

Nikon S2 lenses

Nikon S lenses continued to be produced for the Nikon S2 and the viewfinders for the telephoto and wide angle lenses were modified for the 24x36mm format. What changed in the new viewfinders was their shape and finish, becoming cylindrical with black finish and, starting in 1956, were equipped with Albada bright-line finders. For use with the Nikon S2 a quite compact viewfinder for 35mm focal length was built, attached to a side arm that was inserted into the camera clip so that it could be carried in the ever-ready case.

Between 1954 and 1957, the gamma of Nikon rangefinder lenses continued to grow at a constant rate with the presentation of faster lenses, more extreme wide angles and new lenses with focal lengths that were different from those previously available.

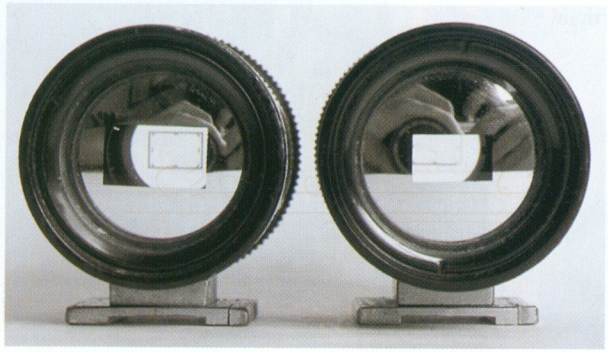
At the end of 1953, Nippon Kogaku created three new lenses that were marketed beginning in 1954. The 25mm f/4 W Nikkor wide angle utilized a 4 - element symmetrical scheme with pronounced curvature taken from the Topogon of Carl Zeiss Jena. It offered an angle of view greater than that of the 28mm wide angle and stopped down to f/22. Filter diameter was 52mm and their especially compact shape made it possible for the lens to retract almost completely into the camera body, leaving only the front crown exposed. The 25mm W Nikkor was first built in a chrome finish and later black finish version. The

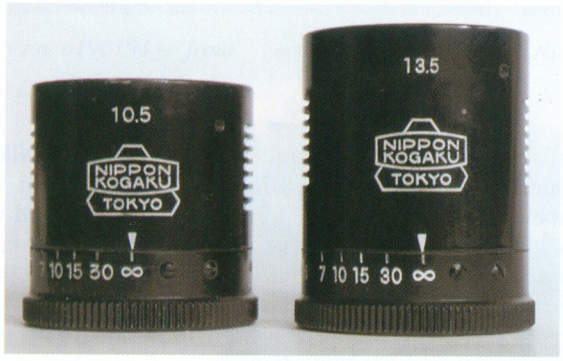


105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P lens — front view



105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P lens — side view





Pair of bright line finders for 105mm and 135m — side view



105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P lens with finder

cylindrical optical finder for the 25mm focal length, on the other hand, was only made with black finish. The price of this lens on the Japanese market was around 30,000 yen and that of the viewfinder about 4,000 yen; the package was offered on the US market for approx. $170.

The 105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P portrait telephoto comprised of five elements, offered an angle of view that was midway between that of the 85mm and 135mm, stopped down to f/32 and used 52mm filters. The optical quality of the 105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P was much esteemed by photographers of the day and did much to boost the fame of Nikkor lenses and Nikon cameras. The 105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P telephoto was only manufactured with black finish (price tag: $152.50) and utilized a fairly small, chrome finish cylindrical optical finder with parallax correction, similar to that on 85mm and 135mm focal lengths, that was later replaced by a new, larger viewfinder with black finish and built-in bright-line. Following the release of the 105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P telephoto, the rangefinder Nikon Variframe universal finders were modified to include the 105mm focal length and covered five focal lengths: 35mm, 50mm, 85mm, 105mm and 135mm. Like the other Nikkor telephoto lenses created for the rangefinder Nikons, the 105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P was also built in a special version, marked with the letter C, with slight modifications for precise focusing on Contax cameras.

Alongside the new lenses with direct mount on the camera body and direct rangefinder coupling, a number of new Nikkor lenses for use with focusing units were also built. To supplement the 250mm and 500mm focal lengths, at the end of 1953 a fast, six-element 180mm f/2.5 Nikkor H telephoto lens was put into production. In terms of speed, the 180mm f/2.5 Nikkor H telephoto just slightly beat the famous 180mm f/2.8 Olympia Sonnar



180mm f/2.5 Nikkor H lens for focusing unit — front view



180mm f/2.5 Nikkor H lens for focusing unit — side view



Second model focusing unit

by Carl Zeiss Jena which was also comprised of six elements and designed for use with a focusing unit. The 180mm f/2.5 Nikkor H stopped down to f/22 and used 82mm filters, focused from 220cm and weighed 1700 grams despite its light-weight black-finish barrel. In the US it sold for $400 plus $100 for the focusing unit.

During 1956, production was begun on two new, very fast lenses that did not replace the existing ones with the same focal length, but did offer an interesting if costly alternative. The 35mm f/1.8 W Nikkor wide angle comprised of seven elements was at the head of its class in a period in which the best German 35mm did not surpass a speed of f/2.8. It was designed by Hideo Azuma on the basis of a modified asymmetric Xenotar type scheme and was manufactured with an all black finish. After 1956, as on other Nikkor lenses, the aperture ring was chrome finished. The 35mm f/1.8 W Nikkor stopped down to f/22 and used 43mm screw filters. Its list price on the Japanese market was 40,000 yen, equal to $180 in the USA, but the price was later reduced to 27,000 yen.

The speed limit for a standard focal length lens was radically lowered with the 1956 unveiling of the nine-element 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor N lens. The extra-fast Nikkor was born in the wake of the Japanese 50mm f/1.1 Zunow lens designed by Michisaburo Hamano in 1953. It stopped down to f/22, used 62mm filters and weighed 350 grams. The first version of the 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor N did not have a focusing helical as the other 50mm Nikkor lenses did and was produced with the same narrow barrel for the internal bayonet. The barrel was produced in light-weight aluminum alloy with black finish.

Production of the second version of the 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor N began in July 1958 and had its own focusing helical with large barrel for external bayonet. The new 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor N also had black finish, but thanks to the new barrel weighed 400 grams.

The cost of the Nikon S2 equipped with the 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor N was 124,500 yen, 41,500 yen more than the Nikon S2 with f/1.4 lens and a full 56,000 yen more than the same camera with f/2 lens. For the 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor N, a special contoured wide-diameter lens hood was offered that had large holes in its base to prevent totally blocking the view through the camera's finder.

The Nikon S2 years saw the growth of the Nikon system to the point that it comprised three focal lengths with the focusing unit and seven different focal lengths for rangefinder-coupled lenses.

NIKON SP



Nikon SP no. 6212511 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in black finish—front

Despite the presentation and commercial success of the Nikon S2, Nippon Kogaku designers continued to work on projects for new models that would match or surpass the best German cameras. The most obvious limit of the Nikon S2 was its fixed frame viewfinder for only the 50mm standard focal lengths. This constraint made to necessary to use special auxiliary finders both with wide angle and telephoto lenses, and parallax corrections had to be made manually each time.

In September 1954, guidelines were drawn up for the design of a new camera and work began on it in 1955. Two projects were developed simultaneously, the first for a rangefinder camera with multi-focal finder and the second for a camera equipped with reflex finder. In both cases, shutter mechanisms were studied from scratch and the automatic frame counter, self timer mechanism and electric motor option were inserted on all camera bodies.

The project for the rangefinder camera with multi-focal finder was given precedence and was completed in May 1957, while the single reflex was put on hold and only completed two years later. The new rangefinder camera did not replace the Nikon S2 and was dubbed the Nikon SP, P standing for professional. Mass production began in September 1957 under the in house production code 26F.

The focal plane shutter of the Nikon SP was controlled by a single selector that did not rotate during shutter release, its speed was upped to traverse the frame in 14.5/1000s, it utilized a new type of silent brake without the sound so characteristic on the Nikon S2, and allowed for flash synch up to a maximum speed of 1/60s.

The shutter curtain was still made of rubberized fabric, but starting in 1959 was replaced by one in titanium. The shutter speed range from one second to 1/1000s was organized as on the Nikon S2 utilizing a geometric scale, but was located on a single selector and color coding was used to differentiate the speed ranges. Speeds between 1/1000 and 1/125 were highlighted in green, the 1/60 flash synch speed in red and slow speeds between 1/30 and 1 sec. plus the B and T settings in white. The fluorescent green used was visible even in low light conditions.

The normal viewfinder showed the image with real dimensions as on the Nikon S2, covered 92% of the framed field, had automatic parallax correction and built-in frames for 50, 80, 105 and 135mm lenses. The frames were selected manually using a ring on the top plate that was coaxial with the rewind crank and this ring inserted the frame of the longest focal length inside the others. If the number 50 was selected, only the 50mm frame would appear, selecting 85, the frame for the 85mm focal length would appear inside the 50mm one, and so on. When 135 was selected, all four frames would appear.

A second viewfinder located next to the first offered frames for the 28mm wide angle focal length and incorporated the frame corresponding to the field of 35mm lenses. This second finder offered a smaller image and covered 85% of the framed field. On the back, a single elongated window housed both eyepieces.

Like the Nikon S2, the Nikon SP also had a single synch socket on its side with the possibility of selecting between FP and X, and on the top plate had a direct synch socket near the accessory shoe. Unlike the Nikon S2, the Nikon SP had a frame counter that reset to zero automatically with the possibility of selecting 20 or 36 frame rolls of film, as well as a device to delay shutter release using a long lever on the front of the camera.

In appearance, the Nikon SP followed the lines of the Nikon S2, differing only in the presence of the self timer and the extremely elongated shape of the double viewfinder which started from the extreme left of the camera front and ended in the center of the lens, forcing designers to move the engraved Nikon name to the right of the rangefinder window.

The connecting line between the front mask and the protruding part that included the rangefinder window and the focusing wheel, was straight and inclined, not curved as on the pre-war Contax and Nikon S2.

The shape of the top plate was also modified with the extension of the upper tier for the entire length of the viewfinder and incorporating the accessory shoe. The external crown of the bayonet mount and main controls were in black finish as on second type Nikon S2 cameras of the same period.

