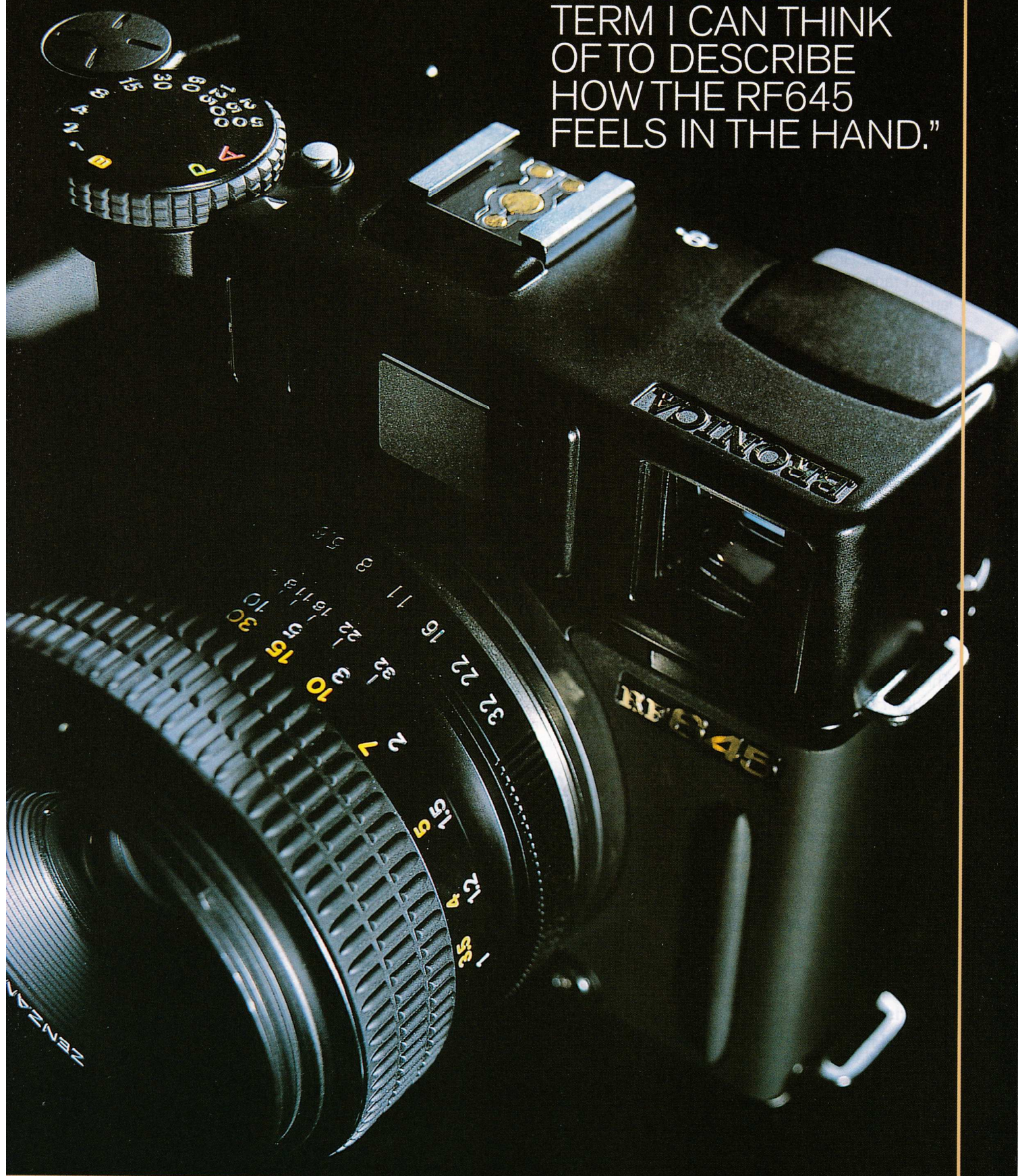


"GORGEOUS.  
THAT'S THE BEST  
TERM I CAN THINK  
OF TO DESCRIBE  
HOW THE RF645  
FEELS IN THE HAND."





