

The Mamiya 7II: How good is Mamiya's fine-tuned rollfilm rangefinder?

At first glance, the Mamiya 7II seems identical to its predecessor, the Mamiya 7. At second and third glance, too. The differences are minor. However, since we neither tested nor wrote up the original 7 in "Hands On," we thought it proper to give the 7II and its lenses a thorough examination now.

Like the 7, the 7II is an unusual and attractive 6x7-cm format, interchangeable-lens rangefinder camera with few peers, though it's most like its sister, the Mamiya 6MF. It's available in black or champagne finish, as shown here.

Because the 7II is a rangefinder camera, there's no mirror box to bulk it up. Result: a likable, reasonably compact body with nice, handholdable proportions (6.3x4.4x2.6 inches). With the standard 80mm lens attached, it's the easiest-carrying 6x7 going.

Let's start with a quick tour of the body, beginning with the knurled multifunction AE dial on top. Mamiya conveniently locates all AE controls on or around the dial: shutter speed, exposure mode, AE lock, film speed, and exposure compensation.

A single-pin hot shoe, locking shutter release (the lock doubles as a meter on/off switch), film-advance thumb lever, and frame-counter window complete the top-side components. On the front, a convenient self-timer switch

The System: Mamiya makes five lenses for the 7II. Each comes with a lens hood, and some with hot-shoe-mounted viewfinders. The lenses include (l to r) 80mm f/4, 50mm f/4.5, 150mm f/4.5, 65mm f/4, and (mounted on the camera) a 43mm f/4.5.



sets the 10-sec countdown in motion with a single press. (We wish more serious-amateur and pro-oriented cameras had single-press self-timers.) At the bottom right is a PC socket and to the right of that, the threaded cable release socket. At the rear is a multiple-exposure control and on the bottom is the unusual light-curtain open/close switch, a tripod socket, and battery compartment cover. (The camera takes one 6-volt 4LR44.) There's a ridge-shaped pedestal built into the base of the lensmount that prevents the camera from tipping forward on flat surfaces—good idea. (See detail photos on page 68.)

Differences between the 7 and 7II? The newcomer has a third neckstrap lug so you can carry it vertically. This sounds minor, but it improves handling considerably. With its narrower, less bulky profile, the 7II is easier to tote than the 7.

Other changes? Mamiya relocated the cable-release socket. It's no longer on the top of the right-hand grip where an attached cable release could get in the way. Now it's on the lower left side, where an attached release is less obtrusive. Another improvement: The projected viewfinder framelines are brighter.

The Mamiya 7II is surprisingly compact and handy for a 6x7 camera. Its slender body has a nice grippable rubbery coat. Focusing with the system's superimposed-image rangefinder is a snap. The secondary-image patch is large and commendably bright. The two rangefinder images are easily superimposed, even in dim light. The parallax-compensating finder framelines are nearly complete rectangles rather than

A good fit: The Mamiya 7II fits comfortably in the hands, in either horizontal or vertical orientation, with important controls conveniently clustered around the shutter release. Most controls can be operated with the camera at eye level. Rubberized surfaces on all grip areas make for a secure hold.



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just corners, and they're auto-indexing for the 65-, 80-, and 150mm lenses. They're also notched to show cropping for the 35mm panoramic format, which we'll talk about later.

Also in the finder: shutter speeds line up along the bottom, and a bright red warning LED lights up when you try to shoot without advancing the film or opening the film plane shield. When you view the finder dead on, it's bright and easy to use. Shift your eye, however, and the finder becomes a bit dim (by rangefinder standards), taking on a pink or green cast. The viewfinder's rubberized eyepiece collar prevents eyeglass scratches and minimizes chances that your eyelashes will leave their oil on the finder.

If you shoot only with the standard 80mm f/4 or moderately wide 65mm f/4 lens, viewing is a breeze. When you attach the wider 43mm f/4.5 or 50mm f/4.5 lens, you'll need one of the acces-



What's new: The lower-right-front corner of the Mamiya 7II sports a new neckstrap lug, and the tapered, threaded cable-release socket relocated from the grip (see text.) The PC socket at left (arrow) is shown capped.

sory shoe-mount finders that come with these lenses. To focus, you use the rangefinder; to frame, you switch to the accessory finder.

If you're shooting with the 150mm f/4.5, the viewfinder picture area outlined is a rather small box in the center of the viewfinder. Still, we had no trouble using it. But if you want a larger viewing image, Mamiya offers an op-



Another lug: With the addition of a third neckstrap lug, the Mamiya 7II can hang vertically, as well as horizontally, from neck or shoulder.