Using the structure of the Nikon S2 as a base, the Nikon SP was also 136mm long and 43.5mm thick, but was just a couple of millimeters taller. It weighed approx. twenty grams more and with the f/1.4 lens totaled 720 grams compared with the 700 grams of the Nikon S2 with the same lens.

Production of the Nikon SP began on



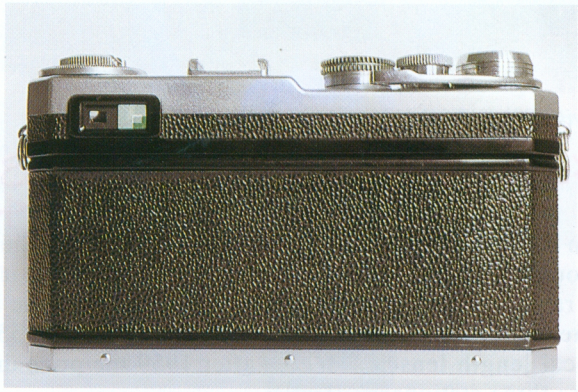
Nikon SP — detail of changing catch with black ring and white numbers



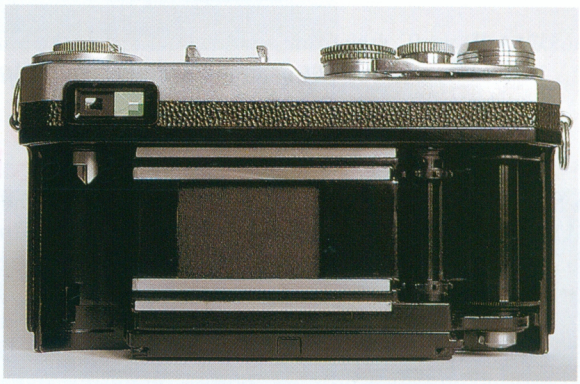
Nikon SP no. 6212511 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in black finish — top plate



Nikon SP no. 6212511 — base plate with single catch and memo dial



Nikon SP no. 6212511 — back with double viewfinder



Nikon SP no. 6212511 — back open with curtain

September 19, 1957 with serial number 6200001 and continued through June 1960, ending with serial number 6232150, but actual output was just over 22,000 cameras, some of which were in black finish with white lettering.

The Nikon SP was unveiled officially in September 1957 in Chicago, and later simultaneously in Tokyo and New York. Trade publications emphasized the arrival of the first Japanese camera with multi-focal viewfinder released following the Leica M3 and underscored how it had surpassed its German counterparts. At the Brussels trade fair in 1958, the Nikon SP and Nikkor lenses won numerous awards.

The prices of the Nikon SP with f/1.4 lens were set in 1957 at 98,000 yen, rising to 139,500 with the f/1.1 lens. In early 1959, just before the release of the Nikon F, the price was lowered to 82,800 with the f/1.4 lens and 107,800 yen with the f/1.1, while with the more modest f/2, the price was only 70,800 yen. The last Nikon SP cameras were offered in 1962 for 68,000 with the f/2 lens and 107,000 with the super-fast f/1.1.

Motor and accessories

Besides the features of the Nikon SP camera itself, its accessories also generated considerable interest. Like the Leicameter for Leica cameras, an exposure meter with selenium photocell to be inserted in the accessory shoe and coupled with the speed selector using the incorporated gear was also offered. In order to facilitate shooting in low light situations, the viewfinder was illuminated to make it easier to control rangefinder focusing.

Finally, for rapid-shooting, the S36 electric motor was produced that replaced the camera back; it was inserted onto the base plate and was interchangeable with the standard back. The S36 motor incorporated a frame counter and offered the possibility of continuous rapid sequence shooting up to three frames per second at all shutter speeds over 1/30s. The motor re-cocked the shutter after each shot at any shutter speed except the B and T settings.

Power to the motor was supplied by six 1.5 volt batteries housed in a separate battery pack connected to the motor by cable. The electric motor for the Nikon SP was sold for 50,000 yen.

The Nikon SP represented the peak in rangefinder technology, but its short-lived existence and limited number of cameras produced show how, even at the time, the rangefinder system's days were numbered. Even the designers at Nippon Kogaku realized the physical limits of their creation and, starting in 1957, concentrated all their efforts on the single lens reflex Nikon F project.

The commercial success of the Nikon F would later cause the halting of production on the Nikon SP and other Nikon rangefinder cameras in order to concentrate all Nippon Kogaku's resources on the development of the reflex system. Virtually simultaneously in Germany, Zeiss Ikon suspended production of the rangefinder Contax in favor of the single lens reflex Contarex. Only Leitz doggedly continued production of the rangefinder Leica while all other companies reaped success with their single reflex models.

In the US, the Nikon SP was originally marketed at $370 with the f/1.4 lens and $415 with the f/1.1 lens. Following 1959 the price was reduced by $40 and with the f/1.4 lens cost $330, the same price as the Nikon F with the same lens.

NIKON S3 - S4



Nikon S3 no. 6312006 chrome finish with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in black finish — front

Nikon S3

The Nikon SP was considered, even by Nippon Kogaku itself, as a "special niche" product for demanding professional photographers, proof of the technological expertise that had been attained by the Japanese photographic industry. It was for this reason that production continued on the Nikon S2, considered Nippon Kogaku's standard item for nine months in parallel with the professional Nikon SP.

The Nikon S3 model destined to replace the Nikon S2 was not put into mass production until March 1958. Numbering of the new model began with serial number 6300001. The factory code for this new model was 26F, the same used for the Nikon SP, followed by the number 1B, while the complete code for the Nikon SP was 26F followed by 2B.

The Nikon S3 shell was quite distinctive in appearance, but its structural similarities with the Nikon SP went much deeper and were more prevalent than would meet the eye. The Nikon S3 utilized the same combined speed selector as the Nikon SP that could be coupled to the same clip-on exposure meters as the Nikon SP. It used the Nikon SP self timer mechanism with the same winding lever on the front, the same synch sockets on the side and top plate and the same shutter release. Above all, the Nikon S3 used the same shutter as the Nikon SP and, like the SP, also offered the option of an electric motor.

The only major difference between the Nikon S3 and Nikon SP was the viewfinder. The Nikon S3 used a normal, single rangefinder coupled viewfinder with a magnification ratio of 1:1. It was large, bright and covered 90% of the field framed by 35mm focal length lenses. Inside the finder were three stationary bright-line frames for the most commonly used focal lengths: the 35mm wide angle which was the outer frame and difficult to discern, the standard 50mm and the medium-long 105mm. There was no parallax correction.

The right front of the Nikon S3 was identical to that of the Nikon SP, but the left side had just one, large rectangular window for the viewfinder, larger than the one on the Nikon S2 but different from that of the Nikon SP. The Nikon inscription was placed once again center-front between the finder window and rangefinder, as on the Nikon S2 and Nikon S.

The Nikon S3 was identical in size to the Nikon S2 and Nikon SP and the body by itself weighed 580 grams. The top plate of the Nikon S3 was identical to that of the Nikon SP, except for the ring around the rewind crank used to select finder frames, no longer necessary because the three frames in the finder were fixed. The rewind shaft mechanism of the Nikon S3 was different and simpler than the articulated one on the Nikon SP, but the rewind cranks were the same.

At the time, the Nikon S3 was considered the "kid brother" of the Nikon SP and the offspring of the Nikon S2. Its price was similar to that of the Nikon S2, 71,500 yen with f/2 lens, 86,000 yen with the f/1.4 and 127,500 with the extra-fast f/1.1. Even in the US, where it originally sold for $10 more than the Nikon S2 ($310 with the f/2 and $355 with the f/1.4), after 1959 the price dropped by $40.

In 1959, following the unveiling of the Nikon F, prices were reduced to 59,800 yen with the f/2, 71,800 yen with the f/1.4 and 96,800 with the f/1.1.

Like the Nikon SP, starting in 1959, the Nikon S3 also came equipped with titanium shutter curtains.

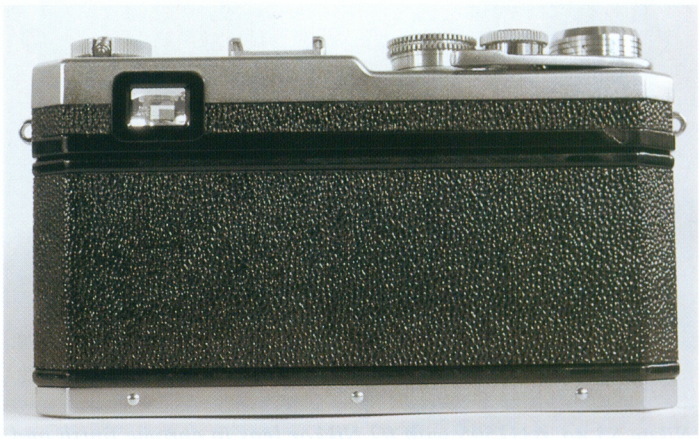
Just over 14,000 Nikon S3 cameras were produced up to March 1961 and approx. 2,000 of them were made with black finish. Production of the Nikon S3 was halted abruptly two years following the birth of the Nikon F and with a total output much lower than had been planned originally. The demise of the Nikon S3 was the result of high demand for the Nikon F and the incapacity to keep two different, and in many ways contrasting, assembly lines running simultaneously. But, paradoxically, the history of the Nikon S3 did not cease with its official production end date.

Nikon S4

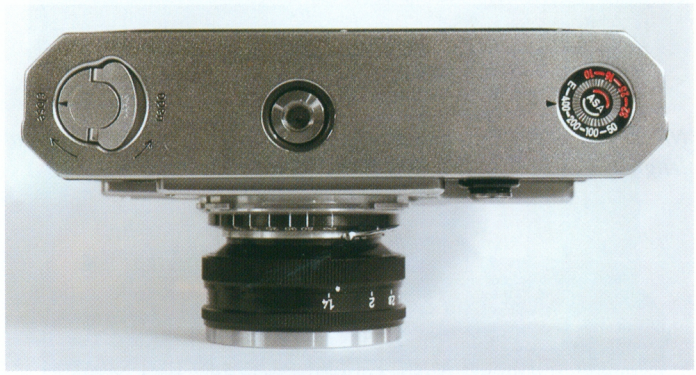
In March 1959, to meet the demand for economically priced cameras, a less expensive model called the Nikon S4 was offered alongside the Nikon S3. In reality, the Nikon S4 was the Nikon S3 without a few of the features held to be of marginal utility for non-professional photographers. With the same body and internal mechanics as the Nikon S3, the



Nikon S3 no. 6312006 chrome finish with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in black finish — top plate



Nikon S3 no. 6312006 — back with finder rectangular eyepiece



Nikon S3 no. 6312006 chrome finish with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor lens in black finish — base plate



Nikon S3 no. 6311595 with f/2 Nikkor lens in chrome finish and Nikkor multi-focal finder with Leica focal lengths — front



Nikon S3 body no. 6312006 — front

Nikon S4 had the same range of shutter speeds up to 1/1000s and used a fabric shutter curtain. All that it lacked was the self timer, automatic frame counter and motor option, while the viewfinder was modified to exclude the 35mm focal length frame.

