



On test

Leica S Typ 007



 MURRAY LAIDLAW

It sounds like a mission for Bond; just two days to test the new Leica S Typ 007. So will Murray Laidlaw be shaken or stirred?

I've been a fan of the Leica S system since the original S2 was introduced back in 2008. Seven years ago, the concept of a medium-format sensor in a pro DSLR-sized body was novel and appealing, even if it did carry a hefty price premium, but subsequent launches like the Nikon D810 and, most recently, the Canon EOS 5DS/R have raised the megapixel bar. Even so, the 30x45mm sensor in the Leica is still significantly larger than the full-frame offerings.

Along with the sensor size, some other things remain the same from the original; the build quality and finish are excellent as you would expect from Leica. The body and lenses have a number of seals to prevent the penetration of moisture or dust, and the camera feels reassuringly solid in the hand, thanks in no small part to its primarily magnesium construction.

This latest version was announced at Photokina 2014 and was officially launched in August this year having

been significantly improved since the prototype shown in Germany. The price has also been reduced. From the front it looks identical to its predecessor, the 006, except that the bayonet mount is now made of stainless steel for greater durability.

A quick glance at the top-plate reveals a number of changes. The most striking is the absence of any shutter speed markings on the selector dial and the two small buttons located just behind it. These are the live ▶

view and video recording buttons. The information panel has also been improved, increasing in size and shape to accommodate additional information and is now described as a 'transflective display' replacing the previous model's smaller rectangular OLED. However this is now monochrome; it used to be colour. On the other side of the prism housing, the GPS antenna has a flat glass surface to improve signal performance. These then are the only visible changes, everything else is hidden inside.

CCD out, CMOS in

The new sensor is the big one, upgrading from a 37.5-megapixel CCD offering to a 37.5-megapixel CMOS item. Leica remains tight-lipped about the origin of the new sensor, all the company will say is that it's not made by Sony who supply both Hasselblad and Phase One.

The CMOS sensor is coupled with the improved Maestro II image processor. Images are processed far quicker than before, although the original Maestro processor wasn't exactly slow. The increase in speed is best demonstrated by the higher burst speed of 3.5 frames-per-second handled competently by the 2GB buffer.

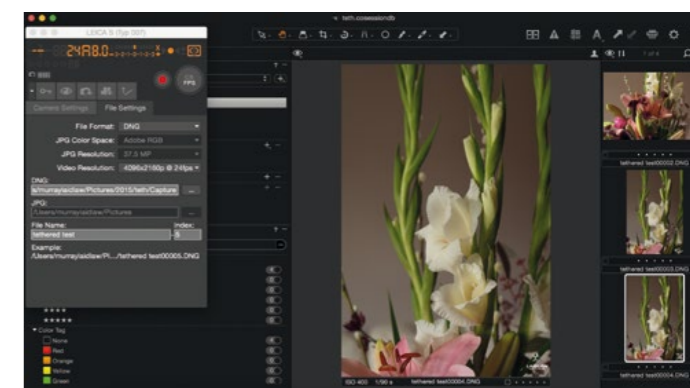
There are a couple of other things you need to know; the live view is very, very good and you can shoot in this mode. The 4K video is also very impressive. Shooting at 3.5 frames-per-second or high-resolution video puts additional stress on the focal plane shutter, but the new model has an increased service life of at least 150,000 cycles according to Leica. There is also a new damper mechanism to reduce vibration when the mirror returns to position and although this is subtle, it provides a noticeable improvement in operation. Finally, like all CMOS sensors the ISO range is extended, this new sensor will go to 12,500, the original Leica S2 CCD stretched to just 1,250.

The autofocus system in the Leica S (Typ 006) was pretty good, but this is amazingly fast and accurate. It features what Leica describes as a predictive autofocus mode. In simple terms the camera registers the motion of the subject and determines the distance at the moment of exposure. At f/8 on the 180mm lens over a distance of around 20m I achieved one out of three images acceptably sharp of a couple walking towards me. In live view mode it is possible to select the point of focus on

RIGHT: Shooting at ISO 100 with a fixed 70mm Summarit-S lens attached delivers impressive image quality from the 30x45mm sensor.



RIGHT: Image Shuttle provides tethered control for the S (Typ 007) with Lightroom or Capture One Pro.



the LCD screen using the toggle control, however you can only really do this when the camera is tripod mounted.

Over the years the resolution of three-inch TFT LCD has been upgraded and on the Leica S (Typ 007), it has been increased to 921,600 pixels, which is almost double the original back in 2010. The glass is now Corning Gorilla glass, which is both tougher than before and scratch resistant.

