



Viewpoint Mike Smith

Own up. Who still has a film camera lying around unused? But have you checked to see whether there's still a film inside it...?

Tony Kemplen's recent column on the Olympus XA (*Tech Talk* 8 April) reminded me of my own XA, which was languishing in an old camera bag at the back of my loft. I didn't know the heritage of the XA line, so eventually identified mine as an XA1, which I bought off eBay to replace the somewhat lacklustre XA2. However, Tony left me wanting an XA3. After fumbling around with the camera and reminiscing about how wonderful it was to have a focusable lens, adjustable aperture and metering – all in an amazingly small package – I then realised there was a film still in it. More rummaging through the loft uncovered my Pentax P30, which, much to my amazement, also had a film in it. The P30 counter was on the first frame, so had obviously been loaded and wound on ready for action, while the XA was on its fourth frame.

The findings made me wonder four things (this is a bit of a straw poll, so please do write in with your responses):

1 Have photographers kept their old film

'The depth of field is spot on, the colours rich, and the rediscovered memory... priceless'

- cameras and, if so, how many?
- 2** How many are actively used?
- 3** Of those languishing in lofts and cupboard, how many still have film in?
- 4** What's on the film?

Undiscovered gems

So, running through these questions, giving my own answers:

- 1** I've obviously still got some film cameras, but not all of them.
- 2** I have five film cameras in my possession, three of which are actively used. The Bronica RF645 is a fabulous handheld medium-format and great for offering portrait and wedding alternatives, while the Nikon F100 is a workhorse and able to use all my standard Nikon lenses. The RF is quirky, and mildly irritating at times, but delivers the goods, while the F100 is purely utilitarian. However, the Leica M4-P is simply a delight to use (the lack of meter doesn't bother me) and there's something about it that makes it feel like an extension of my body.
- 3** Both the P30 and the XA have become sidelined, but even so, I can't bring myself to get rid of them.
- 4** I subsequently finished off the film in the XA (a roll of Fujifilm Superia X-TRA 400) to find it was several years old and had obviously been loaded during a previous film-fest moment. As a result, there was a picture of a sign, two local shops and my daughter. The film was worth it just for that shot – the focus and depth of field are spot on, the colours rich and the rediscovered memory... priceless.

So, in the end my four mystery frames weren't particularly mysterious, but it was an enjoyable trip down memory lane remembering the cameras, shooting with them again and wondering what frames might have been recorded. I'm sure there are some real memories to be recovered in readers' cameras!

Mike Smith is a London-based wedding and portrait photographer. Visit www.focali.co.uk



This frame of Mike's daughter was recovered from a camera that was languishing in his loft

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