

Cosina-Voigtlander 35/1.4 Nokton Classic SC Review

Contributed by Brian Webb
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So it started something like this. I called up a friend of mine to see if he wanted to meet up and go out shooting:

Me: "Hey, you want to go out this weekend?"

Friend: "I can't. I'm in Singapore."

Me: "Oh, okay. Let me know when you're back in town."

Friend: "I will. By the way, I just met with Chii Fei (Chiif Cameras). I got that lens you wanted, the new Nokton."

Me: (In a jealous rage) "LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU'RE BACK IN TOWN!"

He did and we got together so I could play with his new toy and become even more jealous. A few hours and a couple rolls of film later my opinions were set. Here are my thoughts on the newest creation from the Cosina crew to be sold under the Voigtlander nameplate: the 35/1.4 Nokton Classic.

Initial Impressions

Having never used a Voigtlander pancake-style lens beyond toying with a 40 Nokton once and being a regular user of a 35/1.7 Ultron my first thought was simply "This thing is a little lighter than my Ultron." That was quickly followed by "Oh. Plastic." Contrary to the brass & glass that make up the CV lenses I own, the 35 Nokton Classic utilizes plastic for the focusing and aperture rings. I don't think it was a matter of cost-savings in materials on the part of Cosina, but more likely a design requirement, especially considering the compactness of the lens and the focusing and aperture tabs. That brings up a positive first impression I had: it's compact. Of course it's not as compact as a Skopar-type lens, but then again it's a couple of stops faster, too. It's definitely more compact than the other "fast" lenses in the CV lineup like the 28 and 35 Ultrons or the 35 and 50 Noktons. It's even ever so slightly shorter than the 40/1.4 Nokton, which shares the same pancake design. Another positive, albeit a minor one, is the lens cap. I'm glad Cosina went with a clip-on design rather than a push-on design. Yes, the push-on lens caps are somewhat more classy, but the felt wears down and they tend to fall off. Anyone with a 28 Ultron knows what I mean. My friend also got the LH-6 hood, whose vented design I'm not really a fan of. So there it was, my friends compact, light, and slightly plasticky new 35/1.4 Nokton Classic SC mounted on my R2A, ready to go.

Handling

The focusing ring may be plastic, but the action is extremely smooth. It has what I can only describe as the perfect level of drag. Obviously the lens was new and wear and tear may change things over time but at that moment the level of dampening was excellent and movement of the ring was nothing but smooth. Apertures were also excellent with solid stops but not so "solid" as to interfere with changing apertures. In fact, I would say that both the focusing and aperture movements on this lens were better than any of the CV lens I currently use. So far, so good. Using the focusing tab was a breeze. I'm one of the weird sort who actually prefers using a knob to focus with. I have one screwed into my 28/1.9 Ultron and can't for the life of me figure out why the same option wasn't included with the 50/1.5 Nokton. But then again, I also think that all CV wide angle lenses should have "focusing stops" like the Snapshot-Skopar did. Using a tab to change f-stops took some getting accustomed to. More than once I accidentally shifted the aperture when focusing or otherwise fumbling with the lens. Maybe it's because I have big hands, but it was a little annoying. After a couple hours of playing it wasn't an issue anymore, though.

Rendering

When it came to how the photos came out I really had only a couple issues on my mind:

- 1) Did the 35/1.4 exhibit the bokeh weirdness wide open as the 40/1.4? (The subject against a busy background with lots of highlights)
- 2) Was the point of focus sharp wide open? (unlike the 35/1.7 Ultron, which has a slight softness to it).

The answer to question 1 is "Sort of". The 35/1.4 bokeh is similar to that of the 40/1.4, but not exactly the

same. The highlights aren't quite as harsh and busy backgrounds appear in a slightly softer manner. It's still not wonderful, but it is a definite improvement over its pancake brother, the 40 Nokton.

To question 2 the answer is a resounding "Yes!". Just like the 50/1.5 Nokton (and unlike the 35 and 28 Ultrons) this lens is relatively sharp wide-open.

In fact, the Nokton Classic SC is also just as contrasty as the 50 Nokton. My sample being the single-coated version and thus (theoretically) lower-contrast than the multi-coated version, I'd be interested to see just how contrasty the Nokton Classic MC was. Of course with higher contrast comes a lower tonal range. The contrast vs. tonality scale isn't as contrast-biased as the Skopars, but it doesn't have the great tonal range of the Ultrons, either.

Conclusion: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The Good: Compact, light, sharp wide-open, wonderful focusing and aperture ring movements.

The Bad: Some plastic parts, contrasty

The Ugly: A little pricey. The street price will more than likely drop over time, though.

Note: I'd like to thank Scott at Mainline Photographics for getting me this lens, Robert White for trying really very hard, the guys at PhotoMalaysia.com for the last bit of help, and SK Chang (gcsk76 @PhotoMalaysia) for pretending not to care as I abused his new lens.

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