

ЧАЙКА II

Miles Steininger, Vancouver, BC, November 28, 2007.

In my collection I have a rather curious camera. Produced in the 1960s this is a half frame viewfinder camera. It is near universally disparaged. However, I kind of like it.

In Russian the name of this camera is ЧАЙКА-II.¹ Alfred Klomp writes of this camera “[t]he Chajka-II is an ugly, insignificant & not particularly small half-frame camera which has as only quirk the ‘undocumented’ removal of the lens for use on enlargement.”²

The name means gull as in sea gull or various birds of the genus *Larus* or family *Laridae*. However, the name is more interesting than that. The camera is named after Valentina V. Tereshkova or Валентина В. Терешкова. In June of 1963 on board a Vostok 6 craft she became the first woman in space. Chayka was her call sign for the flight.

The ЧАЙКА-I was made from 1963 through 1966. The second model arrived c. 1967. Both are semi compact, well-made half-frame cameras. The lens is an ИНДУСТАР-69: 28mm ($f/2.8-16.0$) Tessar type. There is no rangefinder by 28mm provides just enough depth of field to guess. The close focus is 2.5 feet. The lens has a built-in depth-of-field scale. The shutter speed is selected by a wheel under the top plate; a small arc of which protrudes. The speeds are *B*, 1/30–1/250 s.

Other feature include a cable release connection, PC socket, film speed reminder, & tripod socket. The lack of features include a lack of accessory shoe, let alone hot shoe, rangefinder & exposure meter. The shutter release is the front of the camera.

The lens mount is 39mm thread with a register of $28 \pm .3$ mm. The shutter on the Chaika II is very close to the lens mount, so that any Leica-thread lens with a protruding rear lens element would not mount and might be damaged. As well a shim of $.8 \pm .3$ mm would be needed. Even then the shutter may not allow the full image circle to be projected on the film plane. Without setting the lens to focus on about 10m the lens can't be used on a screwmount camera and focus on infinity.

The purpose of this removable lens was as an enlarger lens. Although, the instruction booklet forbade its removal. The lens can take 22.5 mm filters, although the filters had to be attached after the aperture is was selected.

This half frame camera was made by MMZ-Belomo. Not surprising since MMZ-Belomo made more half-frame cameras than any other Soviet manufacturer. MMZ stands for Minsk Mechanical Works Минск Механические Завод. BelOMO is short for Belarus Optical Mechanical Enterprise or Беларусь Оптико Механические Объединение. In its modern incarnation BelOMO operates a joint partnership with Zeiss AG producing optical and mechanical components.

The height is about 77 mm; the width 115 mm; the depth 53 mm; & the mass is 400 g. Over a million units were made so they should be easy to find, especially in Russia, & other former Soviet Union countries. Mine is chrome and black. However, many different colours were produced. So if you like it you can collect all variants.

In use the camera is fun. Loaded with a 36 exposure roll of a C-41 black & white film it lasts an entire weekend. The lens is sharp enough. Focusing is slow but I enjoy the challenge.

¹Chajka, Tchaika, & Chayka are other spellings.

²cameras.alfredklomp.com/chajka2/