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Fujicolor Portrait Film NPZ 800 Professional

Text and Photos by Jack and Sue Drafaht, February, 2002



This fast color-print film has it all

The more versatile the photographic tools, the more creative control a photographer has in the final image. Often the limits on this versatility have been with the recording medium itself, film. Fujifilm is quickly changing all that with its introduction of higher speed films that don't sacrifice image quality. Their latest debut is Fujicolor Portrait Film NPZ 800 Professional, an ISO 800 color-negative film that renders colors as close as possible to natural subject color. This makes it a great portrait film, as accurate skin-tone rendering can be very fragile. Even the slightest color enhancement can drastically modify the flesh tones.



The standard Macbeth color chart, exposed at ISO 800, shows NPZ 800's excellent color and gray-scale reproduction.

Besides rendering accurate flesh tones, NPZ 800 provides photographers a film speed adequate for working in low lighting conditions. Although not restricted to portrait photography, NPZ 800 allows photographers demanding critical color reproduction a new film of choice. An added bonus is that with enhanced contrast and extended exposure range, grain is much finer than with other ISO 800 films. Pretty incredible, huh?



All this is possible thanks to an array of Fujifilm technologies that have been developed over the last few years. The two that are most critical to the quality of this new emulsion are the Fine (Sigma) Technology, and the 4th Color Layer Technology. The Fine Sigma Technology increases film sensitivity while reducing processed grain size, giving you a smooth tonal gradation throughout the image. Even textures and fine detail are more visible at ISO 800.



The 4th Color Layer Technology allows

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NPZ 800 really shows its stuff when both high film speed and great image quality are required. Pre-dawn light (top), deep shade (bottom) and natural-light macro in a greenhouse (middle) are just three examples of the kinds of things NPZ 800 handles very well. (Of course, it also handles its namesake—portraits—quite beautifully.)

photographers to work easily in a variety of lighting situations that can include low light, mixed light, and extreme lighting ratios. Photo opportunities involving tungsten, fluorescent, and window sunlight can now be exposed with a single exposure and only small adjustments in the final printing.

The wide exposure latitude of NPZ 800 (-2 to +4 stops) allows you the versatility to use higher and lower EIs and still maintain image quality. These changes in film speed also provide you additional control over scene contrast and color saturation. At EI 1600, the contrast and color saturation is reduced slightly, while EI 400 exposures have the reverse effect.

Now let's talk about the actual film tests we ran. We like to look at the target application of each film, and then try to take the film one step beyond. Fujicolor Portrait Film NPZ 800 Professional has a neutral color balance designed to capture flesh tones accurately, but that shouldn't mean the film is limited to portraits. It is the perfect film choice for other applications requiring accurate colors, high film speed and fine-textured grain. Commercial photography often requires that a product with very specific colors be reproduced reliably. Neutral whites, grays and blacks are all very important to nature photographers, and landscape photographers want to reproduce scenics with faithful colors. Keeping all this in mind, we decided to try a wide variety of subjects to push NPZ 800 to the limits.

As with any film review we do an exposure bracket analysis to test the validity of manufacturers' technical data. Our first bracket exposure test proved to us that ± 1 stop provided little change in image quality. The -2-stop test resulted in much flatter images and some increase in grain, while the +2 to +4-stop test also resulted in slightly reduced image quality. So, the bottom line is you should try and stay within the ± 1 -stop range to get optimal results from NPZ 800.

We packed the camera bags and off we headed, early one morning. On our way to town, we came across a group

of cold, wet fishermen on the river bank in the thick fog. We have found that fog tends to bring out the worst in grain, so what better for our first test. We were limited on film, so we kept our exposures at a minimum and depended on exposure latitude to solve any exposure problems. The fog drifted about so some fishermen were in the clear, while others were peeking in and out of the fog bank. Before long, the sun poked through the top of the fog bank, so with one photo opportunity we had covered low light, contrasty light, and conditions that accent grain.

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NPZ 800 permitted hand-held shooting (1/60 at f/5.6) in existing tungsten lighting.

The next day we tried our luck at morning dew drops, flowers, and landscapes near our favorite beach on the Oregon Coast. In order to try the film for portraiture, we lined up a few willing candidates—Pat the local fireman, Kim the veterinary technician and Al the welder.

When we arrived at the local fire station, we were informed that we would have to wait. The crew was out on an important run—a cat up a tree. When they finally returned and we finished snickering, we found a willing candidate to pose for the film test. Fireman Pat was photographed using the heavy overcast light coming through the front doors of the fire station. Exposure times ran from 1/250 to 1/500 and provided us a good f-stop range.



Despite its high speed, NPZ 800 is a good scenic film, allowing for lots of depth of field in early-morning light.

Kim, the vet tech, was photographed in the clinic, which had mixed sunlight coming through the windows and fluorescent lights overhead. Depth of field was our main concern here, so we used a bounce flash off the ceiling as our main light source and were able to get f/11 and f/16.

Al, the welder, provided the most difficult lighting situation. The shop was darkly lit, so we used the overcast sunlight coming through a door, fluorescent light overhead, and the light emitted from the cutting tools for our exposure. Exposure times ranged from 1/30 to 1/90 at minimum f-stop, so we bracketed our exposures to insure that we had a good full-range exposure.

Back at the lab, our C-41 processor was up and running, ready to process these NPZ 800 test rolls. A loupe to several negatives indicated that the grain was very tight, and enlargement later confirmed it. Typically photos with blue sky area are the first to show grain with higher-speed films.

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Colors are accurate in heavy overcast lighting.



Mixed existing lighting proved no problem at all for NPZ 800.

Examination of several photos showed the blue skies had a very nice tonal range.

The scenes in the fog had minimal grain, comparable to ISO 200-400 films we had shot in the fog a few months earlier. The color rendition was very natural with smooth tonal gradations in those areas with slight color variations.

The portraits photographed using NPZ 800 provided accurate flesh tones, and even the surrounding area recorded true-to-life. Even the mixed lighting of the welder proved to be no problem for the NPZ 800. The only images that picked up any grain were some of the close-up nature shots with extreme out-of-focus areas.

Our final test was done using a Nikon Super Coolscan 4000ED film scanner. The color pack, gamma, and exposure settings were very close to the scanner's default. We tried the under- and overexposed images to see if they could be corrected to look like a normally exposed negative.

Finally, we brought several images into Photoshop to test the grain pattern using a trick we learned over the last few years. Selecting a small area in the image, we applied the Sharpen More function and compared it to unsharpened areas. Most high-speed color negative films fail this test as their grain pattern becomes unacceptable. NPZ 800 did as well as many of the ISO 200 films we have given this test.

On a personal note, this is one of the best films we have seen come along in a long time. It has just about everything you want in a film—speed, fine grain, good color rendition, and excellent exposure latitude. Great work Fujifilm! If you want to find out more about this fine film, call Fujifilm at 800/800-FUJI or check out their Web page at www.fujifilm.com.