With these simplifications, production of the Nikon S4 began from serial number 650001 and was offered on the Japanese market with the least expensive standard lens of the day, the 50mm f/2 Nikkor H, at a price tag of 52,000 yen, almost 8,000 yen less than the Nikon S3 with the same lens.

This new camera had the misfortune of being released at the same time as the Nikon F and while American importer Joe Ehrenreich enthusiastically accepted the reflex camera, he was not at all impressed with the Nikon S4 and absolutely refused to market it in the United States. This compromised the camera's future and it was only produced for the domestic market until July 1960 with only 6,000 cameras total, all with chrome finish.

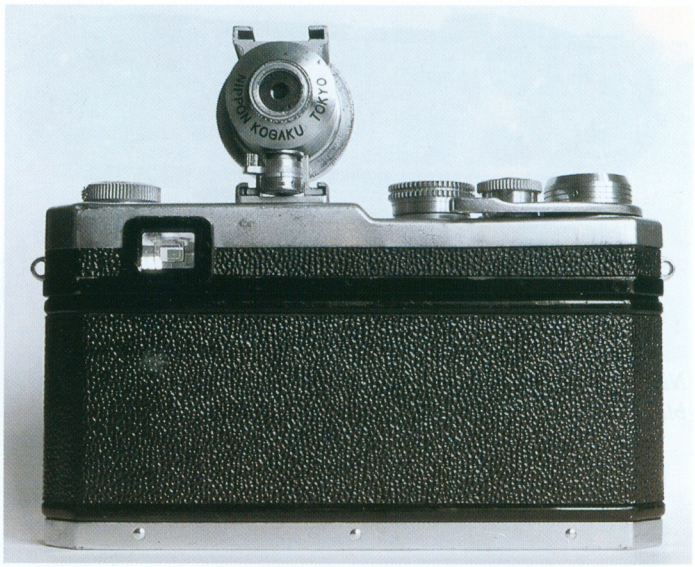
Nikon S3M

In April 1960 the Nikon S3 was built in a special version known as the Nikon S3M and modified to produce 72 18x24mm (in reality, 17.5x24mm) half-frame exposures on a standard roll of film. The half-frame format was quite popular in that period as a way of saving on film costs, but was not looked upon favorably for professional cameras. The Nikon S3M was not created to follow this cost saving trend, but rather to offer sports photographers rapid, motor-driven shooting. In fact, the Nikon S3M was supplied with an S72 electric motor that was based on the S36 model and was modified to reach 72 exposures at a rate of up to six frames a second. With further enhancements, the motor speed could be upped to nine frames/second.

With the exception of the frame counter, all Nikon S3M features were identical to those of the Nikon S3, including the



Nikon S3 no. 6311595 with f/2 Nikkor lens in chrome finish and Nikkor multi-focal finder with Leica focal lengths — top plate



Nikon S3 no. 6311595 with Nikkor multi-focal finder with Leica focal lengths — back





Nikon S3 body no. 6311595 — top plate

Nikon S3 body no. 6311595 — front

shutter, winding lever, synch sockets and self timer. Even the exterior of the viewfinder window remained the same and the bright-lines vertically indicated the field covered for 35mm and 50mm focal lengths, but the 105mm focal length frame was also available.

Most of the Nikon S3M cameras were black finish and cost 76,000 yen when equipped with the f/1.4 lens and 64,000 yen with the f/2. Despite its features and unusual performance levels, photographers did not seem to appreciate the appeal of the Nikon S3M. The venture was a commercial fiasco that caused production to be halted after just one year. Fewer than 200 Nikon S3M cameras were manufactured with a starting serial number of 6600001.

Nikon S3 Olympic

On the occasion of the Tokyo Olympic Games and in answer to photographer demands, Nippon Kogaku produced a number of Nikon SP bodies on an occasional basis. At the same time, a special series of around two thousand Nikon S3 cameras with black finish and serial numbers ranging from 6320001 up to 6322561 was put into production. The Nikon S3 Olympic did not have any special inscription, but it did use the titanium curtain shutter and had a number of the controls found on the Nikon F, such as the rapid winding lever, self timer lever and rewind crank.

The standard lens on the Nikon S3 Olympic was the 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S with modified 6-element scheme with a special aluminum barrel that was longer than on older lenses. The 50mm Nikkor S Olympic had an improved anti-reflection coating and was in black finish, including the front ring.

Nikon S3 Millennium

In February 2000, Nippon Kogaku (which in the meantime had become the Nikon Corporation), decided to market a number of commemorative cameras destined for collectors to mark the advent of the new millennium. Once again, the choice fell to the Nikon S3 which was produced exactly as it had been forty years earlier. Approximately 2000 of the Nikon S3 Millennium, or Nikon S3/2000, were built with chrome finish and stamped with serial numbers starting from 2000-1.

At first marketed only in Japan with a price tag of a half million yen, the equivalent of over 4000 Euro, the Nikon S3/2000 was later also exported abroad, but in very limited quantities. The frame counter on the Nikon S3/2000 could be set to 24 or 36 exposures, compared with the 20 or 36 of the original model, and film speed was measured in ISO instead of ASA. The shutter curtain was made of fabric and the distance scale on the focusing ring was given in meters instead of feet. The rapid winding lever was also slightly different from the original and the eyelets on the carrying strap were in stainless steel and not chrome.

The lens used to equip the Nikon S3/2000 was the 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S only, with black barrel.

A limited number of the S3 Millenium model was subsequently produced in black finish only for the Japanese home market.

Nikon S3 lenses

The triumphant reign of the Nikon rangefinder was not only marked by the production of the motorized Nikon SP and Nikon S3 cameras, but also by the release of new lenses and accessories. At its birth, the Nikon SP already boasted a



Nikon S4 no. 6505257 with 35mm f/1.8 Nikkor lens — top plate



Nikon S4 no. 6505257 with 35mm f/1.8 Nikkor lens — front



Nikon S4 body no. 6505257 — front



Nikon S4 body no. 6505257 — top plate



Nikon S3 Olympic, black finish with 21mm f/4 Nikkor O lens and finder



Nikon S3 Millennium 2000 with 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S lens — (photo Luigi Cane)

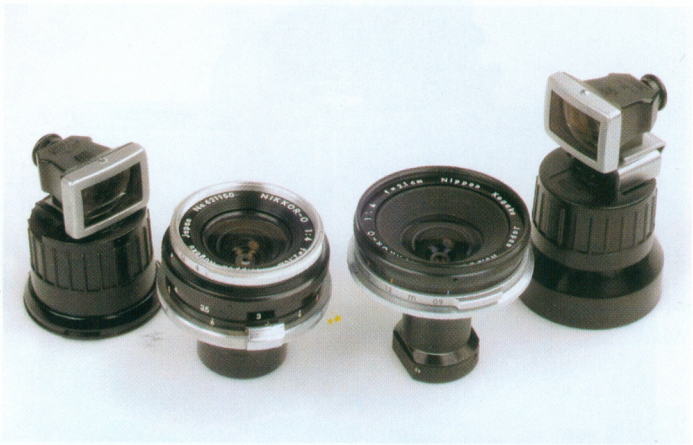
system of rangefinder coupled lenses with focal lengths from 28mm to 135mm, as well as long focal length lenses to be used with focusing units. The multi-focal finder of the Nikon SP made the clip-on optical finders useless and even the adjunct multi-focal finders, the Variframe and Varifocal, seemed obsolete.

In addition to lenses for normal use, from the mid-Fifties Nippon Kogaku also offered three special lenses for out of the ordinary applications. The 35mm f/3.5 Nikkor Stereo was comprised of a pair of Tessar type lenses housed in a single barrel that made it possible to produce pairs of stereo images in 18x24mm format. For this lens, a special vertical half-frame optical finder was made. The fashion for stereo lenses for 35mm cameras was also evident in the double lens Zeiss Stereotar for Contax and Leitz Stemar for Leica, from which the Nikkor Stereo clearly drew inspiration.

The 50mm f/3.5 Nikkor Micro was an original, 5-element lens with correction for close-up shooting and could be used either in normal position with rangefinder coupling with focusing between 90cm and infinity, or in extended position with focusing from 45mm to 90mm. Using a connecting ring it was also possible to obtain even higher enlargement ratios, up to 1:1. Because of parallax problems, close-up shooting using rangefinder cameras did not produce optimum results, but the Nikkor Micro proved itself to be an excellent macro lens that would occupy a place in the Nikon system for quite some time, especially in the version with single reflex Nikon F mount. The Nikkor Micro for rangefinder cameras utilized the internal bayonet mount



21mm f/4 Nikkor O lens with finder



21mm f/4 Nikkor O lens with finder, Nikon S and Nikon F versions compared



W3 Nikon panoramic head

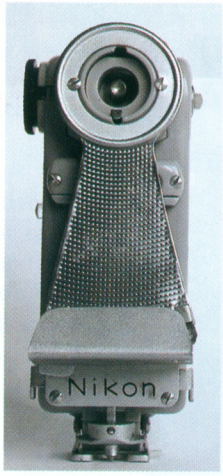


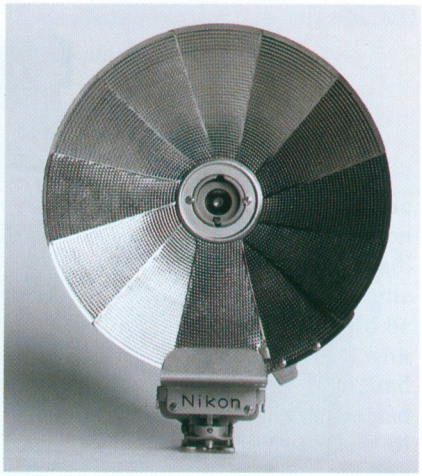
Selenium exposure meter with black finish for coupling with Nikon S3, SP, S4



135mm f/4 Nikkor Q lens with short barrel for bellows

Nikon BC5 folding flash with wireless direct contact for Nikon S2, Nikon SP, Nikon S3 and Nikon S4





typical of standard lenses, filter diameter was 34.5mm and it stopped down to f/22. Before the creation of the Nikkor Micro and right from the very beginning of rangefinder Nikon history, Nippon Kogaku had offered close-up shooting systems comprised of supplementary elements with a special barrel complete with "eyeglasses" for the finder and rangefinder. These additional elements made it possible to focus from 80cm and 45cm from the focal plane and were made for standard 50mm f/2 or f/1.4 lenses in the various versions for the different cameras, first the Nikon S and later the Nikon S2 and Nikon SP, S3 and S4.

