

Apples, Oranges & Passion Fruit

BY JIM ELDER

This issue of *PhotoPro* contains a comprehensive report on current camera bag choices. We made a random selection for the tests based on what we knew of popular brands and models, but did not select the candidates with any narrow, well-defined criteria. The result was an “apples and oranges” selection, which complicated the comparisons somewhat. The UPS truck also brought a bag that fit into neither the apple nor the orange crates: a Fogg.

It came from England via France. While not a “perfect” bag—there is no such bag—this one was truly unique, a thing of beauty, standing apart from the other bags. Perhaps a passion fruit?

I once had an almost perfect camera bag. All leather. It was called the “Leica Universal Carrying Case” (EBYOO) and used the “Benser System” to carry Leica, and only Leica, cameras and lenses. An assortment of fiber insert “boxes” nested vertically provided instant access to every piece of equipment and wasted not a cubic centimeter of space. There were inserts for film, filters, meters and optical finders. Other inserts were available for Visoflex housings, the special “bugeye” 35mm and 135mm lenses used on M3 and M2 Leicas and even the rare Leicamotor.

The lid opened up and out, providing visual and physical access to everything inside. On the front was a full-length pouch for odds, ends and a Leitz table pod/ball-head combination. The entire package was perhaps 12 inches long, six inches wide and seven inches deep.

Typically I carried three M2s, a

Leicamotor, 21, 28, 35 and 90mm Leitz lenses, a Spectra incident-light meter, the table pod, film and filters, lens tissue, pens, cards, model releases and a Swiss Army knife. If a flash was needed, I would add a generic leather pouch to the shoulder strap, stuffed with a folding flash gun and a carton of M3 bulbs.

That was all I carried for most assignments. An extreme example was a two week stint photographing forest fire fighters in the Idaho pan-



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handle/western Montana region for *Life* magazine. That little Leica case and a surplus gas mask bag stuffed with film were all I packed and all I needed. After 14 days of smoke and soot, the leather case still smelled and felt like leather.

I experienced a nostalgia attack when I opened the box containing the Fogg London “Latitude” bag. Genuine leather straps, brass hardware and understated elegance. But such a bag must surely be a “boutique” item of limited practical use. Most likely it would be too heavy. Wrong on both counts.

Fogg bags are handmade by former Londoners Nigel Fogg and bee berman (that’s the way she writes her name) in southwest France. Veteran professionals, including *London Daily Express* chief photographer John Downing, have contributed design expertise to various Fogg models.

The exterior material is 22 ounce cotton drill, rubberized on the backside to shed water. Lining is a light cotton canvas that does not collect dust. Industrial grade touch fasteners hold the internal dividers and serves as quick closures for the four pocket flaps and the top overflap. More secure fastening is provided by a brass stud/leather strap design—solid but easy to open and close.

There are also touch fastener “open position” retainers to prevent the generously sized overflap from dropping to the ground. Storage in the overflap is “limited” to flat items that will not cause discomfort when working with it open and hanging between the bag and one’s hip.

“Limited” is not the best word choice. The design includes an 8x13” pocket on the top and three more under the flap—more than enough storage for layouts, passports, tickets, model releases, pens and mini flashlights. Another flat storage compartment on the backside adds to “office space” but discourages hip hazard equipment. Leather pod straps and waiststrap loops are standard.

The inner cover zips closed in the center, but the unique design provides a snap down, out of the way mode for this cover. The result is no compromise of visual or physical access to the camera equipment

inside. In there, simple but effective dividers allow horizontal, “cradle” or vertical storage of cameras and lenses. Infinite combinations of cameras and lenses can be carried in this $13\frac{3}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{5}{8}$ inch space.

For example, I loaded three motor bodies attached to short, medium and long zoom lenses on “top,” with a Widelux and small flash below. Two generous (removable) end and two (fixed) front pockets carried meters, film, tape, air can, knife, filters, flashlight and sunglasses. Between the main cargo area and the front pockets is a large (10x14x2”) zipper compartment with two internal pockets. Everything that will not fit anywhere else can go there, including a laptop computer if you are strong enough to pack that much weight.

Weight won’t threaten the Fogg strap and handle systems. The wide cotton webbing shoulder strap, with brass adjustment hardware, is looped through one inch webbing securely attached to the main bag. These “interim” loops allow strap “hang angle” adjustment, which in turn promotes physical comfort. Similar straps serve as carry handles, yet snap down on each side, out of the way when not needed.

I almost missed three other “hidey-holes.” Discreet touch fastener strips—so discreet they look like sewn seams—provide access to the thin but effective closed cell padding material in the back, inner front and outer front panels. A perfect place to stash cash, traveler’s checks or personal documents, but if someone steals your bag, trouble. If I owned a Fogg, however, I’d never let it out of my sight.

Nigel and bee make a few other models, some smaller and two larger, but not very many of any. All models are available, when available, in olive, black and sand fabric colors with chestnut leather and in all black. The importer is London Imports Ltd., 1344 Broadway, Suite 210, Hewlett, NY 11557. They can supply a list (a very short list) of retail outlets. As for cost, it’s like the old joke about the man looking at a yacht: “If you have to ask, you can’t afford it.”

Or can you? Some products transcend economic logic. When form and function merge, metamorphosize into art and include elegant utility, rationalized self-indulgence might override prudence. Sometimes we need a serving of passion fruit. 