In keeping with current trends, the Leica S (Typ 007) has the option of GPS tagging in the EXIF data and, based on the co-ordinates that are stored in Adobe Photoshop or Lightroom, can display precise location information on a map if required. This is made possible by the built-in GPS module. More useful perhaps is that by using the data, the location place name can be added to search keys for archived photos. What is clever is that the new dual-axis position sensor displays the precise

horizontal and vertical orientation in the viewfinder, which allows you to align the subject accurately.

Going soft

There are also big improvements in the Image Shuttle software. This provides an interface to control the camera in tethered mode in Lightroom or by using a 'hot folder' with Capture One Pro. The previous version was a bit of a trial to use, but version 3 – in beta at the moment – is much better. The window is smaller, less prone to crashing and altogether more user-friendly. It worked well with Lightroom after the supplied plug-in was installed.

The camera software has also been rewritten to match the format of the M series cameras. I don't have any other Leica cameras but picking the new camera up for the first time it's easy and quick to navigate through the menus. These are well structured and

easy to follow and the selected settings are clearly displayed on the top-plate LCD. Within the shooting menu it is possible to change all the parameters you would expect, and in playback mode information about the shot is clearly displayed around the edges of the frame for a few seconds before sliding out of view to reveal the full image. Checking sharpness on the resulting files is easy – you can zoom to 100% by pressing the aperture selection wheel on the back and then navigate the image using the toggle button.

A Leica S app is now available to download from iTunes and, in combination with the latest version of iOS, the camera's integrated Wi-Fi will enable remote control of the camera and viewing of images both in live view and after capture. Both aspects of this work well, particularly on the iPad.

The Leica S has always been a user-friendly camera but the latest model



IMAGE: Autofocusing is greatly improved over the previous model, while the CMOS sensor delivers images packed with vibrant colour

“THE BUILD QUALITY OF THE S (TYP 007) IS IMPECCABLE BUT IT ALSO HANDLES WELL”

builds on this making it a pleasure to shoot with. The DSLR profile makes it easy to hold, and shooting in portrait format is a breeze. One of the things that I liked immediately on this camera was the use of keys around the LCD on the back rather than a wheel and centre button and I'm pleased to see Leica has retained this arrangement on the 007. Naturally these keys can be programmed as can the function button on the front of the camera.

The battery has been replaced and although it remains the same size and shape as in earlier models, the older batteries are not compatible with the Leica S (Typ 007). I assume the new version has an increased power capacity as both live view and shooting video will increase the drain on the battery.

All medium-format producers now offer a CMOS sensor so this was a natural upgrade for Leica, the inclusion of video is a bonus but it's not a reason to buy, at least not for me. The stand-out features are the extended ISO range, the excellent live view and the improvements in software both in-camera and in Image Shuttle 3.

Verdict

Leica has certainly ticked some key boxes, both in terms of usability and functionality. As you'd expect, the build quality of the Leica S (Typ 007) is impeccable – it's built to last and beautifully put together – but it also handles well. In terms of speed of use, it may not quite be DSLR frame rate, but it's not too far behind and the autofocus is fast and accurate. The impressive live view function, built-in GPS and 4K video enhance its overall appeal, while the software improvements are most welcome.

In the world of DSLR photography with ever-increasing pixel numbers the Leica might appear to offer poor value, it's not the jump in quality it once was. The resolution is, of course, more than enough and when associated with a larger sensor and Leica glass you can be assured of quality. Leica equipment has always been expensive but this never has been, nor ever should be, a consideration with Leica. If you want to shoot medium-format but would prefer the DSLR body shape, this may be the camera for you. [N](#)

SPECIFICATIONS

STREET PRICE £12,900 body only

RESOLUTION 37.5 megapixels

SENSOR SIZE 30x45mm (Leica Pro format)

ISO RANGE 100-12,500

PROCESSOR Leica Maestro II

AF MODES Single, predictive, manual

EXPOSURE MODES Program (P), shutter-priority (T), aperture-priority (A), manual (M)

METERING MODES Multi-field, spot, centre-weighted

EXPOSURE COMPENSATION +/-3EV in ½ stop steps

EXPOSURE BRACKETING 3 or 5 exposures in ½, 1, 2 or 3 stops

DRIVE MODES Single, continuous up to 3.5fps, interval, self-timer (2 and 12 seconds)

SHUTTER SPEED RANGE 60secs-1/4000sec

FLASH SYNC 1/250sec

VIDEO Full HD: 1920x1080p, 4K 4096x2160p; 24, 25, 30fps, 4K: 24fps

REAR LCD 3in TFT LCD, 921,600 pixels

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD) 160x80x120mm

WEIGHT 1260g without battery

CONTACT uk.leica-camera.com

VERDICT

FEATURES
4.5/5

HANDLING
4/5

IMAGE
QUALITY
5/5

OVERALL
4.5/5