

NIKON MF-21 BACK

The Right Half of the N8008's Brain

by Jack and Sue Drafa

PHOTOGRAPHIC'S USER REPORT

When we first field tested the Nikon N8008 in the November 1988 issue of PHOTOgraphic, we were *extremely* pleased with the camera. What we didn't realize at the time, was that the N8008 we tested was only running on half of its electronic brain; the other half is found in Nikon's MF-21 multi-function back.

The MF-21 is so important to Nikon N8008 users that we felt that an in-depth report on just the back was essential to totally understand all the possible uses for the N8008.

First, understand that the "MF" in the product name refers to five basic operations of the N8008 camera: Interval timer function, long time exposures, autoexposure bracketing, freeze-focus, and data imprinting.

CONFIGURATION

The MF-21 is slightly larger than the standard N8008 back, weighs a little more, and requires less than a minute to install. You'll only have to install it once, because once you've tried the MF-21 back, you will never want to remove it! On the left side of the back is the standard viewing window, for reading film information off the cassette. On the right is a small battery compartment that holds two 3V CR-2025 lithium batteries used to operate the large LCD display on the back of the MF-21 (even when the camera is turned off). The center section consists of a very large liquid-crystal display, and an extensive control panel hidden behind a tiny, magnetized door.

The LCD shows information about single functions, or combinations of functions. The control panel has seven buttons. The FNC button cycles through each of the five functions to be selected. The MOD button allows the photographer to modify various features of each function. Pressing the SEL button selects a specific modification so an adjustment can be made using the ADJ button. If the interval timer or long-exposure function is

used, a START/STOP button is used to control the action. Once a function is selected and modified, a SET/RESET button will activate or deactivate each of the specific functions selected. And finally, the PRN button prints one of eight types of data in the lower right-hand corner of the film frame.

INTERVAL TIMER



When selecting this function, the MF-21 first asks you what time you want the sequence to start. Using the SEL and ADJ buttons, pick the date, hour, and minute you want the action to commence. For example, 7 12:07 is the seventh day of the month at 12:07. The next question asked by the back is how much time should elapse between each event photographed. For example, 01:02:04 is one hour, two minutes, and four seconds between each event. The last question is, how many exposures should be taken per event, and how many events will be photographed. For example, 3f-03 would indicate three frames taken of each event, and three complete cycles before the entire sequence is over; or 3 hours, 6 minutes, and 12 seconds total elapsed time using the example cited above.

We found this function extremely useful for documenting nature events, such as a flower opening, an egg hatching, sunsets, and bird-nest activity. If you set the N8008 to multi-exposure, you could set the camera to take nine exposures of the moon in different positions on one frame, and not

lose any sleep getting the shot. If you wanted to document a construction job over a month's time, you could set the interval to one exposure every 24 hours and let the camera do the rest... for the next 30 days!

LONG EXPOSURE

If you desire exposures that exceed the 30 seconds, the long-exposure function can be selected and adjusted to a maximum setting of 99 hours, 59 minutes, and 59 seconds, by using the SEL and ADJ controls. This mode is handy for photographing star trails, night scenes, or any subject that requires extremely long exposures. This function could be combined with the interval timer, for instance, when photographing star trails. You could set the interval for one exposure, one event, and set the shutter to open at 9 p.m. and stay open for six hours, so the shutter would close at 3 a.m. Isn't technology great?

AUTO BRACKETING

The auto-bracket function is fairly straightforward. It asks two questions: how many exposures—3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, or 17—and how much difference in exposure between the frames; for example, .3, .5, .7, 1, 1.3, 1.5, 1.7, or 2 f-stops. If the motor drive of the N8008 is in the continuous mode, all bracketed exposures will be taken immediately. If it's in the single mode, one part of the bracketed sequence will be taken with each press of the shutter button.

FREEZE-FOCUS OR FOCUS PRIORITY

The most misunderstood control on the MF-21 is the so-called freeze-focus control. The manual states that this control is designed to automatically trip the shutter when a subject enters a preset plane of focus. This point is true, but there is much more to this function than meets the eye. Nikon gives the example of a sporting event where the subject passes through a point of preset focus and trips the



