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From the Archives

Ilford Delta 400 Professional

Text and Photos by Jack and Sue Drafafl, June, 2001



Excellent high-speed black-and-white film



When we first started our professional training at Brooks Institute of Photography many years ago, all the assignments for the first year were on black-and-white film. There was no mention of the word color until the second year of schooling. We learned to view and photograph everything in varying shades of gray. Inevitably, the endless black-and-white assignments taught us that great photographic images involve more than just capturing the subject itself. Lighting, scene contrast, and tonal range are the key players in creating great black-and-white images.

Shot in the same old train park and late afternoon sun as the photo at left, with the exposure determined by spot-metering the blue sky above the train, locking-in the reading and recomposing.

Although we now expose an abundance of color film, we jump at the chance to fine-tune our photographic skills on a new black-and-white film. Ilford, a leading film manufacturer with an extensive black-and-white portfolio, just announced an improved Delta 400 Professional. Ilford has changed the name from 400 Delta to Delta 400 and added a bright new shade of green to the film box. The key ingredients in this new emulsion are its finer grain, increased film speed and exceptional sharpness.



River reflections were captured at 1/125 at f/16 with a 28mm focal length.

Every subject takes on a whole new look when viewed through shades of gray. It seems that we can find an endless supply of subject matter for black-and-white film reviews. We find that subjects we often pass by when conducting a color test prove to be the center of interest in black-and-white. A simple rusting hinge on a building may feature incredibly detailed tonal values, and even eerie shadows can become new exciting black-and-white images.

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Basing the exposure in late afternoon sun on a spot reading of the area near the bolts at the top of the image (1/250 at f/16) held a very wide range of detail.



On a cold, frosty morning, Mother Nature provided a nice touch to the local flora. Electronic flash provided the lighting, a 105mm macro lens got us up close, and Ilford Delta 400 recorded it beautifully at 1/125 at f/22.

The best part in shooting black-and-white film is that you have full control of the scene's tonal values through exposure and processing. The new Ilford Delta 400 has expanded its processing to include a variety of chemicals and variable processing times to help. This new emulsion is balanced so that you can process both 35mm and 120 simultaneously in the same chemical processing tank.

Ilford realizes that true black-and-white photographers love to experiment with processing chemicals and times, so they offer a variety of processing chemicals from which to choose. If you like to match the film with an Ilford developer, you have the choice of Ilford ID-11, Microphen, Perceptol, Ilfotec DD-X, Ilfotec HC, and Ilfosol S chemicals. If you like the Ilford emulsion but lean toward Kodak chemistry, you can try Kodak D-76, T-Max, Xtol, Microdol-X, or HC-110. Agfa Rodinal users can process the new emulsion at dilutions from 1-25 to 1-50. Delta 400 can also be machine processed in Ilfotec DD, ID-11/D-76, and T-Max RS developers.

To give us all a creative edge, Ilford had designed the emulsion so it can be rated from EI 200 to 3200 by simply altering the combination of time and chemistry concentration. Since this film offers a lot of processing and exposure control, it is a good idea to run a test roll before you go out on a black-and-white shoot. We find that using bracketed exposures in sunlight, overcast, deep shade, and with the sun in the picture will give you a good set of silver images on which to base future exposures.

Delta 400 can be used with all types of black-and-white or colored filters. Most will be exposed correctly if you use a TTL system, but those orange to deep red filters may require 1 1/2 stops additional exposure compensation. Because of the spectral response of Delta 400, exposures late in the afternoon or on winter days may require slightly more exposure than usual. No reciprocity exposure compensation is needed for exposure times from 1/2 second to 1/10,000. Longer times will need additional

exposure and bracketing would be advised for those situations.

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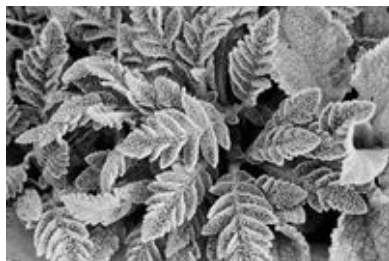
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On a cold, frosty morning, Mother Nature provided a nice touch to the local flora. Electronic flash provided the lighting, a 105mm macro lens got us up close, and Ilford Delta 400 recorded it beautifully at 1/125 at f/22.



More early-morning frost, this time on the top of a fence post. The camera's multi-segment metering came up with 1/125 at f/8, and Delta 400 provided lots of detail.



Testing new Delta 400 was a great excuse to get out of the office and have some fun. Our initial tests with ISO 400 and Ilfotec DD-X in our darkroom gave us images we considered a little overexposed. A second roll and a modified processing time gave us some perfect test negatives, so off we went.

The morning of the main test, the temperature was hovering right around 32°. We could see some fog off in the distance, so we loaded our Nikon F5s and added a new Tamron 28-105mm f/2.8 zoom we were also testing. As we drove along the bay we could see frost in the shade, so we stopped to photograph some frosted leaves. The tide was high, causing the river that feeds into the ocean to be backed up. The trees along the shoreline were creating some great reflections in the high water with perfect shades of gray for our test. We tried a little bit of vertical and a tad of horizontal to find just the right composition for each shot. As we walked along the river, we discovered a great shot destined to only last a couple of minutes. A fence post had frost on the top end that duplicated the wood pattern underneath. As the sun started to rise, the frost melted and we moseyed on our way.

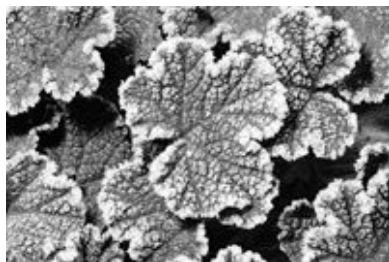
The next day was warmer, so we took a walk through the woods to capture the wonders of the tall northwest trees. It was dark in the forest and we needed more exposure, so we rated those images at EI 800. The next stop was a peaceful walk on the beach for some cave and silhouette shots. It was such a nice day that we kept trying to convince ourselves that we still didn't have enough photos. In truth, we just didn't want to go back to the office to work. As the sun faded, we headed home to process our images.

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Delta 400 can be rated at speeds from EI 200 to EI 3200, and processed in a wide range of developers. Start with the recommendations in the film instruction sheet, and shoot your own test, using bracketed exposures in a variety of lighting conditions. When you dial in your ideal EI/developer combination, you'll love the results!

In order to verify that our processing time and temperature were on target, we processed a single roll. Everything looked great, so the rest of the film was processed, dried, and spread out on the light box. Wow! The exposure latitude of the 400 was excellent, and could pull more detail than we would ever need for our final prints. For several images we had placed the sun directly in the picture, and the detail in the shadow areas was still holding. It was amazing how the images of the reflections along the river had such a nice long tonal range and still maintained superb image detail in the trees. The exposure latitude of this Delta 400 was very wide indeed.

Upon closer examination, we found that the grain structure was very fine. The change in grain size from ISO 400 to 800 was not visible, and only slightly noticeable when increased to EI 1600. If we had to pick a best rating for the film, we would suggest you try your tests from ISO 400 to 640.

Iford Delta 400 can be printed on a traditional enlarger with photographic materials, or scanned into a computer system and printed on inkjet papers like those made by Ilford Imaging. Yes, they even make inkjet paper for their black-and-white films and our resulting prints were excellent. Black-and-white photography is for the photographer who wants to venture beyond the norm, and the versatility of Delta 400 makes it easy. For information on Ilford black-and-white films and traditional or digital output options, you can log onto Ilford's Web site at www.ilford.com or call 201/265-6000.



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