



Voigtländer Classics

Slow down, says **Richard Kilpatrick**, and chill out with Voigtländer's classically designed and precision engineered 58mm f/1.4 Nokton SL II and 40mm f/2 Ultron SL II lenses

There is a gastronomic movement known as 'slow food', representing the antithesis of modern, fast paced, microwave and takeaway living; the emphasis being not necessarily on the food you eat, but the lifestyle surrounding it - setting down the pressure and deadlines, and simply enjoying the processes of cooking, serving and eating. It's a movement which has some merit, and not just because it's healthy. It forces you to pause and think for a moment; and many people taking time to try it find their approach to food becomes more creative and flexible.

Indeed, the ethos of 'slowing down' seems quite appropriate these days. Because I wanted to place a barrier between the pressure of work and the pressure of modern traffic, I traded my Mazda sports car for a Citroën with hydropneumatic suspension.

Likewise, when considering lenses for my

recent investment in Nikon kit, an element of taking away pressure was one of my priorities. I bought the fastest and most capable camera to meet the pressure of work. Now seemed like a good time to take advantage of that, and devote some time to the craft of producing an image.

Owning a Nikon means the availability of a vast and interesting range of lenses, some dating back to the 1960s; but lenses from that era are often inappropriate for use on digital, or damaged, or command collector-value prices. Some of the more interesting lenses demand different techniques for the D3, like locking the mirror up.

The appearance of the Cosina-produced Voigtländer 58mm f/1.4 Nokton SL II, and the 40mm f/2 Ultron was welcome therefore: two low cost, classic lenses, that offered useful focal lengths and manual operation, with the benefits of AI-S CPU compatibility.

Voigtländer 58mm f/1.4 Nokton SL II

I was so impressed with the Voigtländer 58mm f/1.4 Nokton SL II lens - a reproduction of the classic Topcor - that during the brief period I had it for review, I rapidly adopted as the standard lens adorning my camera. A joy to use, manufactured in a way which implies engineering rather than production, the 58mm features an astonishingly smooth and precise focus mechanism, causing the lens to extend slightly but without rotating.

The nine-blade diaphragm gives a pleasing bokeh, though there are some sharp corrections in the background, resulting in a rather bright edge. Colour is neutral, and contrast pleasingly soft, lending images a natural and timeless feel. Paired with the D3, the lens is impressively sharp, and delivers almost inspirational results in some circumstances. Distortion is minimal - as you'd



Above: Like the Nokton 58mm SL II, the Moog Voyager is a 1960s classic remade. The upper part of the image shows the impressive sharpness at f/16 (minimum aperture), the lower half shows the narrow depth of field the f/1.4 maximum aperture provides on a full frame sensor.

Facing page: Lenses mounted on a Nikon D3. The 40mm f/2 Ultron SL II pancake lens (left) is a much smaller lens than the 58mm (right).

expect from a standard lens on a full-frame camera - and with a minimum focusing distance of 45cm, it's well suited to copy work.

As a mechanical device, working with manual focus can slow you down a little. For portraiture, it's a creative and flexible lens. For reportage and candid work, rather than the point-and-shoot simplicity of a typical modern DSLR, a little forethought is required. Having said that, not only does the lens work perfectly with the D3's matrix metering, it also works with the 51-point AF sensor to provide focus confirmation.

I use a Type E focus screen with gridlines, which is marginally brighter than standard, and after becoming accustomed to the lens and camera, I found I could focus acceptably well for f/5.6 by eye, although on a full frame camera, to be absolutely sure of securing your chosen image, you really want to use a tripod and either zoomed live view or the focus confirmation fully open.

For APS-C/DX format users, the 58mm gives an angle of view equivalent to that of an 85mm portrait lens. At £205 ex VAT, unless you require ultimate speed of image capture, it really should be on your shopping list.

Voigtländer 40mm f/2 Ultron SL II

The 40mm f/2 Ultron with close-up lens has a lot of potential, with sharp results for the money, a 1:4 magnification ratio, and 25cm minimum focusing distance (1:7/45cm without close-up lens). It is a much smaller lens than the 58mm, a pancake type.

Mechanically, it is very similar in feel, but entirely different in operation. The smaller focus ring is harder to hold, and the lens feels less robust. Ideally, I'd want to test this on a DX format camera, where the difference in focal length will be more noticeable. On the full frame D3, the trade-off for the 18mm difference in focal length didn't feel well rewarded.

The Ultron comes with a few extras, though. You get a dome-type lens hood and a close-up adaptor lens included, though the price is the same £205 ex VAT as for the 58mm. It deserves a look - and the results were by no means bad - but it did not shine in the way that the 58mm did. As an aspherical lens, the Ultron is technically unusual, and has been mechanically revised for the SL II model, making it physically slightly smaller.

Are you ready to change gear, and take time to savour the process of creating an image? Even if it is just a focus action, the very



Above: Shot on the 40mm with close up adaptor, showing the very shallow depth of field achievable on a full frame DSLR.

act of placing the hand on the lens, and adjusting something so clearly mechanical and analogue is refreshing in an era when a professional level MF digital is point and shoot. They may not suit everybody, but the very existence of the Voigtländer lens range for DSLRs is welcome. As inexpensive and useful tools, they are priced competitively and deliver results that belie their low cost. **f2**



Voigtlander 58mm f/1.4 Nokton SL II

- 7 elements in 6 groups
- 9 aperture blades
- Min focus distance 0.45m
- Max magnification ratio 1:5.8
- 64x48mm, 320g
- 58mm filter size (non-rotating)
- Optional barrel-shaped screw-in hood
- £205 ex VAT
- Available in Nikon and Pentax fittings



Voigtlander 40mm f/2 Ultron SL II

- 6 elements in 5 groups inc. 1 aspherical element
- 9 aperture blades
- Min focus distance 0.45m (max magnification ratio 1:7)
- 63x25mm, 200g
- 52mm filter size (non-rotating)
- Dome shaped screw-in hood included
- Close up lens for 0.25m (1:4 magnification) included
- £205 ex VAT
- Available in Nikon and Pentax fittings

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