Long-exposure mode

INTERVAL
LONG EXP
AUTO BKT
FCS PRIOR

◀ 00:10:05 ▶



Focus priority

INTERVAL
LONG EXP
AUTO BKT
FCS PRIOR

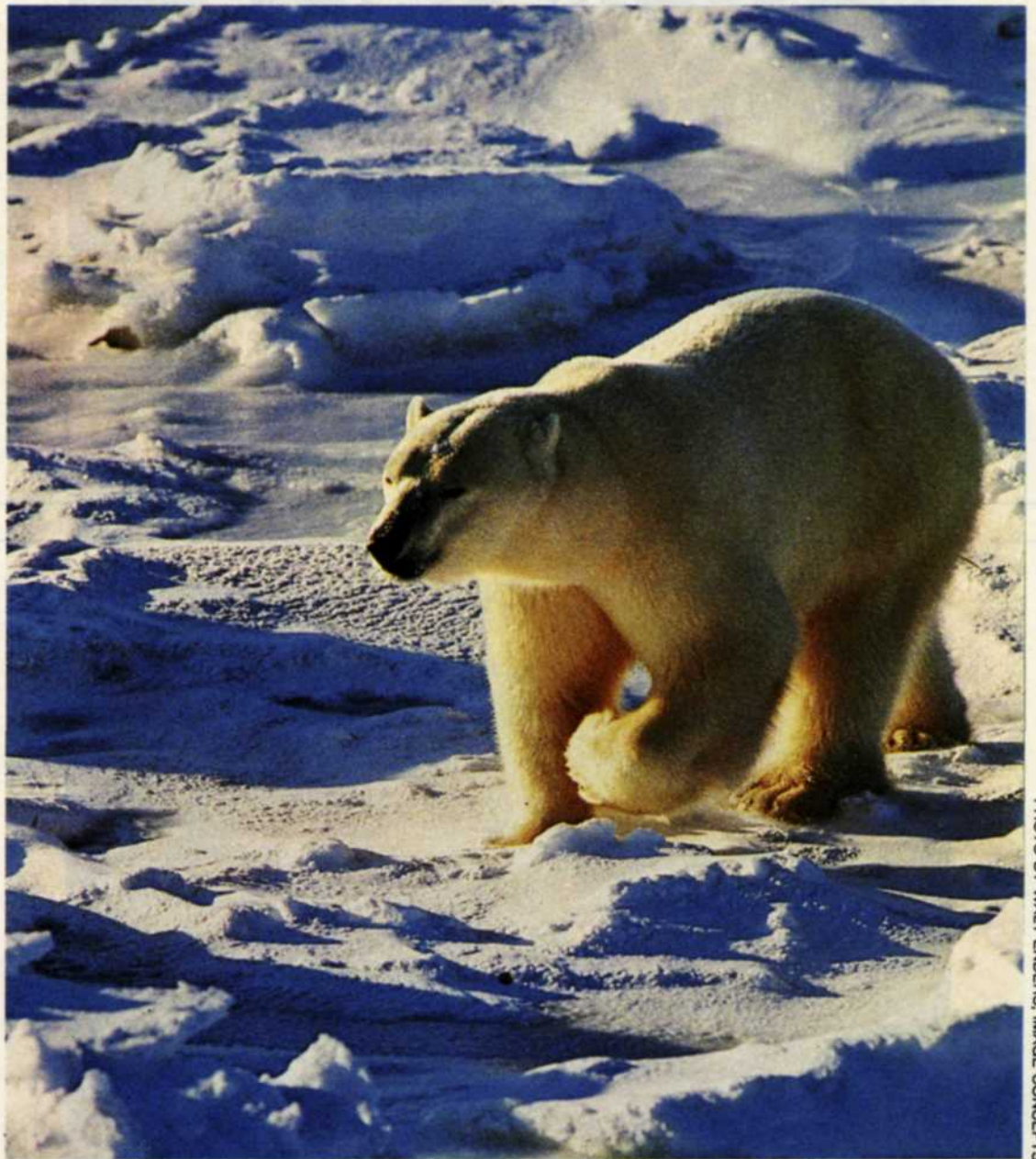
◀ ▶



Interval timing

INTERVAL
LONG EXP
AUTO BKT
FCS PRIOR

◀ START TIME 5 13:05 ▶



Focus priority

INTERVAL
LONG EXP
AUTO BKT
FCS PRIOR

◀ ▶

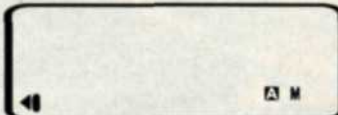
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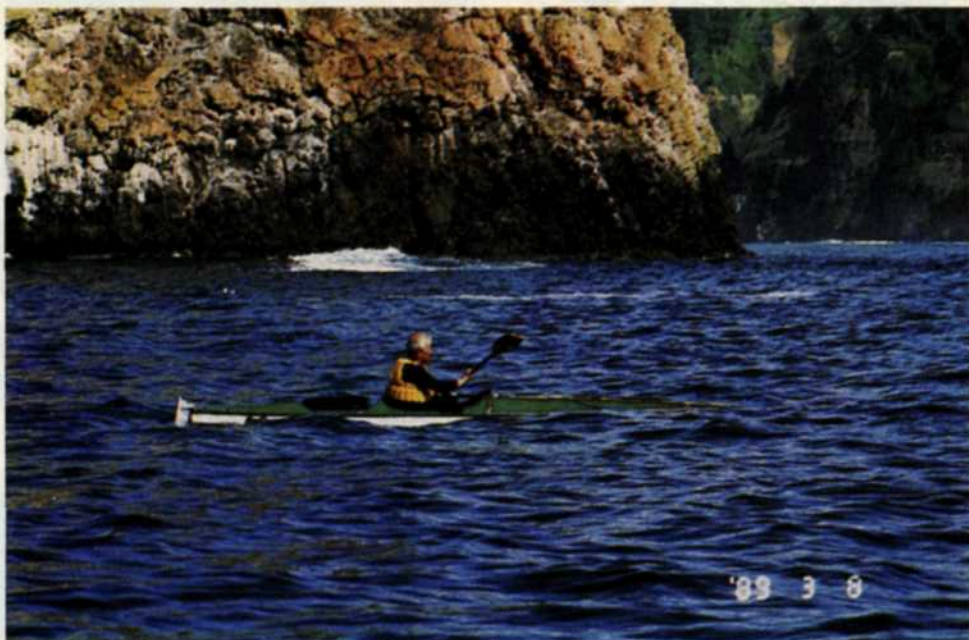
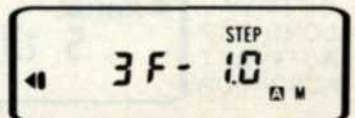
Focus priority

INTERVAL
LONG EXP
AUTO BKT
FCS PRIOR



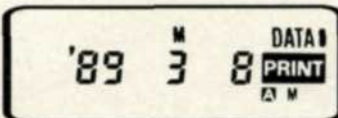
Autobracketing

INTERVAL
LONG EXP
AUTO BKT
FCS PRIOR



Data imprinting

INTERVAL
LONG EXP
AUTO BKT
FCS PRIOR



NIKON MF-21

shutter. In order to accomplish this, you must turn the camera's autofocus off. This concept made us wonder: what if you place older manual-focus lenses on the N8008, and set the back to Freeze Focus? If you press the shutter button, nothing happens until you manually focus the lens. When the image is sharp, the shutter is tripped, making a semi-autofocus system out of your old manual-focus lenses.

Let's take another situation where you are using a macro lens to photo-

One of the best uses of Freeze Focus isn't even discussed in the manual!

graph flowers. If you place the camera in manual focus, and set the lens to the desired magnification, you can move the camera and lens in on the subject until it comes into focus, tripping the shutter at the correct magnification.

We found the best use for Freeze Focus was not even discussed in the manual. If you set your N8008 to continuous focus, and the motor drive to continuous-low, with the freeze focus on, you have created a tracking system for the N8008 camera. We tried this on several moving objects such as passing cars, planes, and joggers, and were extremely impressed by the ability of the N8008 and the MF-21 to keep up with moving subjects.

DATA IMPRINTING

