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First Exposure: Kodak Supra Films by Jack & Sue Drafa

Kodak's recent film offerings have resulted in two professional groups of film targeted at both portrait and commercial photographers. The Portra film family of five, is designed to be very forgiving in the difficult lighting conditions that portrait photographers may encounter.

Now, commercial photographers have a new film family called Supra that includes Supra 100, Supra 400, and Supra 800. These three emulsions are designed to cover a wide range of exposure situations in photojournalism, stock, fashion, and commercial photography. They each have a vibrant color palette and are matched in printing characteristics for both traditional printing systems and film scanners.

The technologies used to create the Supra line of films were extracted from the PJ Ektapress family, as well as some new emulsion enhancements. Supra 800 replaces Ektapress 800, and offers the most improvements. Its new high-efficiency T-Grain structure provides outstanding fine detail reproduction and its ability to be pushed as much as two full stops provides added versatility with minimal decrease in image quality. Improved DIR, Universal DIR, and DIAR chemistries give the emulsion better color and saturation, even when underexposed.

If the lighting is low, subject speed very fast or lenses very long, then Supra 800 should be your film of choice. Its higher ISO makes it perfect for capturing sporting events in both daylight and low light, where long lenses and high speed are the norm. Nature photographers will love this emulsion because they can achieve faster shutter speeds with their super long lenses and obtain sharper images.

When you constantly move from sunlight to low light and back again, then grab some Supra 400. It has fine enough grain to closely approach the level of Supra 100, yet it is fast enough to capture most low light situations. If you're not sure what Supra film you'll need, this emulsion is the best to start with. It works well in most situations and offers very fine grain, excellent color saturation, and wide exposure latitude. Supra 400, which replaces Ektapress 400, uses Kodak's Advanced Development Accelerator for fine grain, and sports a new emulsion overcoat to decrease risk of handling damage. A one-stop push potential gives you the luxury of E.I. 800 when you don't have Supra 800 loaded in your camera

Supra 100 is really Ektapress PJ100 in a new box with a new name. It will continue to provide the same high quality that PJ100 has given us in the past. Supra 100 uses optimized T-Grain and enhanced cubic grain technology to maintain a fine grain structure. It is ideal for big enlargements and high quality scans.

So, why did Kodak skip over the ISO 200 category and only release three Supra emulsions? The answer amounts to lighting levels and photographic physics. When pros want maximum quality and extreme enlargements, they use a super fine grain film with a low ISO speed. Supra 100 fits this scenario as it is designed for macro, landscapes, fashion, medical and other situations with plenty of light and little subject movement. With improved characteristics and pushing abilities, these three emulsions allow you to cover most photographic situations with excellent image quality. So, who needs more?

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Supra In Use

Normally, when we get a film for testing, we have a minimum of time to for testing due to short publication deadlines. With Professional Supra, time was on our side. Kodak had a large quantity of the film available before its actual release, and sent us an ample supply. Our deadline was still a couple of months away, so as local events came up, Supra was on the scene.

Our garden was in full bloom with insects, snakes, and other assorted critters doing their summertime thing. We kept an F5, macro lens and a flash loaded with Supra 100 ready for whatever mother nature offered. Over the next couple of weeks, flowers, bees, a June beetle, garden snake, and a pet chameleon named "Igor" were captured on Supra 100.

We heard there was a small town parade, so made sure that Supra and the Drafahls were in the front row. Supra 100 started the parade, but we soon realized that the action and lens focal lengths required moving up to Supra 400. The vibrant colors of the clowns were perfect complements to the Supra film test. We used both natural sunlight and flash fill as we quickly worked our way through several rolls of film. Looking for additional local events via the Internet, we found out that the Columbia Games were in progress. These events focused on a variety of outdoor summertime events on or around the Columbia River. We packed up our Nikon F5s, a variety of lenses from 14mm to 500mm and were off to the wind surfing events. Supra 100 worked out great for the wide angle shots of the surfers preparing. The Supra 400 was perfect for short telephoto images because its film speed allowed shutter speeds adequate to provide sharp images. When we switched to the longer lenses, like the 300mm and up, we had to load Supra 800 to keep those shutter speeds high enough. The action on the river was hot and it didn't take long to fire through another half dozen rolls of Supra.

On our trip back to the lab, we made a quick stop at Bonneville Dam. This is a great place to test film, because they have a very impressive generator room where the lighting is low, mixed with tungsten, fluorescent, and sunlight. We used the Supra 400 for several shots, but noticed that the light level had forced borderline shutter speeds. Although Supra 800 is only one stop faster, it was enough to put us in a more comfortable shooting zone.

We have been using PJ100 for quite a while, so we knew that its fine grain and excellent color saturation would continue in the Supra 100 images. The nature shots clearly proved that with their fine detail and exceptional sharpness. Vivid, yet true-to- life color brought those critters to life.

The Supra 400 images of the clowns were excellent. Both the flash fill and available light images had great color saturation, fine grain and a remarkable scene range. One of the most impressive negatives was of a man in a red outfit holding red balloons. The negatives held the red color well and didn't bleed into adjoining colors as often happens. The Supra 400 images of the wind surfers proved that this film indeed possesses fine grain, excellent color saturation, and was a great all around film.

The Supra 800 images of the wind surfers, and Bonneville Dam had very fine grain for a film with this high an ISO. The exposure latitude proved to be very wide and gave us detail in areas we did not expect. Nature and sports photographers are going to love this film because it is the perfect film for use with long lenses.

We used one setting on our Nikon LS-2000 to scan images from all three emulsions and saw no color shift between emulsions. One advantage of using scanners with film tests is that you can adjust the gamma to see how the grain structure looks in the D-Max areas. We found that both Supra 100 and Supra 400 have lots of room for gamma adjustments from highlights to deep shadows. We found that with the Supra 800 you need to be careful when adjusting the shadow areas. If you try to pull more detail than is really there, you will end up with a slightly increased grain pattern.

Supra films are available in 135 format and are packaged in either 5-roll Pro Packs or 20-roll bricks. Three film speeds will cover a wide range of shooting conditions from rapidly changing lighting to long lenses and even offer the versatility of push processing. Supra is the perfect family of color negative films to meet all your commercial applications.

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