To facilitate close-up shooting with the help of the focusing unit, in 1958 a special 135mm f/4 Nikkor Q lens was released with 4-element Tessar layout and short barrel. Rather than being mounted directly on the camera, it was attached to an extension bellows. This lens, also known as the Nikkor Bellows, could only be utilized with focusing units and, like all telephoto lenses, somewhat betrayed the philosophy of rangefinder cameras and at the same time also pointed up all their functional limitations.

In June 1959, when the Nikon F was already absorbing much of the time and interest of the Nippon Kogaku optics department, three new lenses for the Nikon rangefinder were released. The longest of these was designed for use with a focusing unit and had just three elements with a focal length of 350mm and maximum opening of f/4.5. The 350mm f/4.5 Nikkor T stopped down to f/32, had an all-black finish and utilized 82mm screw filters like the 180mm f/2.5 Nikkor H. Like the latter, it also weighed 1700 grams, but it focused from twice the distance, about four meters.

The light-weight 105mm f/4 Nikkor T telephoto lens also had just three elements and was somewhat of an anomaly among Nikon rangefinder lenses in that it was a direct competitor of the prestigious 105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P, with which it shared the focal length but weighing half as much. Its lens scheme was that of a long-focus, not a telephoto, lens and this caused it to protrude from

NIKON RANGEFINDER CAMERAS

MODEL	CODE	FORMAT	SER. NO.	FINISH	START PRODUCTION
Nikon I	6FB	24x32mm	6091	Chrome	March 1948
Nikon M	6FB	24x34mm	609760	Chrome	March 1949
Nikon S	6FB	24x34mm	6094101	Chrome	January 1950
Nikon S2	16FB	24x36mm	6135001	Chrome or black	December 1954
Nikon SP	26F2B	24x36mm	6200001	Chrome or black	September 1957
Nikon S3	26F1B	24x36mm	6300001	Chrome or black	March 1958
Nikon F (reflex)		24x36mm	6400001	Chrome or black	March 1959
Nikon S4	26F4B	24x36mm	6500001	Chrome	March 1959
Nikon S3M	26FMB	18x24mm	6600001	Chrome or black	April 1960
Nikon S3 Olympic		24x36mm	6320001	Black	1964
Nikon S3 Millennium		24x36mm	20001	Chrome	2000

STANDARD LENSES

LENS	NAME	BARREL	ELEMENTS	FILTER	END PRODUCTION
50mm f/3.5	Nikkor Q	Retractable	4 elements		December 1945
50mm f/2	Nikkor H	Retractable	6 elements	40.5mm	Fall 1946
50mm f/2	Nikkor H	Chrome Tokyo	6 elements	40.5mm	1950
50mm f/2	Nikkor H	Chrome Japan	6 elements	40.5mm	1953
50mm f/2	Nikkor H	Black	6 elements	40.5mm	1955
50mm f/1.5	Nikkor S	Chrome	7 elements	40.5mm	1950
50mm f/1.4	Nikkor S	Chrome Tokyo	7 elements	43mm	December 1950
50mm f/1.4	Nikkor S	Chrome Japan	7 elements	43mm	1953
50mm f/1.4	Nikkor S	Black	7 elements	43mm	1954
50mm f/1.4	Nikkor S	Aluminum	7 elements	43mm	1955
50mm f/1.4	Nikkor S	Black	7 elements	43mm	1956
50mm f/1.4	Nikkor S	Black Olympic	7 elements	43mm	1964
50mm f/1.4	Nikkor S	Black Millennium	7 elements	43mm	2000
50mm f/1.1	Nikkor N	Black narrow	9 elements	62mm	February 1956
50mm f/1.1	Nikkor N	Black wide	9 elements	62mm	June 1959

WIDE ANGLE LENSES

35mm f/3.5	W Nikkor	Chrome Tokyo	4 elements	43mm	March 1948
35mm f/3.5	W Nikkor	Chrome Japan	4 elements	43mm	1952
35mm f/3.5	W Nikkor	Chrome Japan	4 elements	43mm	1954
35mm f/3.5	W Nikkor	Black	4 elements	43mm	1956
35mm f/2.5	W Nikkor	Chrome	6 elements	43mm	September 1952
35mm f/2.5	W Nikkor	Black	6 elements	43mm	1956
28mm f/3.5	W Nikkor	Chrome	6 elements	43mm	September 1952
28mm f/3.5	W Nikkor	Black	6 elements	43mm	1956
25mm f/4	W Nikkor	Chrome	4 elements	52mm	November 1953
25mm f/4	W Nikkor	Black	4 elements	52mm	1956
35mm f/1.8	W Nikkor	Black	7 elements	43mm	September 1956
21mm f/4	Nikkor 0	Black	8 elements	43mm	June 1959

TELEPHOTO LENSES

135mm f/4	Nikkor Q	Chrome Tokyo	4 elements	40.5mm	1947
85mm f/2	Nikkor P	Chrome Tokyo (f/16)	5 elements	48mm	March 1948
85mm f/2	Nikkor P	Chrome Japan (f/16)	5 elements	48mm	1951
85mm f/2	Nikkor P	Chrome (f/32)	5 elements	48mm	1953
85mm f/2	Nikkor P	Black (f/32)	5 elements	48mm	1956
135mm f/3.5	Nikkor Q	Chrome Tokyo	4 elements	43mm	March 1950
135mm f/3.5	Nikkor Q	Chrome Japan	4 elements	43mm	1953
135mm f/3.5	Nikkor Q	Black	4 elements	43mm	1955
85mm f/1.5	Nikkor S	Black	7 elements	60mm	January 1951
105mm f/2.5	Nikkor P	Black	5 elements	52mm	December 1953
105mm f/4	Nikkor T	Black	3 elements	34.5mm	June 1959

LENSES FOR FOCUSING UNIT

250mm f/4	Nikkor Q	Black	4 elements	68mm	January 1951
500mm f/5	Nikkor T	Black	3 elements	110mm	September 1952
180mm f/2.5	Nikkor H	Black	6 elements	82mm	November 1953
350mm f/4.5	Nikkor T	Black	3 elements	82mm	June 1959
1000mm f/6.3	Nikkor	White/Grey	Reflex	52mm	June 1959

SPECIAL LENSES

35mm f/3.5	Stereo Nikkor	Chrome	4 elements	40.5mm	December 1956
50mm f/3.5	Micro Nikkor	Chrome	5 elements	34.5mm	October 1956
135mm f/4	Bellows Nikkor Q	Black	4 elements	43mm	May 1958

the camera body more than a real 105mm telephoto lens that was faster and more compact. Built in imitation, perhaps, of the pre-war Elmar Mountain, the 105mm f/4 Nikkor T had black and silver chrome finish, stopped down to f/22 and used 34.5mm filters. The same lens with Nikon F mount was put into production in 1959.

The true innovation among the lenses unveiled in June 1959 was the super wide angle 21mm f/4 Nikkor O, comprised of eight elements using a symmetrical scheme to cover an angle of ninety degrees. The super wide angle 21mm f/4 Nikkor O was designed by Zenji Wakimoto, also the designer of the Nikkor Micro, and its lens scheme was similar to the 21mm Biogon built by Carl Zeiss for the Contax, but was slightly faster than the 21mm f/4.5 Biogon.

The 21mm f/4 Nikkor O was released almost simultaneously with the 21mm f/4 Angulon built by Schneider for the Leica. It replaced the 25mm wide angle in the Nikon rangefinder system, had a special truncated pyramid shape finder and utilized 43mm filters. As with the Biogon and Super Angulon, the lens structure retracted significantly into the camera body, and in the infinity focusing position the rear element of the super wide angle was just seven millimeters from the shutter curtain.

The outside finish of the lens, as on all Nikkor lenses of the same generation, was in black-colored aluminum with the front aperture ring in chrome. The super wide angle 21mm f/4 Nikkor O was marketed together with the viewfinder at a price of 33,000 yen, but was manufactured with Nikon/Contax bayonet mount in a very limited number of perhaps just five or six hundred.

The same lens was built in greater number with Nikon F bayonet mount with a different barrel, with the aperture ring shifted and filter diameter upped to 52mm. In the Nikon F version, when this lens was used, the mirror had to be locked up which meant loss of the reflex view and the need to use the supplementary optical finder. Despite this shortcoming, it remained in production until 1967.

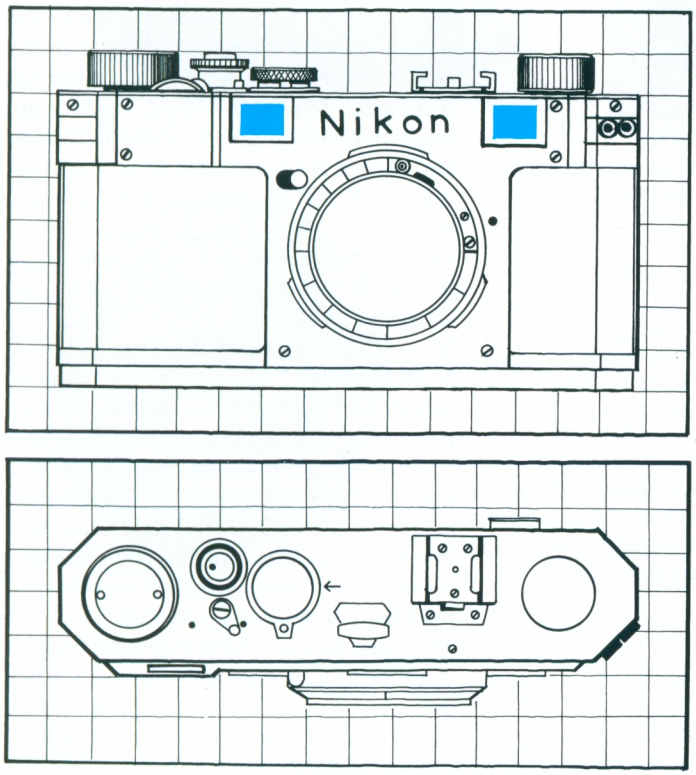
Thanks to the ironies of the rules of optics, the long telephoto lenses could be used on the rangefinder Nikons only if the rangefinder was bypassed and a focusing unit used, while the 21mm super wide angle could be used on reflex Nikons only by locking up the mirror and using the optical finder.

