

35/1.7 Ultron versus 35/1.4 Nokton Classic SC

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I just placed an order for the CV 35/1.4 Nokton Classic. Being the black and white filmie geek fanboy that I am, I obviously opted for the single-coated (SC) version. Yes, I already own the CV 35/1.7 Ultron. Yes, part of my decision to buy this lens was driven by pure G.A.S. (Gear Acquisition Syndrome). Beyond that though, there were actual good reasons behind my action. There were also good reasons *not* to "trade-in" my Ultron for the Nokton Classic. What follows is the "internal discussion" that went on in my head and why I ended up selling off my Ultron to help finance a new Nokton Classic.

Size, Weight, and Build

In terms of size and weight, the 35/1.4 is the clear winner. Minus the hoods, the Nokton is a full 2cm shorter than the Ultron. It's also an ounce lighter. This makes it a better "take-along" lens. As build-quality goes I can't say much as my Nokton is new. I do feel a little "iffy" about plastic being used for the aperture and focusing rings, even though I do understand *why* it was used. The build quality of my Ultron was excellent and I didn't have a single issue with it in the few years I've abused it.

Handling

The aperture and focusing movements of my Nokton Classic are excellent. In fact, I would say that they exceed that of any CV lens in my bag. Of course, it is new and time will tell if usage will degrade it's performance in this regard. I would term the movements of my Ultron as being "average". Not bad at all, but not an experience either. This brings up a basic design difference: pancake versus barrel. I love focusing ring knobs. I even have the optional one in place on my 28/1.9 Ultron. I don't like aperture ring knobs. The Nokton Classic has both, the Ultron neither. This puts them on equal footing in my book.

Rendering

Sure, the 35/1.4 is 2/3 stops faster than the 35/1.7 but that extra speed is meaningless if the resulting image is too soft to be useable. One thing that sometimes annoyed me about the Ultron was its slight softness wide open (although sometimes I did like the look). Happily, the 35/1.4 is noticeably sharper at f1.4 than the 35/1.7 is at f1.7. It's even slightly noticeable at f2. From f2.8 onward the differences, if any, are negligible. The downside is that the tonal range of the Ultron exceeds that of the Nokton Classic (yes, even the S.C. version). This may not matter if you shoot color but might be of some importance to B&W users. The Nokton Classic renders a moderate level of contrast, very much in the same way of the Skopar designs. Yes, even the S.C. version.

Wide Open Examples

100% Crop

The Little Things

The Devil (or God, depending on your point of view) is in the details, right? Here are a couple minor details. The close focus distance of the Nokton Classic is .7 meters. It's .9 meters for the Ultron. This might make the Ultron a better "fit" if you have a Bessa R or R2 and the Nokton Classic a better choice for Bessa R2A/M, R3A/M, or R4A/M users. Actually, if you have a Bessa R then the 35/1.7 is your only choice since the 35/1.4 is available only in an M-mount. This holds true for Barnak Leicas and any number of Ukranian rangefinders, too. The LTM mount is more versatile in that it can be adapted to an M mount while the reverse isn't true.

Why I Chose the 35/1.4 Nokton Classic SC

Blame my CV 50/1.5 Nokton and poor winter weather. Due in large part to some very inclement weather keeping me inside I was doing quite a bit of shooting at dimly-lit indoor locations. I got to spend a lot of time with my faster lenses, the 28/1.9, the 35/1.7, and the 50/1.5. Shot at or near wide-open I found that I liked the images produced by my 50 Nokton best. It wasn't the tonal range or level of contrast that impressed me about this lens. The Ultrons are better there. It was the sharpness. At f1.5 and f2, where many of my photos were taken, the 50/1.5 didn't exhibit the softness that the Ultrons do. From f2.8 there isn't a difference and I would gladly pick one of the Ultrons for their tonality. Unfortunately, when you are in a dimly-lit room shooting Tri-X wide-open and only getting 1/30s out of it,

f2.8 isn't really an option. The 35/1.4 is just as sharp and just as fast as the 50 Nokton but smaller and with a wider angle of view.

So that, plus a heavy load of G.A.S., is why I chose the new 35/1.4 Nokton Classic over the 35/1.7 Ultron.

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