

# Cosina-Voigtlander 90/3.5 Lanthar Review

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As with my previous reviews, this one is based on practical use rather than any published specs. What's the point of good numbers if they don't translate into something that I can make the best use of, right? You'll find no photos of test subjects taken in controlled lighting conditions here. The reason is, I have yet to come across such a situation when out photographing. It's all about actual usage. Basically, I mounted the Lanthar on my R2a and carried it in my messenger bag for a couple of weeks. The weather in Taipei is quite inconsistent so this allowed me to take photos in a variety of lighting conditions from the high-contrast lighting of noontime to the low-contrast, diffused lighting that comes with overcast skies. I also tried to shoot a variety of films (Efke 100, HP5+, Tri-X, and Shantou ERA100) souped in the developers I had on hand (Kodak HC-110, Rodinal, and Diafine) in order to best get an idea of how the lens rendered an image.

## Why?

Did I need this lens? Well, when I bought it I assumed I needed it. I assumed I did for 2 reasons: 1) There are 90mm frame lines on my rangefinder and 2) because I was told that 90mm is the "portrait" focal length and I might actually have to take a portrait with my camera one day. I also thought it might come in handy to have a little extra reach on occasion. I had heard some talk that focusing 90mm on a rangefinder wasn't the easiest thing to do, but didn't have any actual experience with having to do it so it wasn't really on my mind.

## Out of the Box

Unlike some Voigtlander stuff sold locally, I found the CV 90/3.5 Lanthar to be priced fairly normally here in Taipei. So instead of bearing "mail order wait" hell by ordering off the Internet I was able to buy one from JS Foto at the end of Poi Ai Rd., across from the post office. Just like most other Cosina-Voigtlander gear, I found the Lanthar to be very well put together. One thing that did take me by surprise is it's length. It's much longer than the next lens in line, the 75/2.5 Heliar. This is especially true with the hood attached. This makes it an odd fit in my camera bag and not very pocketable.

## Handling

The forums buzz was right. It is difficult to focus teles on a rangefinder. It's not just the short baselength of my R2a, but also the .6x viewfinder magnification. The low viewfinder magnification makes distant subjects appear even more distant and thus harder to focus on. With this being the case, spontaneous and "decisive moment" photography are out the window. With the short baselength of my R2a, even if I get a subject in sharp focus through the VF my actual zone of sharp focus will be off. If you're looking to take late night moody shots or pics of a local band playing at the neighborhood club you'll need to bring some really fast film as this lens only opens up to f3.5. Not exactly blazingly fast, but with the short baselength that the Bessas have it's useless to shoot anything faster at 90mm, anyway.

## Rendering

This lens is razor sharp corner-to-corner at every aperture. In fact, it's virtually just as sharp wide open as it is stopped all the way down. This means that diffusion is almost nonexistent, even at f32! I haven't even been able to visually identify an "optimal aperture" with any of the enlargements I've made yet. Overall contrast is very similar to Cosina-Voigtlander's Skopar lenses. This is to say, they are rather contrasty. This works well for color photography but, as a matter of personal taste, I prefer creamy tones over higher contrast in my B&W photography. It gives me more to work with in the darkroom and a more "scannable" negative for lightroom post-processing. If you're like me, it means avoiding harsh lighting and using low-contrast processing when using this lens.

## What's the Better CV Telephoto Lens?

Cosina makes two telephoto lenses for rangefinders under the Voigtlander banner: the 75/2.5 Heliar and the 90/3.5 Lanthar. The focal length difference between them is 15mm, but remember that the difference in angle of view decreases as focal length increases. In other words, you'll see a greater difference in the 7mm between a 28mm lens and 35mm lens than the 15mm difference between these two. They may be close in angle of view, but their focal length combined with their minimum focusing distance of 1 meter makes the Lanthar a better "headshot" lens while the Heliar is really more of a "torso-up" lens. Obviously, the 75/2.5 is almost a full stop faster than the 90/3.5, but the f2.5 maximum

aperture of it still isn't really quick enough to make it suitable as a low/ambient light lens. The Lanthar is a bit sharper than the Heliar, especially outside of the f5.6-f8 range, but the 75mm does render a creamier tonal range, So which is the better choice? Based on size, speed, usability, and my personal preferences with regard to image rendering, the 75/2.5 is the clear winner. The 90 goes with me only when I think that I'll specifically need it.

Conclusion: the Good, the Bad, & the Ugly

Good: As with most (if not all) CV glass, a fair price for good quality brass & glass. Sharpness, including edge sharpness, is excellent and consistent throughout the aperture range. It's also the longest of the CV rangefinder lineup.

Bad: Rather slow at f3.5. This leaves low light photography out unless you're into Delta 3200.

Ugly: Difficult to focus visually on rangefinders with a low magnification, such as the .6x viewfinder on my R2a. Also, focusing is inaccurate on RFs with a short baselength...like my R2a.

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