The appearance in November 1967 of the retrofocus wide angle 20mm f/3.5 Nikkor UD for the Nikon F marked the end-production date of the 21mm Nikkor O.

NIKON RANGEFINDER TECHNICAL SPEC SHEETS

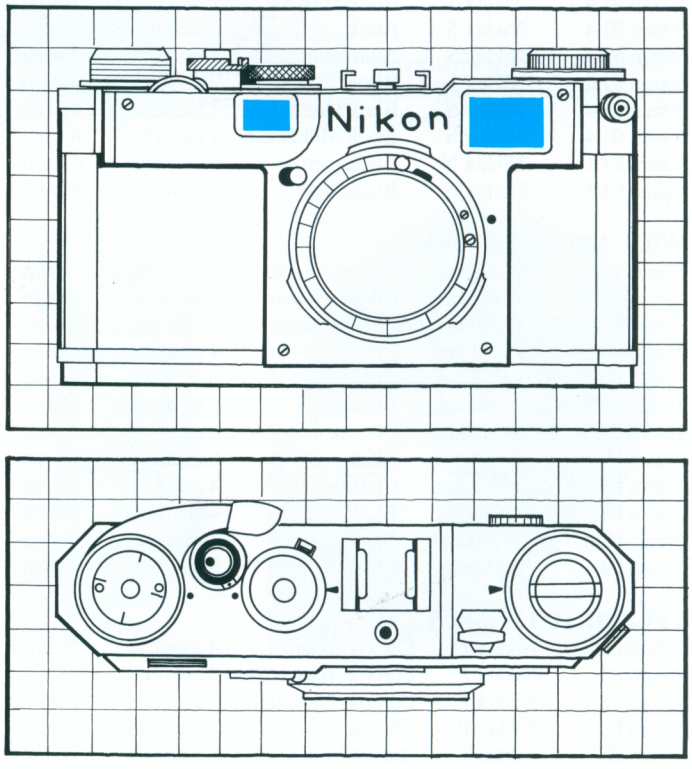
Production of Nikon rangefinder cameras began in 1948 with the 24x32mm format Nikon I and ended in 1964 with the Nikon S3. Over this period, their position was firmly consolidated with the 24x34mm Nikon M in 1949 and, above all, the synchronized Nikon S in 1950, replaced in 1955 by the Nikon S2, the first 24x36mm Nikon camera that was also equipped with a rapid winding lever.

The Nikon SP followed in 1957 with multi-focal viewfinder, self timer and the option of connecting a photo-electric exposure meter and electric motor. In 1958 the Nikon S3 replaced the Nikon S2, offering the same performance levels as the Nikon SP but with a simplified finder displaying just three focal lengths. The Nikon S4 was a further-simplified version of the Nikon S3 without self timer or motor option.



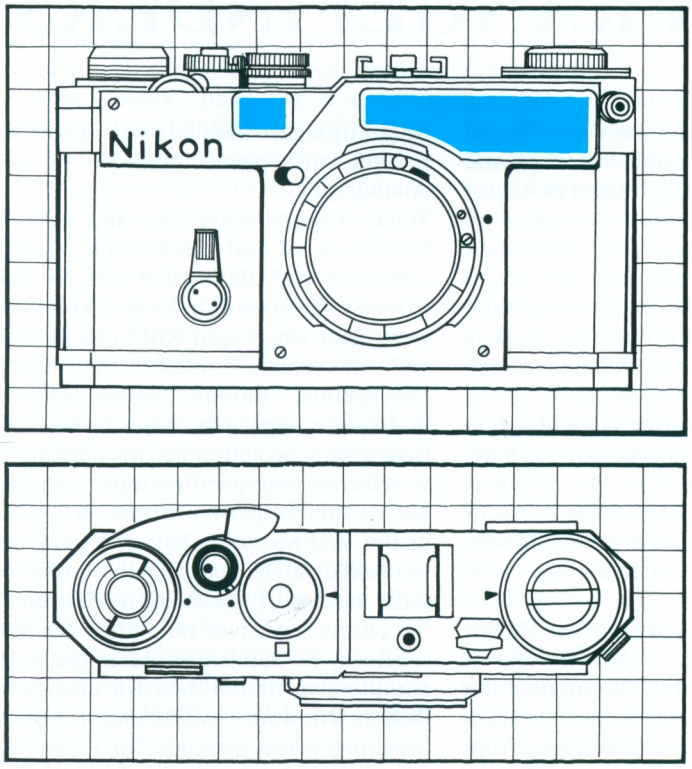
NIKON S

The Nikon S was the first Nikon camera to be officially exported to the United States. It utilized a Contax-type mount, rangefinder coupled to viewfinder, two synch sockets and maximum shutter speed of 1/500s.

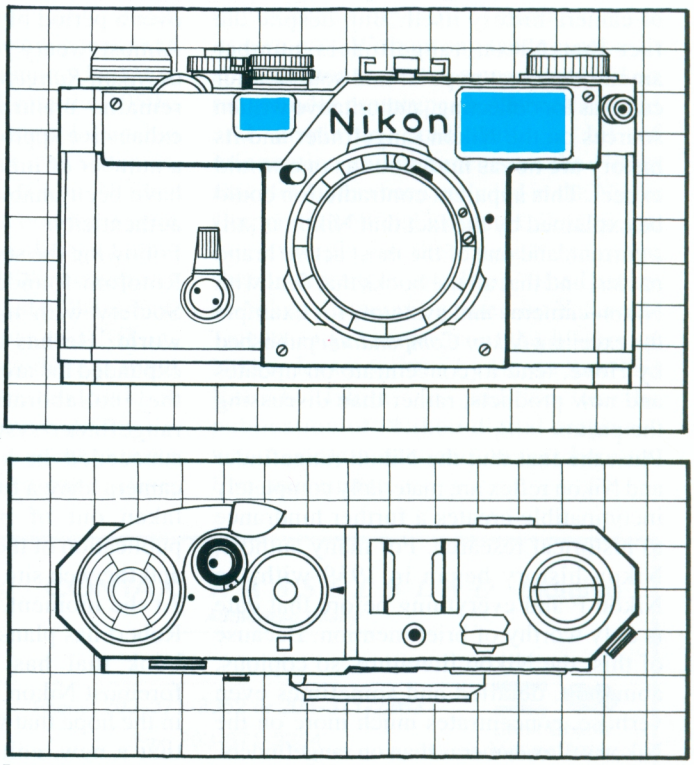


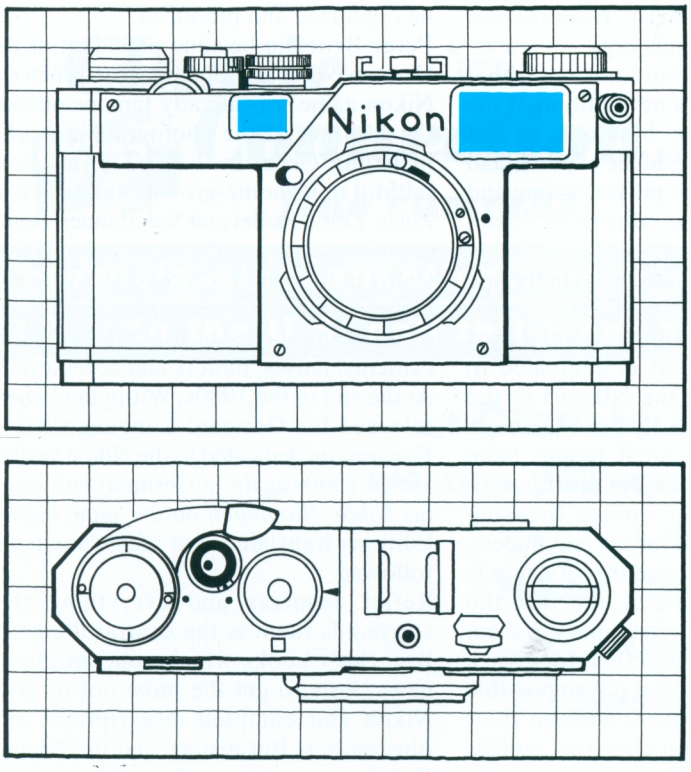
NIKON S2

The Nikon S2 replaced the Nikon S, offering the addition of a rapid winding lever, 1/1000s shutter speed, larger viewfinder, rapid rewind crank, switchable flash synch socket and standard 24x26mm format. Over 56,000 Nikon S2 cameras were manufactured until production was halted in 1958.



NIKON SP
The professional Nikon SP offered a double multi-focal viewfinder for lenses from 28mm to 135mm, self timer, option of exposure meter to be coupled with the speed selector, option of a film advance motor and automatic zero reset frame counter. Over 22,000 Nikon SP cameras were made.





NIKON S3
The Nikon S3 replaced the Nikon S2 in 1958 and offered the same performance levels as the Nikon SP but with the viewfinder simplified to include 35mm, 50mm and 105mm focal lengths. The Nikon S3 was manufactured until 1961 with just over 14,000 cameras produced, plus approximately 2,000 with special numbering for the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

NIKON S4
The Nikon S4 was offered alongside the Nikon S3 with streamlined performance levels, no self timer or motor option and manual frame counter reset. Less than 6,000 were made between 1959 and 1960 and it was not exported to the US.

