

## Cosina-Voigtlander 28/1.9 Ultron Review

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This isn't a "numbers review". Anyone can do one of those. You don't even need the actual lens. All you need is a specs sheet and to write a few lines like "The lpm of this lens is greater than 100, so it is very sharp." followed by something like "...but it still doesn't render the same 'look' of a Leica lens." to give the review an air of authority. This is a review based on my feelings and results I've gotten after purchasing the lens and putting it through its paces on my Bessas. If numbers comfort you, go buy an issue of Pop Photo. If you want re-affirmation that the extra money spent for a red dot was worth it, read the Erwin Putts review

Why? So why this lens? The primary reason was to fill a hole in my glass lineup. Yes, I do have a CV 25/4 Skopar, but it is non-RF coupled and has a somewhat permanent home on my Bessa L. The 25 aside, I have nothing from 15mm all the way to 35mm. In terms of 28mm choices, the Leica 28/2 didn't seem worth the price after reading a comparison review on the Luminous Landscape website. That left the 28/3.5 Skopar and the 28/1.9 Ultron. Through the CV lens lineup, contrast and tonality properties are generally consistent within the same series. For example, the 50/2.5 Skopar will exhibit a contrastiness and tonal range very similar to the 35/2.5 Skopar, 25/4 Skopar, and so on. In this respect, Skopar lenses tend to be contrastier at the sacrifice of tonality while Ultron lenses are more evenly balanced. If I were primarily shooting color film or digital, the higher-contrast, smaller Skopar may have suited me, but since I shoot primarily black and white film I wanted something with a more conservative balance of tonal range and contrast. Out of the BoxSome Voigtlander stuff being somewhat overpriced locally thanks to a price-fixing agreement between many Poi-Ai Road retailers (wanna get a new Bessa L for US\$300?), I decided to get this lens from Stephen Gandy at CameraQuest. Even though this was (for me) a large purchase, I've made some smaller purchases from him in the past and he's proven himself to be very reliable (although that opinion has changed dramatically recently). The only thing I hate about ordering from him isn't his fault at all, but that of Newtonian physics. If only the postal service would jump on the quantum bandwagon so I could have my lens instantly teleported to me and not have to wait the 3-5 days for Global EMS. Oh, well. 3-5 days later I signed the delivery form and took possession of the nondescript brown cardboard box that contained the fastest 28mm lens for a rangefinder: the CV 28/1.9 Ultron. Wicked. Off went the 35/1.7 Ultron from my R2 and on went this beauty. The first thing I noticed was the additional weight. The 28mm Ultron is slightly heavier and longer than its 35mm counterpart, but it takes up about the same space in the viewfinder. The other thing I noticed was that it felt more "solid" than the other Cosina-Voigtlander lenses I own. This isn't to say that the quality of other CV glass is poor. Far from it. But the tolerances on it do seem a little tighter on this one. Going HyperfocalOne of the best things about the wide-to-normal focal length range is utilizing hyperfocal technique. Hyperfocus is especially useful in scenic photography because you can get a DOF greater than is possible using standard manual or auto focusing. It's also very useful in my favorite kind of photography: street photography. It allows you to take sharp, well-focused photos quickly...even faster than AF. Think you need bright light and a small f-stop to make this technique effective? Not with the 28/1.9. Even at a "wide" f2.8 the lens will give you a depth of field from 4.5 meters to infinity. One stop down at f4 opens this up to 3 meters. What this means is that with medium speed film you can utilize hyperfocus in places like smoke-filled bars and poorly-lit auditoriums. Of course if the day is bright and sunny, feel free to stop all the way down to f22. That'll get you a DOF from closer than you can even focus out to forever. Low-Light ImagingWhat's the point of doling out the extra cash for an extra stop of speed if you're not going to use it? Having 400-speed film loaded in an RF camera with no mirror slap vibration and a bright VF, and a 28/f1.9 Ultron mounted makes inconspicuous (read: flash-less), wide-angle nighttime city shooting a reality. The ambient lighting cast by passing traffic, street lights, and the occasional neon sign is all you need to get something hand-holdable. For the same reason, environmental shots of your local, dimly-lit, smoke-filled, singles bar are also do-able. Using "equipment minimalism" to melt in with the "normal folk" is part of the reason you picked a rangefinder system over an SLR-type one, right? Of course there is still the issue of shutter speed versus subject movement. You may be able to hold your camera steady enough at 1/15s but it's doubtful that the car flying down the street will come out sharp. Choose your subjects carefully. While a speeding car might be a blur, a man sitting on a bus stop bench won't. Or better yet, a man waiting at a bus stop as a blurred bus passes by. Taking hidden shots in dim lighting, mixing motions, and having a broader angle of view opens up numerous creative possibilities and this lens gives you the a focal length and aperture range that allow you to explore them fully. RenderingAfter reading many 'net reviews and forum posts about this lens I had set some very high standards for it. I was not disappointed in the slightest. Photos were contrasty but not too harsh. Pictures showed a full range of tones which blended wonderfully into each other. In fact, tonality was almost as creamy as using a classic, single-coated lens but with better contrast and sharpness. Overall sharpness was very good throughout the aperture range, with the peak being at about f4 or f5.6. What surprised me the most was it's sharpness when wide-open (f1.9/f2). The subject edge sharpness and look are similar to the 50/1.5 Nokton although the DOF of the 28/1.9 Ultron is deeper for the same aperture and distance given the broader focal length. Like all other Leica-mount Cosina Voigtlander lenses this one has 10 aperture blades, providing more of a circular opening than an angular one. Of course, bokeh (how the out of focus area is rendered) depends on more than just the shape of the aperture otherwise it would be the same in all CV lenses. I guess the best way to describe the bokeh of this lens is "none". By this I mean that OOF objects are pleasantly soft but still wholly recognizable. This makes the 28/1.9 Ultron very much suited for documentary and journalistic-type work but maybe not so much suited for portraiture. For taking portraits, I highly suggest the Voigtlander 75/2.5 Heliar. Conclusion: the Good, the Bad, & the UglyGood: Fair price. Excellent overall build quality. This lens is not only fast and sharp, but renders beautiful images, too. Bad: Rather large and heavy for a rangefinder lens. Size and heft more resemble an equivalent SLR lens. Ugly: Unlike other Voigtlander

wide-angle lenses, there is no viewfinder included with the 28/1.96 Ultron. This is the only thing about this lens that really irks me. The argument can be made that some rangefinders have 28mm lines, but at the time of this writing NO Cosina-Voigtlander rangefinders do (the R4a and R4m with 21/25/28/35/50 frame lines isn't due out until April '07). 'mon Cosina! With such a great lens, would it have killed you to include a VF?