The fifth function of the MF-21 is what most photographers think of when they think of accessory camera backs. Data can be printed on the film using the PRN button, or just displayed on the LCD panel for the photographer's information. Using the MOD, SEL, and ADJ functions, the photographer can select four slightly different variations of the date to be imprinted on the lower right-hand corner of the frame. For example, (8 3 89) (8 2:48) (89 3 8) (3 8 89) all represent March 8, 1989 at 2:48.

Two types of frame counts can be imprinted with the MF-21. The first is the standard frame count found on the top of the camera; the second counts until you reset it, like a trip meter on a car. If you want to keep track of how many photos you have taken on a shooting, this function will keep adding until you reach 999,999 exposures.

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If you desire a specific number be on every frame, a fixed number can also be selected and printed onto the image. This would be useful if you were making several copies of a slide show and needed to number each series of dupes with the same number.

Shutter speed and f-stop can also be printed on the film with the DATA IMPRINT function. This is handy when running film tests so you don't have to write down the information—the MF-21 does that for you.

A special sixth function allows the photographer to vary the intensity of the imprint exposure. Auto-imprint exposure and manual-imprint exposure (L, M, H1, H2) can be selected to achieve the desired effect.

CONCLUSIONS

After using the Nikon MF-21 Multi-function back for studio, sports, nature, and AV production, we found it an absolute necessity for the N8008 user who wants to get the maximum help in solving a variety of photographic problems. The N8008 is a great camera, but the MF-21 Multi-control Back just makes it better. Why settle for half a brain? Remember how the saying goes... two brains are better than one... or something like that! ■

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