Product Report

These Product Reports are, insofar as we can humanly make them, the honest observations of a working photographer/cinematographer with years of well-grounded practical experience. Each piece of equipment reviewed has gone through several weeks of actual use in the field. This is not a "lab test," but rather a report on the suitability the quality the handling, the reliability and the ruggedness of each unit as it relates to the everyday needs of the filmmaker

by Steven T. Smith

Canon Scoopic 16M

Just about this time two years ago I reviewed the Canon Scoopic 16. Most of my comments about this 16mm hand camera were favorable. In fact, I liked the Scoopic so much I went out and bought one and have been using it almost daily since. For television news the Canon Scoopic can hardly be beat.

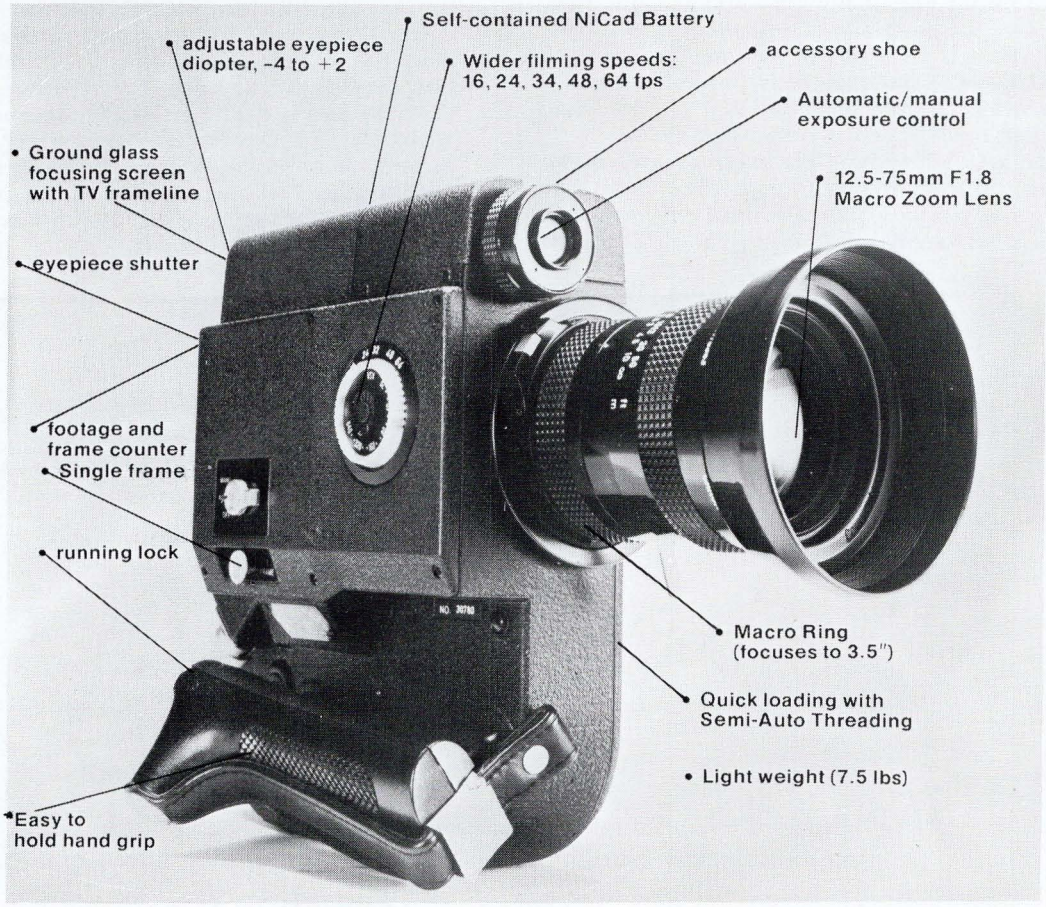
But a new camera has come along that has caught my fancy – an updated version of my trusty Scoopic. The new camera is called the Scoopic 16M – the "M" stands for "macro-zoom." The old 16 and the new 16M are very similar in size and shape. Both weigh nearly the same: old – 7 pounds, new – 8 pounds. Both have fast built-in zoom lenses, electric eye, automatic loading, and other common features. It is what the 16M has, that the 16 doesn't, that really makes the difference.

Take the lens. The 16M has a 12.5-75mm T2.5 (f1.8) 16 element zoom lens. The lens looks like any other Canon varifocal – rather massive, with heavily knurled zoom and focus rings. It accepts common 72mm filters and lens accessories (just like the old 13-76 on the old Scoopic). It will focus from infinity to three and a half feet. It will also focus from three inches to two and a half feet! How is this done? Canon calls it "macro-mechanism."

It's all sort of complicated, but it has to do with moving an element inside the lens – accomplished with the Macro-Ring at the rear of the lens. The ring is normally locked into place, permitting the use of the 12.5-75 for regular shooting. When you depress a button on the Macro-Ring you can turn the ring and all of a sudden you can shoot nice sharp close-ups without special lenses or tubes. It is all very simple to operate, and a ball to play with! You can still focus using the lens's focusing ring, but you can now also use the zoom ring to focus the lens.