BOOKS ON NIKON RANGEFINDERS

There is an aura that surrounds the most prestigious classic cameras, generated not only by the cameras themselves and their lenses and accessories, but by the entire ambience that surrounds them, the stories of those who make them, what is written about them in books and periodicals and the proliferation of collecting-related information that becomes an integral part of camera history itself. But, despite the fact that Nikon rangefinders number among the most popular and sought after cameras for collecting, authoritative written sources on the Nikon rangefinder and its history are not as numerous as one would expect. This apparent contradiction could be explained by the fact that Nikon is still a current, and one of the most active brand names, and that all the books that deal with Nikon cameras and systems, for example the excellent *Nikon Compendium* published by Hove, tend to concentrate on updates and new products, rather than discussing the past.

Plus, the fact that the Nikon rangefinder and Nikon reflex are materially completely incompatible creates a further hindrance to historical research. For many authors, Nikon history began in 1959 with the Nikon F and everything before that date is only worthy of brief mention. Because of this, the Nikon literature, so copious, abundant, detailed and sometimes even verbose, concentrates much more on the Nikon reflex cameras than on rangefinders. On the other hand, among Nikon rangefinder enthusiasts, there is a sort of reverse snobbism against the Nikon reflex in which the Nikon F and its proliferation of off-spring are seen as not worthy of serious collecting.

The split that exists between Nikon rangefinder and Nikon reflex cameras has become even more marked in the world of camera historians, researchers and collectors. For contemporary writers, discussion of the Nikon rangefinder has become a difficult and risky business. Difficult because Robert Rotoloni risks overshadowing every other author wishing to embark on the same field. Risky because without new data, there is the danger of regurgitating what has already been written in an uncritical manner.

The bibliographical treasure trove on the Nikon rangefinder first appeared back in 1981 with the publication of the first, and now virtually unavailable edition of **Robert Rotoloni**'s *Nikon Rangefinder Cameras* which dealt solely with the cameras. This slim volume was enlarged with a section dedicated to lenses and accessories and then republished in August 1983 under the same title, becoming an immediate point of reference. As Robert Rotoloni wrote in the preface to the second edition, his love for the Nikon rangefinder dates back to early 1967 and his book is the fruit of involved, painstaking research over a period of fourteen years.

Almost twenty years after the publication of *Nikon Rangefinder Cameras*, this book remains unsurpassed for its original, exhaustive approach, despite the efforts of a number of imitators and followers who have been unable to create a chink in its authenticity.

Following the success of his book, Robert Rotoloni founded the Nikon Historical Society with members throughout the world. He has continued his research, expanded his archives and benefited from the collaboration of many Nikon rangefinder system enthusiasts. He has succeeded in keeping interest in this camera alive a full forty years after it was taken out of production through the publication of the quarterly *Nikon Journal* and the web site nikonhs.org.

At the moment, it would not seem that Robert has plans for a new edition of the book that has made him one of the foremost Nikon rangefinder experts, and in the hope that we are proven wrong and that a new, enhanced edition of *Nikon Rangefinder Cameras* will someday appear, we will continue to lovingly and admiringly flip through our 1983 copy. The book follows the classic 3-part division. The first part is dedicated to camera bodies from the Nikon I to the Nikon S3M, the second part to lenses in ascending order by focal length from 21mm to 1000mm, and the third part to accessories including motors, focusing units, clip-on exposure meters and finders. It has been suggested that this division is too formal and artificial and that the cameras and lenses contemporary to them should be covered together to give a historical perspective, that it is impossible to understand the finders without their respective lenses and that the motors should be discussed together with the cameras they were designed to drive. Others have commented that the 39x1mm screw mount Nikkor lenses and the Nikkor C lenses for Contax have not been covered sufficiently, nor has the rest of Nikkor and Nikon output during the 1930s and 1950s. Real nitpickers have also criticized the second-rate print quality of the photographs.

Today, twenty years later and with the benefit of all that has happened in the collecting world during that time, it is easy to locate the failings in Robert Rotoloni's work. But when seen within its cultural and historical context, the book's courageous, unique, explosive and innovative approach comes to the fore. Before him, no author had ever attempted so selective and specific a topic regarding such a limited period of time or subject matter, and no author had ever gone into so much detail in analyzing the variations, serial numbers, finishes and modifications. No author had ever published the lens schemes, the number of pieces made and complete technical data for each lens. Robert Rotoloni's was a major, ground breaking work, not only for its subject matter, but also its approach. Following the publication of *Nikon Rangefinder Cameras*, not only had we learned much about the Nikon rangefinder, but also how a book on classic camera history should be organized and produced.

Peter Braczko became president of the German Nikon Club in the 1980s when the Nikon name was already famous outside the confines of the photographic world, including Germany that had always been faithful to its home-grown names such as Zeiss, Leitz, Rollei and Voigtländer. Being president of one of the most active Nikon Clubs in the world offered Peter Braczko the opportunity to deepen his knowledge of all components of the Nikon system cameras, lenses, motors and accessories. At the end of the 1980s, Wittig publishers released his Germanl Language *Nikon Faszination* dedicated to the Nikon system and in 1990 (again in German) published his *Nikon Handbuch* on the same theme. Editions translated into other languages followed.

Reflex cameras and everything that surrounds them is the central theme of Braczko's books which concentrate on news, how to get the most out of your Nikon and complete descriptions and illustrations. But history and the Nippon Kogaku company are also an integral part and despite his emphasis on progress and future developments, he does delve into the cameras' roots.

As a result, in his most popular book, the *Nikon Pocket Book* (1994), Braczko dedicates fifty pages to the Nikon

rangefinder system in three brief chapters following the traditional division of topics into cameras, accessories and lenses. Naturally, Braczko does not ignore Rotoloni's work, but over a decade following the publication of *Nikon Rangefinder Cameras*, he does succeed in giving his own original twist. Without any pretext of writing an entire book on the subject, but rather just the first part of what could be a much more extensive work, and without writing a single line on the history of Nippon Kogaku or the Japanese photographic industry in general, Braczko provides detailed, often previously-unpublished, information on each Nikon rangefinder camera, each lens and each accessory. Not once does he set himself up as an alternative to what Rotoloni has written, but rather integrates the older material into his own without repetition, overlap or copying, treating the same topic from a different angle.

His approach is more distant, aseptic, perhaps even cold and impersonal, much like an entomologist who lays his insects out on the dissecting table to classify them. Braczko offers just one, sharp and detailed photograph for each camera, lens and accessory. He does not show the variations in color or finish, the production variants or the lens schemes. His text is clear and precise, filled with information and data. It is the true companion piece to Rotoloni's passion-filled work, the perfect book for the collector looking for systematic detail. By putting together the images and text offered by Rotoloni and those by Braczko, we obtain a virtually complete picture of what the Nikon rangefinder system was and represented.

It could be noted that both books ignore references to the rest of the world and history in general, that the Nikon rangefinder system is seen as a system onto itself while we all know how much exchange there was between Japanese and German companies and among Japanese companies themselves during the 1950s. Neither author discusses the relationship between Zeiss and Nikkor lens schemes, or that between Leica and Nikon. Neither mentions that while production was begun on the Nikon S3 Olympic, the Spotmatic was being field tested. Neither compares the Nikon SP motor with that of the Robot. Each author seems to live in a Nikon-centered universe in which there is room for nothing else. For some, this could be positive, for others a negative quality.

Realistically speaking, one needs to make choices and if, in Rotoloni's case, originality and a comprehensive research approach take front seat, with Braczko it is the need to summarize and be concise. With the publication in 2000 of *The Complete Nikon System* (Silver Pixel Press), Braczko does not hesitate to include once again fifty or so pages on the Nikon rangefinder system, offering the same information found in the *Nikon Pocket Book* with a different graphic layout.

The growing interest in the Nikon rangefinder system has also contributed to changing the approach of Nikkon Kogaku, (now Nikon Corporation) management to its own past. Without any fanfare and with apparent nonchalance, a number of Nikon rangefinder prototypes have been located and displayed, and quite a bit of information and comments on the Nikon rangefinder has been included in the Nikon Corporation official web site (nikon.co.jp). For example, in the English language section there is an article on "The History of Nikon Cameras" written by Yokoyuki Tateno and excerpts from the history of Nikkor lenses written by Haruo Sato and Kouichi Ishita, in addition to the publication of "Nikon digital archives" which contain data and images here-to-fore unavailable.

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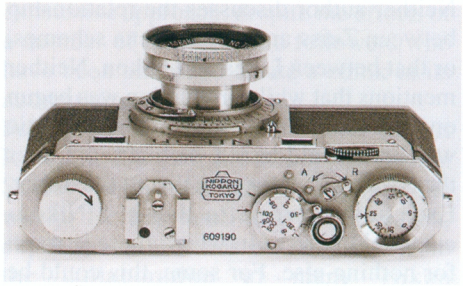
Christie's auctions

NIKON RANGEFINDER AND THE COLLECTING MARKET





Nikon I, chrome, with a 50mm f/2 lens.
Condition: 5D
Estimated price: £ 8000-12000
Auction price: £ 8225



Nikon M, 24 x 34mm chrome, red synchronisation sockets and engraving.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 1000-1500
Auction price: £ 3290



Nikon S, Chrome, with a Nikkor S 50mm f/1.4 lens and a Nikkor P 85mm f/2 lens.
Condition: 4B
Estimated price: £ 1000-1500
Auction price: £ 1057



Nikon S, chrome.
Condition: 2C
Estimated price: £ 800-1000
Auction price: £ 2115



Nikon S, chrome with a Nikkor S 50mm f/1.4 lens.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 800-1000
Auction price: £ 940



Nikon S, chrome with a Nikkor H 50mm f/2 lens.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 450-550
Auction price: £ 528



Nikon S, chrome with a Nikkor S 50mm f/1.4 lens.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 500-800
Auction price: £ 646



Nikon S, chrome, with a 50mm f/1.4 lens, a 35mm f/2.5 lens and a 135mm f/3.5 lens.
Condition: 3C
Estimated price: £ 800-1200
Auction price: £ 1175



Nikon S2, chrome with a Nikkor H 50mm f/2 lens
Condition: 3C
Estimated price: £ 550-650
Auction price: £ 705



Nikon S2, chrome with a Nikkor S 50mm f/1.4 lens.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 1100-1500
Auction price: £ 1292



Nikon S2, chrome, black-dial, with a Nikkor S 50mm f/1.4 lens.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 550-650
Auction price: £ 822



Nikon S2, chrome, with a 50mm f/1.4 lens.
Condition: 4B
Estimated price: £ 250-350
Auction price: £ 376



Nikon S2, chrome, with a 35mm f/3.5 lens.
Condition: 5B
Estimated price: £ 200-300
Auction price: £ 352



Nikon S2, chrome, with a 50mm f/2 lens, a 35mm f/2.5 lens and a 135mm f/3.5 lens.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 400-600
Auction price: £ 998



Nikon SP, black-paint (repainted), black-dial, with a Nikkor S 50mm f/1.4 lens.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 800-1200
Auction price: £ 2937



Nikon SP, chrome with a W Nikkor 35mm f/1.8 lens.
Condition: 4B
Estimated price: £ 1000-1500
Auction price: £ 1645



Nikon SP, chrome with a Nikkor H 50mm f/2 lens.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 1400-2000
Auction price: £ 1880

After the Leica, the Nikon rangefinder is probably the camera most highly-valued and esteemed by collectors the world over. In the relatively short period during which it was produced—essentially just a decade—the limited number of cameras built overall, the combined allure of the Nikon name and rangefinder technology and the reputation for quality engineering of the cameras and their lenses, have all contributed to pushing up prices and encouraging the phenomenon of price matching and probably even some over-competition.