# TESTED

BRONICA RF645 £1500

PHOTOGRAPHIC GEAR  
REVIEWED AND RATED IN  
PP'S COMPREHENSIVE  
TESTED SECTION

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# BRONICA-ITIS

The Bronica RF645 has no autofocus, TTL metering or motorwind and isn't digital. Daniel Lezano tests a new 6x4.5cm medium-format rangefinder which is destined for great success

HERE IS LITTLE doubt that if it wasn't for the size and cost of the cameras, medium-format would be the number one choice for most photographers, with 35mm cameras being consigned to the happy snapper. A combination of the larger format size of 120 film and high quality optics provides far superior quality, which is why medium-format is the standard choice of kit for most professional photographers.

However, over the years a number of medium-format cameras have appeared which approach the portability of 35mm, including models from Fuji and Mamiya. The Bronica RF645 now joins this elite group.

As its name suggests, the Bronica shoots

6x4.5cm images allowing 16 exposures on 120 film and 32 on 220. It's not the first compact 645 on the market, as Fuji has several models in its range (the Fuji GA645Zi is also tested in this issue).

Where the Bronica holds a major advantage is that it boasts interchangeable lenses. Three lenses will be available at the time of launch, not an extensive choice I'll agree, but enough to keep the landscape photographer happy for now at least.

GORGEOUS. THAT'S THE BEST TERM I can think of to describe how the RF645 feels in the hand. It boasts a solidity that puts the likes of the Fuji in the shade.

Build quality is comparable, in fact, to a semi-pro 35mm SLR. The main body and front facing are die cast, the bottom plate is made of brass while the upper housing, in which the viewfinder is set, and the integrated rangefinder housing is made of aluminium alloy.