The size of the image on the film is related to three things: the focal length of the lens, the position of the Macro-Ring, and the distance from the subject to the film plane. But, interestingly enough, the image size is the same at macro-wide-angle and at macro-telephoto – only the perspective is different. When focused and macro-ed all the way down, you can cover about a two and a half by three and a half-inch rectangle.

Another feature of the macro zoom is "multi-point" focusing. In the words of Canon: "When the focal length is varied through zooming for macro shooting, the focus point changes correspondingly Multi-point focusing utilizes this characteristic to give a special effect." This special effect is a shot that starts on a sharp subject in the foreground, and as you zoom, becomes sharp on a subject in the background. As long as you preset your focus prior to the shot you don't need to fool with focusing while filming. Just zoom in or out. It's really a neat effect.



The Canon Macro 12.5-75mm is superbly sharp! – at all focal lengths, and at all positions within the macro spectrum. This lens must truly be considered the state-of-the-art.

Now let's move on to the automatic exposure system. This is very similar to the EE on the old Scoopic. There is a CdS window above the lens – this is not a thru-the-lens system. The meter is cross-coupled to the iris and the camera speeds. In the AUTO position the meter will open up or stop down all by itself. It does so quickly and, I have found, quite accurately. You can switch over to MANU (manual) to override the meter. The only problem I encountered with the built-in meter was with backlit situations. Here it is better to go to a hand meter and MANU or just stop down a stop and MANU. The meter has ASA settings from 20-640. There is a needle and your *T* stops (that's right, T stops!) are in the finder frame.

Which brings us to the finder. One of my complaints about the old Scoopic was the finder image. It was bright, but very difficult to focus. In my first report I suggested a ground-glass conversion as an alternative. I tried that alternative – I had my Scoopic converted to groundglass. It was a colossal failure. I have since had it re-converted. With the groundlgass you could not only not focus the 16, you could barely see through it!

They have done something right with this Scoopic 16M. It has one of the brightest, nicest, finest grain, groundglass finders I have ever had the pleasure to view through. Wow is it super! And it even has a TV frame. I love to see when I'm shooting, and this finder lets me do just that.

Unlike the 16, the 16M's finder dims as the lens stops down, but you can still see and can still focus, and that's all that's important. I definitely like this finder – it has to be one of the absolutely best on the market! And the rubber eyecup for the finder eyepiece is much more comfortable than the old one. (Just thought you'd like to know.)

The hand-grip is more rugged than on the 16. And it also has knurlings to give you more traction. There is an adjustable handstrap to help keep you and the camera together. The run button is located on the grip. It is a push-in-and-hold to Run, let-go to Stop. You can twist it into a Run-lock if you wish. Also located on the right-hand side of the camera is the speed dial, the OFF-AUTO-MANU selector lever, an external power input, a little round knob that Canon calls the "film feed indicator," a single-frame switch, and an iris opening button.

Now for some details. The film feed indicator just lets you know if you are still running film through the camera. The single-frame switch is just that. Pull it out and you can punch off up to 4,000 frames, one-at-a-time, if you want. And the iris opening switch is really neat. Hit it and the aperture opens up to T2.5 for focusing. To stop back down just depress the Run button halfway and the meter circuit goes into operation. Very handy.

The old and the new hand Scoopics are not well-suited for tripod use, as they sit. But just screw-in a standard cable release, mount them on a tripod, and they work fine. The cable socket is in the center of the Run button on the 16M.

On the rear of the camera is a battery check. And the footage counter has been moved back there. It is a bit better counter and they have also added an adjustable frame-counter – for animation and stop-motion. Canon has put in an eyepiece open/close lever so you can keep light out of the finder and off the film when you are shooting via remote.

The battery for the 12v DC motor sits on top of the camera. It is about twice the size of those that go into the 16, but it also gives you twice the footage – up to 1600 feet. The battery charger can fully recharge a pack in three and a half hours. The charger incorporates a circuit that prevents the battery from overcharging and being damaged. Also on the top of the camera is a very large accessory shoe–for lights and such.

The left-side door now incorporates the finding system – like the Arri 16S. The mechanism is similar to the old 16's, but has been beefed up a bit. And lest we forget the bottom of the camera, there are both 1/4-20 and 3/8-16 tripod mounting threads.

It is a little harder to get the film started in the 16M, but once it gets going threading is easy. A hell of a nice new feature is an inching knob that lets you wind the film BACK if it jams. Before, you had to go into the rollers and, to clear a jam, sometimes literally tear the film out.

The M is awfully quiet compared to its predecessor. That quietness makes my job that much more easy to do – I hate to distract little old ladies while filming bridge-club activities. Maybe even Bobby Fisher would appreciate the quiet new Canon Scoopic 16M.

This is a damn nice camera. It is one of the best newsreel cameras I have ever had the pleasure to work with. It does not have 400 foot magazines or interchangeable lenses or anything else like that. It is a simple, down-to-earth, hand camera that is super to use. It does have macro-focusing and has that great viewfinder. For shooting silent newsfilm, or for general 16mm filming, this is an ideal camera. It is quite well made; its optics are sharp; it is easy and comfortable to use. What more could you want? When my neighborhood camera shop gets one in, I think I'll go down and buy it.

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