

Kodak Ciné-Kodak Special II 16 mm motion picture camera 1948



Model history

This is a Kodak Ciné-Kodak Special II motion picture camera. This professional 16 mm turret camera was the technical pinnacle of the Ciné-Kodak motion picture camera dynasty. The model was introduced in 1948, and reportedly was manufactured until 1961. It has many special features and an elaborate set of controls.

The camera is the successor to the original Ciné-Kodak Special (1933-1948).

The camera is "substantial". Equipped with the 100 foot film magazine (as we see above) but with no lenses and no film, it weighs in at just about 9 pounds.

Film system

The camera utilizes 16mm roll film which can be single- or double-perforated.

The camera uses interchangeable film magazines (actually called by Kodak "film chambers"), available with capacities of 100 feet (as seen here) or 200 feet. The magazine is in effect "half the camera".

The entire film transport system, including the exposure gate and intermittent pulldown mechanism, is contained in the magazine.

The transport system uses a single sprocket. The film gate can easily be completely opened and disassembled for cleaning.

An "available footage" indicator, visible through a window on the rear of the chamber (for the 100 foot chamber), shows how much film remains. It operates by "feeling" the supply spool. The camera proper also has a "footage exposed" indicator. It must be zeroed when the camera is loaded, and increments based on the operation of the camera mechanism.

Lenses

The camera's turret accommodates two lenses, mounted with a Type S mount. This was Kodak's universal mount for ciné lenses. Ironically, this is the only Kodak camera model that natively used that mount.

This model was commonly initially furnished with a Cine Ektar II 25 mm f/1.9 or f/1.4 lens as the "starter" lens.

The turret face is roof-shaped, apex outward, which "splays" the lens axes, reducing the risk that one lens will interfere, physically or optically, with the other one. (This had been a problem with the predecessor model, the original Ciné-Kodak Special, which had a flat-face turret, with the lens axes parallel.)

Drive

The camera mechanism is operated by a governed spring motor, wound by a folding crank.

The camera can be set to operate at any frame rate from 8 fr/s to 64 fr/s by turning a knob on the "control panel". The knob has markings at 8, 16, 24, 32, and 64 fr/s, considered to be the "available frame rates".

An 8 fr/sec rate had traditionally been used to permit shooting under lower light conditions that would otherwise be possible (as it increases the exposure time). Of course a side effect is that the apparent speed of motion of the moving subject when the film is viewed is twice what it actually was. And of course this doubling of speed can be used intentionally for comedic effect.

The 16 fr/s frame rate is the norm for 16 mm silent motion pictures. A 24 fr/s rate (used for 16 mm sound films) is most often used when a magnetic sound track is to be laid on the film after development, or when the film shot is to be integrated into a production with sound during post production.

The higher frame rates are most often used for "slow motion" effects.

When fully wound, the motor is able to drive the camera for 38 feet of film. At a frame rate of 16 fr/s, that would be 1 minute 35 seconds of shooting; at a frame rate of 24 fr/s, a little over 1 minute. When winding, when the spring is almost fully wound (about "35 feet worth") a warning bell rings. When running, when the amount of remaining wind is down to "3 feet worth", the bell also rings.

The spring wind crank is wound counterclockwise. Among Ciné-Kodak cameras, that is only true for this model and its direct predecessor, the Ciné-Kodak Special.

The camera is operated by pressing a control button on the front of the camera (on its right side). If the button is pushed in and then pushed down, it locks in the running position, useful when the camera is on a tripod and the operator wishes to join the scene. A separate control button on the camera's right side "control panel" shoots a single frame, a feature that can be used for stop motion animation.

There are provisions for using a second, smaller crank to hand wind the camera, forward or backward, in order to do in-camera double exposures,

split screen shots, dissolves, and the like. A frame counter dial assists in keeping precise track of such maneuvers.

Viewfinder

The camera is equipped with an open viewfinder, typically operating in the "reverse Galilean" mode, with a vision adjustment control. Only the rear portion is on the camera (actually, on the film chamber). It is given the proper field of view for each taking lens by way of a distinct front viewfinder lens, matched to the focal length of the taking lens, which comes into place when that taking lens is put in place.

Reflex viewfinder

The camera is equipped with a reflex viewfinder, allowing for precision framing and focusing, but only before shooting commences.

Exposure control

Control of exposure is done both by change in the lens aperture, done by rotating a ring on the lens, and by changing the "shutter angle" (fraction of the time the shutter is open), done with a lever on the camera's control panel, which changes the frame exposure time (for any given frame rate). The shutter angle can be changed continuously, including down to zero (no exposure) while the camera is running, to provide "fade" and "dissolve" effects.

Ciné-Kodak Universal Guide

This specimen is equipped with a Ciné-Kodak Universal Guide, an "exposure calculator" with a rotating dial, mounted on the left side of the film magazine. It takes drop-in cards for various film types, and gives suggested apertures for a number of scene lighting conditions, for the various available frame rates.

Original cost

In October of 1949 a Ciné-Kodak Special II with the 100 foot film magazine and a 25mm f/1.9 lens sold for \$898.50 (considered equivalent in September of 2017 to about \$9200.00).

This specimen

This specimen is a Kodak Ciné-Kodak Special II 16 mm motion picture camera, serial number 9566, equipped with a 100 foot film magazine, serial number 100-5904.

Based on the provenance of the camera, we have concluded that the camera body proper was likely made in 1948. The film magazine, however, is somewhat older; in fact, the format of the magazine serial number suggests

that it was originally provided with the earlier Ciné-Kodak Special (not -II) model (although it is entirely compatible with this camera).

The camera is exhibited with a Kodak Cine Ektanon 15 mm f/2.7 lens (Lumenized) (1951) and a Kodak Ciné-Kodak Telephoto 76 mm f/4.5 lens (1941), both with type S mounts (matching that of the camera). There is one viewfinder front lens, that for a 25 mm taking lens (which we do not have).

Acquisition

The camera was purchased in October of 2017 through eBay from Calkovsky Cinema Worldwide (Rüdi Calkövsy). The 15 mm f/2.7 lens was purchased in October of 2017 from eBay seller "ryaan2000". The 76 mm f/4.5 lens was purchased in October of 2017 from eBay seller "shyde1". The "25 mm" viewfinder lens was purchased in October of 2017 from eBay seller "fotoaffar".

Provenance

On this model, the buyer could opt to have his name put, at the factory, on an engraved nameplate discreetly located on the bottom of the camera front plate. There is such a plate on this specimen, with the name "Charles T. Chapman". We have since learned that Chapman (1891-1949) was a noted still photographer and early cinematographer, later a newsreel photographer, working for a while for the Pathé organization, but then largely a free lancer, doing documentaries and such.

Condition and restoration

The camera, as received (and as advertised) was in somewhat "beat up" visual condition (it had evidently been used in "serious field conditions"), but in generally good mechanical condition. We have done substantial aesthetic restoration as of October, 2017. There were a few mechanical features that did not work properly. Several have been corrected as of October, 2017.

Nickname

This camera is known colloquially as "Rescue Dog", an allusion to the circumstances of its acquisition.