For rangefinder Nikons, the collecting market has registered record sales with very high prices paid for those camera bodies, those lenses, those motors or those accessories of which only a few were made. These record prices have ended up affecting the market itself and pushing up prices on even common, easy-to-find Nikon-brand pieces.

For older pieces, one-of-a-kind (or virtually one-of-a-kind) items, prices exceed all objective estimates and are set on a case-by-case basis in hard-fought auction bidding.

With standard-production pieces, a fairly reliable appraisal can be given, even if for rangefinder Nikons prices are subject to sharp peaks caused by the whims of collectors. On the other hand, even leading experts involved in rangefinder Nikon pricing vary widely in their assessments.

According to estimates given in camera pricing guides, the Nikon M, of which just over 3,000 were manufactured, has a very high estimated value, ranging from 6000 to 10,000 Euro.

For the chrome Nikon S, considered to be quite common, estimates range from 500 Euro up to 1000 Euro for pieces in top condition, and even up to 1500 Euro for cameras manufactured before 1951 with MIOJ marking.

Black-finish Nikon S cameras easily go for over 2000 Euro.

For the Nikon S2, also considered fairly common, prices range from 800 to 1200 Euro, but go even higher for cameras in perfect condition and over 5000 Euro for those with black finish.

Prices of the Nikon SP range between 2000 and 3000 Euro, up to 5000 for top-condition pieces and even 7000-8000 Euro for those in black finish.

The Nikon S3 also starts at a base price

of 1500 Euro, rising in relation to the physical condition of the individual cameras, up to just over 2000 Euro. The black finish Nikon S3 starts at 5000 Euro to reach 7000 to 8000 Euro for the black Olympic model. The Nikon S3 Millennium are still too new to have a stable estimated value, but the price should be fairly close to 5000 Euro.

The highest prices in the world of the rangefinder Nikon are obviously claimed by the original Nikon I of which fewer than 700 were made, with prices over 20,000 Euro. But even higher are the half-frame Nikon S3M, with less than 200 made and prices over 40,000 Euro or even higher with the S72 electric motor.

Official sales figures registered at leading auction houses over the last decade only partially confirm the prices given in the various guides and show significant variations, with quite remarkable peaks.

For the Nikon I, prices range from a minimum of £8000 (approx. 13,000 Euro) up to £20,000 (over 32,000 Euro). The body alone of the Nikon M has brought prices starting from a minimum of £1000 (1600 Euro), while up to £5000 (8000 Euro) was paid for a body with standard 50mm f/1.5 lens. A black finish Nikon M custom manufactured for the LIFE team was sold for over £19,000 (over 30,000 Euro). For a Nikon S body, official prices start at a minimum of £200, just over 300 Euro, up to a maximum of £2000 (more than 3000 Euro). The Nikon S with 50mm f/2 or 50mm f/1.4 lens, with negligible difference, were sold at prices that varied between £250 and £700, with maximum prices reaching £900. Mini-outfits consisting of a Nikon S and three or four lenses have gone for £1400, over 2200 Euro.

Another example is the outfit belonging to George Rodger, the photographer of Magnum fame, comprised of a Nikon S, and Nikon S2 and six lenses ranging from 28mm to 135mm focal length that was sold as a unit for less than 3000 Euro.

For the Nikon S2, more common than the Nikon 2, prices are similar although with a slightly higher average and decidedly higher peaks that reach over £1000 for Nikon S2 with 50mm f/1.4 lens and over £2700 for a Nikon S2 with 50mm f/1.1 lens. A black finish Nikon S2 body sold for over £1300 and, on one occasion, a black Nikon S2 with 50mm f/1.4 lens brought almost £6000 and on another a black Nikon S2 with 50mm f/2 even exceeded £12,000, close to 20,000 Euro.



Nikon S3, chrome with a Nikkor S 50mm f/1.4 lens.
Condition: 2B
Estimated price: £ 1400-2000
Auction price: £ 1762



Nikon S3, chrome with a Nikkor H 50mm f/2 lens.
Condition: 2B
Estimated price: £ 1500-2000
Auction price: £ 1645



Nikon S3, chrome, with a 50mm f/1.4.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 500-800
Auction price: £ 1527



Nikon S4, chrome with a Nikkor S 50mm f/1.4 lens.
Condition: 3B
Estimated price: £ 2000-2500
Auction price: £ 2350

For the chrome finish Nikon SP, minimum prices start at £800 (1300 Euro), but range up to over £3500 if equipped with 50mm f/1.4 lens and over £5000 if equipped with 50mm f/1.1 lens. For a chrome Nikon SP equipped with black Olympic 50mm f/1.4 lens, £12,000 was paid. Prices of black finish Nikon SP cameras begin at £2500 and range up to £5000, but with the S36 electric motor, on one occasion this camera brought £7500 and on another over £12,000.

The chrome finish Nikon S3 with 50mm f/1.4 lens ranges in price between £700 and £1300, peaking at up to £1500. Black finish Nikon S3 prices start at £2000 to rise to over £3500, with the top price of £8800 for one with a 50mm f/1.4 Olympic lens. Its kid brother Nikon S4—belying its humble origins—has brought prices starting at £1500 up to a maximum of £2200.

Alongside those paid for the Nikon I, the all-time highest prices were registered for the Nikon S3M at over £17,000 (almost 28,000 Euro) for a black Nikon S3M with 50mm f/1.4 lens, over £20,000 (32,000 Euro) for a black Nikon S3M body with S72 motor and over £28,000 (46,000 Euro) for a black Nikon S3M with 50mm f/2 lens and S72 motor.

In the price lists of major international dealers, for collectors'-item Nikons, the material offered is both tempting and disconcerting at the same time. A black Nikon SP with S36 motor is priced at £7500 (close to 12,000 Euro). A black Nikon S3 in top-notch condition with 50mm f/1.4 is offered at £12,000 (over 20,000 Euro). A chrome Nikon S3 in the same condition with 50mm f/1.4 is offered at the same price. For a Nikon S3 body in perfect condition, the asking price is £4500 (almost 7000 Euro). A Nikon S in excellent condition and equipped with a 50mm f/1.4 lens is priced at £3500 (over 5000 Euro). And a Nikon S in perfect condition with f/1.4 lens is valued at £5000, close to 8000 Euro. A spanking-new Nikon S3 Millennium with original lens is offered at $4800, over 5000 Euro.

The Nikon rangefinders and their lenses and accessories never pass unobserved when browsing through the catalogues of the major auctions held periodically in Europe and the US. The keen eye of the collector immediately checks out the base estimated price, condition of the equipment and other information to compare the sales prices with previously recorded ones. Even if the cameras involved are not truly special items, such as the Nikon I, Nikon M without synch or motor-driven Nikon S3M for which



Nikkor S 50mm f/1.4 lens, chrome.
Condition: 3
Estimated price: £ 400-600
Auction price: £ 411



Nikkor S 50mm f/1.5 lens, chrome.
Estimated price: £ 1000-1500
Auction price: £ 2115



W Nikkor 35mm f/1.8 lens, black and chrome.
Condition: 3
Estimated price: £ 500-700
Auction price: £ 587



W Nikkor 35mm f/2.8 lens, chrome, with a Nippon Kogoku 2.8cm optical finder.
Condition: 3
Estimated price: £ 400-600
Auction price: £ 646



W Nikkor 35mm f/3.5 lens, chrome, the back engraved Made in Occupied Japan.
Condition: 3
Estimated price: £ 400-600
Auction price: £ 470



W Nikkor 25mm f/4 lens, chrome.
Condition: 3
Estimated price: £ 800-1000
Auction price: £ 940



W Nikkor 25mm f/4 lens, black, with a black Nippon Kogoku 2.5cm optical finder.
Condition: 2
Estimated price: £ 1000-1400
Auction price: £ 2937

special prices are the norm, the collector's interest is always piqued by the Nikon rangerfinder. During the year 2002, a number of Nikon rangefinders found their way under the auctioneer's gavel, with sale prices that confirm the continued interest in this specific family of cameras.

A synchronized Nikon M body in 2B condition, with estimated price of between £1000 and £1500, hit £3300. A Nikon S body in 2C condition, estimated price £800-£1000, rose to over £2100. The Nikon S and Nikon S2 cameras in 3B condition with standard Nikkor f/2 or f/4 lenses, sold for a minimum of £500 and maximum of £800, with one exception that went for over £900 and another for close to £1300.

A Nikon S with standard Nikkor f/1.4 lens and Nikkor 85mm f/2 telephoto, went for over £1000.

The Nikon S3 in 2B condition with standard Nikkor f/2 or f/1.4 lens brought, respectively, £1650 and £1760. A Nikon S4 with standard Nikkor f/1.4 lens went for as high as £2350. With the Nikon SP with standard Nikkor f/2 or f/1.4, sale prices registered between £1650 and £1900, peaking at over £2900 for a Nikon SP refinished in black and with standard Nikkor f/1.4 lens.

Nikon S lenses

When speaking of Nikkor lenses for rangefinder Nikons, the market becomes even livelier with even greater variation than with camera bodies, partly the result of the higher number of different types of lenses and their variants.