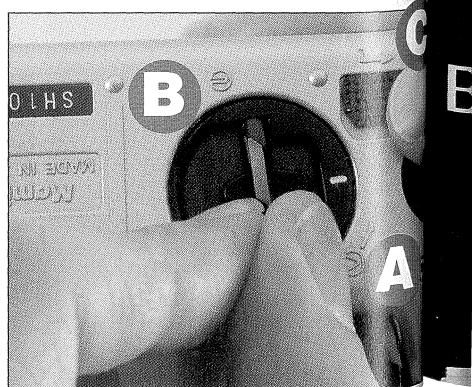
tional full-frame, hot-shoe-mounted, focusing-scope-like finder for the 150mm. It has manually set parallax correction based on subject distance.

The wide-angle external viewfinders have bubble levels that are viewable externally or magnified through the finder. Excellent! Each viewfinder has a rubber-coated eyepiece and adjustable diopter correction. (The external finders block the view of the AE dial from above, but we think this is a minor point.)

We developed a system for using these extra viewfinders. They require, after all, some care. You can't simply toss them in your camera bag. Our system? We left the 43mm finder in place, regardless of the mounted lens. Even when using the normal 80mm, we appreciated having the bubble level in the wide-angle finder. With the 50mm mounted, we could usually estimate the framing midway between the built-in 65mm and the accessory 43mm finder areas. This "system" streamlined viewfinding nicely.

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An extra step: To change lenses on the Mamiya 7II, you must advance the film, then turn this switch on the camera bottom from the open (A) to closed (B) position. This draws a spring-loaded cloth curtain across the film gate, protecting the film from fogging while the lens is removed. With the new lens in place, the curtain springs open by releasing the locking mechanism (C). You can't remove a lens unless the curtain is in place. Note the battery compartment in the grip (arrow).



In the field, the 7II was a gem. Its film load/advance system, in particular, deserves praise. While it offers no removable insert or interchangeable back advantages, these very absences make the 7II one of the easiest-loading medium-format cameras. It advances to the next frame with a single stroke of the smooth, moderate-travel rapid-wind lever, and loads film in much the same manner as most rollfilm cameras going back to the '30s. You press two buttons located in the bottom of the film chamber that release studs holding the film spools in place. Then you drop the unexposed roll into its chamber, draw the paper backing across the film gate, fit the leader into the take-up spool, and reset the studs. After advancing the film to line up the film-backing arrow with the corresponding camera-body notch, you shut the back, and advance to frame one. That's it.

The camera can be switched between 120 and 220 rollfilm without special inserts. You just flip the built-in film-back pressure plate 180 degrees. The 7II also accepts 35mm film, producing 24x65-mm panoramics, 16 to a 36-exposure roll, with an accessory adapter kit (\$200, street price). It's the same format used by the Hasselblad X-Pan and 35mm Noblex Sport cameras.

The four-part 35mm adapter kit may seem complicated, but it snaps quickly into position. The kit's 35mm cartridge holder slips into the left-hand 120/220 film chamber; a drop-in 35mm take-up spool sits opposite. The 24x65-mm mask fits easily into the film

gate between them. When you've completed a 35mm roll, you thread a crank mechanism into the tripod socket; the mechanism mates with a key in the camera's base that allows you to rewind the film. It took us less than a minute to convert the camera from rollfilm to 35mm and back.

If you're a 35mm SLR shooter, you'll probably like this camera's non-SLR-like quiet operation. Press the shutter release and all you hear is a whispered "click" from the leaf shutter.

The camera's centerweighted averaging meter and aperture-priority AE system performed excellently for us. The 4-1/500 sec shutter-speed range (plus bulb) proved ample enough. We especially liked the AE/AE Lock toggle on the shutter-speed dial. You can easily flip between continuous and locked readings with the camera at eye level.

Do you shoot a lot of flash photos? Mamiya provides a single-pin hot shoe for nondedicated autoflash. The system worked well for us. The 7II also has a PC socket.

Optical options

We shot with all five Mamiya 7 lenses, and found them optically impressive. (See the lens tests, page 102.) Once you've dealt with the light curtain (see photo), the lenses mount easily. They come with bayonetting lens shades, which reverse for storage. (Some shades were easier to bayonet into place than others.)

Like all 35mm and other rollfilm rangefinder cameras today, closeup photography is somewhat limited. (See lens tests.)

Who will like the Mamiya 7II? Anyone who prizes large negatives (or slides) from a (relatively) small, quiet, and portable camera. (Our test 7II attracted much attention on the street. "Is that a 35mm?" "Is that a digital camera?")

The 7II is a rugged, well-thought-out machine that produced sharp, well-exposed pictures and proved to be very reliable in our tests. It's a winner.

Multiple exposures? As many as you like: With some rollfilm cameras, making multiple exposures is a chore. With the Mamiya 7II, you slide the camera-back thumb switch to the right, and you're off!