For standard 50mm lenses, our database is quite extensive and the range of prices very wide. The lens which, in its day, was the most humble—the retractable mount 50mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q—today has an estimated value of over £2000 and one was sold at auction for £2200. The retractable mount 50mm f/2 Nikkor H is valued at around 1000 Euro, with fixed mount and marked Tokyo about half that, while the very common chrome or black fixed mount marked Japan have an estimated value of around 200 Euro.

The estimated value of the 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor S also starts at less than 500 Euro for the chrome version with Tokyo marking and drops to less than 200 Euro for the chrome or black version with Japan marking. The only exception is the rare, raw aluminum finish version of which approximately 300 were made and which have an estimated value of up to 1500 Euro. The first version of this lens, made of black aluminum and in a total number of 500, is valued at around 1000 Euro. Another exception is the black 50mm f/1.4 that equips the Nikon S3 Olympic, valued at up to 2000 Euro and which has sold for as high as over £1750.

The 50mm f/1.5 Nikkor S, of which less than 1000 were manufactured, has an estimated value of approximately 2000 Euro. The gigantic 50mm f/1.1 Nikkor N standard lens is valued at around 2000 Euro, both in the small- and large-bayonet version, and auction prices of over £900 have been registered, as well as record sale amounts of over £2600. The special 50mm f/3.5 Nikkor Micro lens is also valued at 2000 Euro.

The wideangles

Among wide angle lenses, the most common and least highly esteemed is the 35mm f/3.5 W Nikkor Q which, in the chrome or black version marked Japan, has an estimated value of just over 200 Euro, rising to over 1000 Euro in the version with chrome finish and Tokyo marking. For the 35mm f/2.5 W Nikkor, estimated values start at 200 Euro for the chrome version and double that for the black, but lenses with chrome aperture ring go for as high as 1000 Euro. On the other hand, the fastest W

Nikkor, the 35mm f/1.8, is valued at just over 500 Euro with chrome ring, rising to over 2000 Euro if the ring is black finish. In recent auctions, prices for the less-fast model ranged between £350 and £470, for the f/2.5 model between £200 and £300 and for the fastest f/1.8, between £400 and £600.

For the 28mm f/3.5 W Nikkor, the difference between the chrome- and black-finish versions is not that great, both having an estimated value of around 500 Euro, but in recent auctions, prices have ranged between £450 and £600. For the extreme 25mm f/4 W Nikkor, estimated values are much higher, 1000 Euro for the chrome and 1500 Euro for the black. A 25mm f/4 W Nikkor with chrome finish and without finder went for £940, but for this same lens, sales have ranged between £600 and £1000, peaking at over £1500. The optical finder alone for the 25mm wide-angle went for over £600 and one of these lenses, with black finish and finder, offered at a base auction price of between £1000 and £1400, rose in the end to over £2900.

The extreme 21mm f/4 Nikkor O, with estimated value of around 2500 Euro, together with its own finder brought a record sales of almost £4400, over 7000 Euro. But among wideangle lenses, albeit special ones, the record is held by the 35mm Nikkor Stereo with an estimated value of around 15,000 Euro.



Nikkor P 105mm f/2.5 lens, black and chrome.
Condition: 2
Estimated price: £ 250-350
Auction price: £ 376



Nikkor P 85mm f/2.0 lens, chrome, the rear cam engraved Made in Occupied Japan.
Condition: 4
Estimated price: £ 300-500
Auction price: £ 1175



Nikkor P 85mm f/2.0 lens, chrome.
Condition: 3
Estimated price: £ 300-500
Auction price: £ 352



Nikkor P 85mm f/2.0 lens, black and chrome.
Condition: 3
Estimated price: £ 300-500
Auction price: £ 352

Telephoto lenses

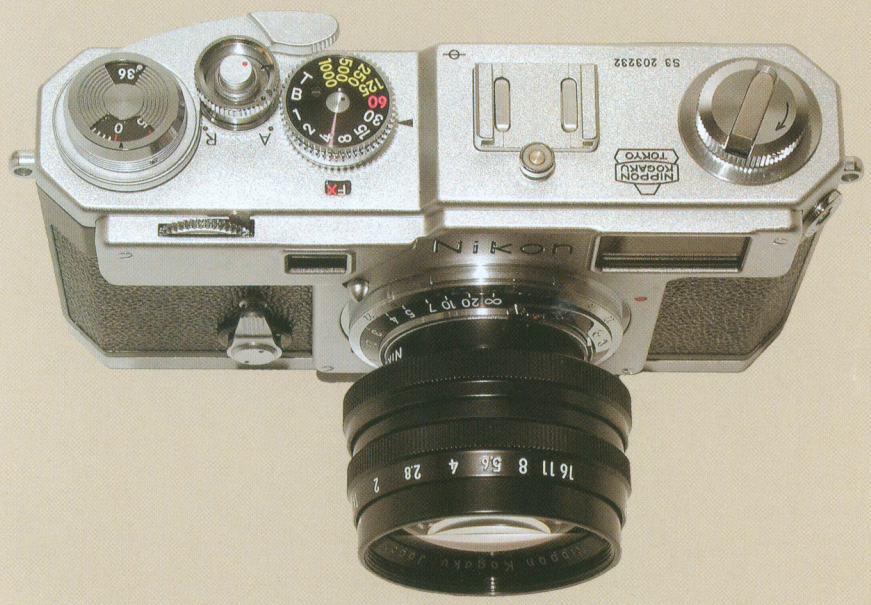
For Nikkor rangefinder-coupled telephoto lenses prices also vacillate within a very wide range, peaking high for rare or much-sought-after lenses and with significant variation for the various finishes. The 85mm f/2 Nikkor P portrait lens with original chrome finish and Tokyo marking, can go for over 500 Euro and, in some cases, double that, while with the more common chrome finish and Japan marking, estimated values are halved, rising again to between 250 and 400 Euro in the black finish version. At auction, this lens has brought prices that range between £200 and £1000. Most recent auctions have seen a minimum price of £350 and maximum price of £470, with the top amount of £1175 paid for a lens marked "Made in Occupied Japan". The very fast 85mm f/1.5 Nikkor S is valued at around 750 Euro, but at auction has even sold for as high as £1500. The 105mm f/2.5 Nikkor P, considered quite common with an estimated value of less than 300 Euro, ranged between £350 and £380, while the model which in its day was the least expensive—the 105mm f/4 Nikkor T—has an estimated value of not under 700 Euro but at auction has gone for over £1200. The 135mm f/4 Nikkor Q telephoto, manufactured for a very short period immediately after the war, has an estimated value of 750 Euro, while the more modern and common 135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q has a fairly high value of around 400 Euro only in the black finish version with Tokyo marking, while the chrome or black version with Japan marking is estimated at half this amount. In recent auctions, prices for the 135mm f/3.5 Nikkor Q ranged from a minimum of £150 to a maximum of £300, irrespective of chrome or black finish.

Reflex system telephoto lenses

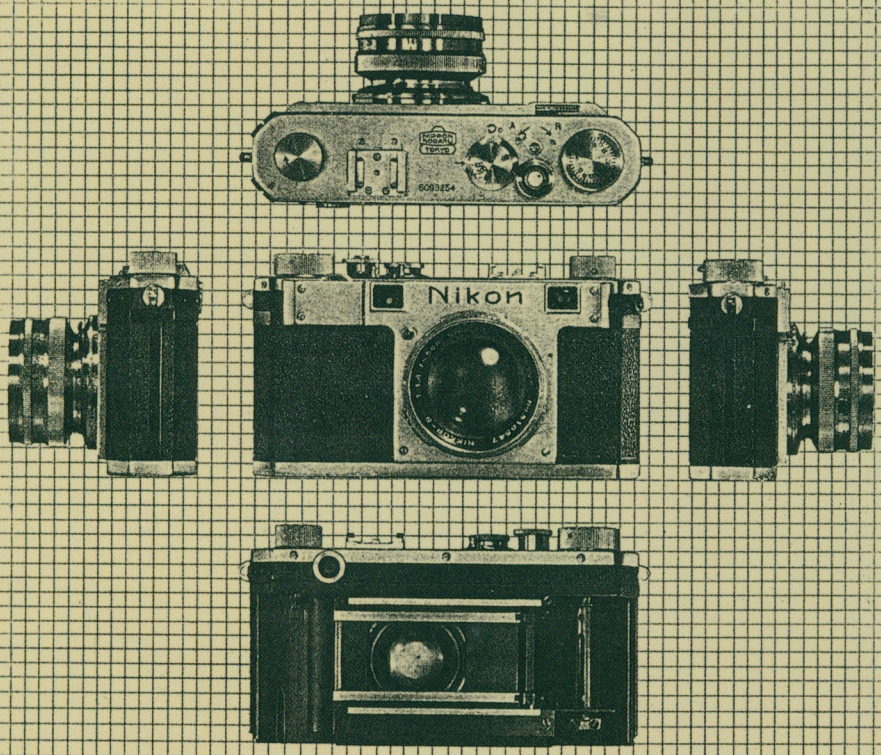
The highest prices for Nikkor telephoto lenses have been registered for the longest focal lenses to be used with the reflex system. The 180mm f/2.5 Nikkor H has an estimated value of not less than 750 Euro, but at auction reached £1000. The 250mm f/4 Nikkor Q has a slightly higher estimated value of 800 Euro, but at a recent auction brought over £500. For the long 350mm f/4 Nikkor T telephoto, estimated value ranges around 1000 Euro, but once again sale prices have reached £1000. The 50mm f/5 Nikkor T telephoto has an estimated value of between 3000 and 4000 Euro, but registered sales prices are over £4000. The 135mm f/4 Nikkor Q macro, with short barrel to be used with bellows and reflex system has an estimated value of around 1000 Euro. With the one-meter catadioptric, the estimated value is around 6000 Euro, but its actual price cannot be calculated because of the very, very limited number of lenses produced. These lenses can only be used with the reflex system for which sale prices range from £2000 to £4000. The optical finders also have fairly high estimated values and for hard-to-find pieces, wideangle and variable focal length finders, sale prices have been around £500, but close to £1000 was paid for the 35mm mini finder.







Nikon S3 Millennium
October 2000 commemorative reproduction of the 1958 Nikon S3. Eight thousand of these cameras were built using the original drawings and valuable input from a number of ex-employees of Nippon Kogaku K.K. who had been involved in the original project. Courtesy of Nital, Turin, Italy.



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Popular Photography, May 1952