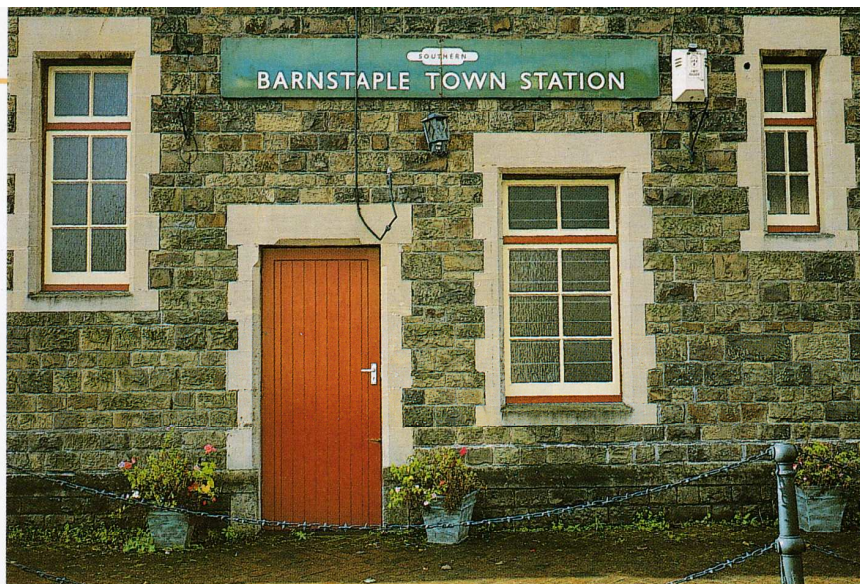
# TESTED



## SPECIFICATION BRONICA RF645

**PRICE:** £1500 with 65mm f/4; £1150 body only  
**TYPE:** 6x4.5cm coupled rangefinder with interchangeable lenses  
**LENS MOUNT:** RF645 mount  
**FOCUSING:** Manual helical system  
**TTL METERING:** Five-segment centre-weighted average metering  
**EXPOSURE MODES:** Program AE, aperture-priority AE and metered manual modes  
**VIEWFINDER:** Real image, dual image superimposing rangefinder. 0.6x magnification  
**FILM TRANSPORT:** Film winding crank; one full stroke or ratcheted winding action  
**SHUTTER:** Manual mode 1sec-1/500sec in full stops; aperture-priority 8secs-1/500sec in 1/2 stops; program 8secs to 1/750sec in half-stops. Flash synchronisation at all shutter speeds  
**POWER:** Two 3v CR2 lithium batteries.  
**DIMENSIONS:** 145.6x107.3x64mm  
**WEIGHT:** 810g  
**DISTRIBUTORS:** Introphoto, Priors Way, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 2HR.  
 Phone 01628 674411; fax 01628 771055

THE BIG TEST



Hand-held, this shot was taken at 1/30sec with the lens wide open and shows no shake. The bright sky just outside the image area didn't fool the meter.

The camera handles well with the large grip providing a firm and comfortable hold. All the controls are well spaced out, decent in size and clearly marked.

The viewfinder provides an upright view rather than a landscape format. It's odd at first, but after a while you get used to it. The image is bright and clear and using the rangefinder to focus is easy. The left side has a comprehensive information display which you may find obscured if you're a left-eyed viewer like me.

A large dial on the top-plate allows selection of the exposure modes and shutter speeds with a locking mechanism preventing accidental use. By setting the program mode the exposure system is controlled completely by the camera, so the Bronica essentially becomes a 645 point-and-shooter! This is fine for snapshots but you're more likely to want to take control for other shots. Select A for aperture-priority or, for complete control, set a shutter speed and use the camera in manual.

The sensor for the exposure system is found behind a window above the lens. It's a five-segment centre-weighted metering system which adjusts the spread of sensitivity according to which lens is fitted.

There's no integral flash but Bronica has produced a dinky gun. It offers auto and manual control with an LCD giving plenty of data including a flash distance guide.

Other features to note are a PC socket, self-timer, multiple exposure facility and cable release socket. An innovative facility is the light-shielding curtain which prevents light from fogging the film when you change lenses. It slides up into place as you twist the lens off the mount with the curtain reaching full shielding just before the lens is completely removed.

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT THE compact size of this camera makes it very attractive to the outdoor photographer keen to keep the weight of the kit to a minimum.

However, you should be aware of a couple of points. The first is that rangefinder cameras lack a depth-of-field preview. Fortunately, the RF645 lenses boast a comprehensive hyperfocal scale, so you should be able to maximise depth-of-field by using hyperfocal focusing.

The second is that the upright format means landscape photographers will forever be holding the camera sideways so watch out for wonky horizons. There's no built-in spirit level to help here.

There's little to complain about the handling. The RF645 is comfortable to hold and the leaf shutter generates virtually no vibration. The shutter is very quiet and there's no motorwind to worry about and the film wind-on is smooth.

## RF645 ACCESSORIES

Introduced with the camera are three lenses and a flashgun:

	RF 45mm f/4 £700 (with viewfinder)	RF 65mm f/4 £500	RF 135mm f/4.5 £650
<b>35mm EQUIVALENT</b>	28mm	40mm	80mm
<b>APERTURE RANGE</b>	f/4-32	f/4-32	f/4.5-32
<b>LENS CONSTRUCTION</b>	Seven elements in five groups	Six elements in four groups	Six elements in five groups
<b>MINIMUM FOCUS</b>	1m	1m	1.8m
<b>FILTER SIZE</b>	58mm	58mm	62mm
<b>WEIGHT</b>	330g	300g	540g



<b>RF645 Speedlight</b> £300	
<b>GUIDE NUMBER</b>	20 (ISO 100, m)
<b>COVERAGE</b>	Settings for 45mm & 65mm
<b>POWER</b>	Two AA batteries
<b>SIZE</b>	75x53.6x60.3mm
<b>WEIGHT</b>	110g





Shooting into the light runs the risk of gross underexposure and lens flare. The RF645 exhibits neither, producing the exact result hoped for.

The lack of vibration also means that hand-holding at slow speeds needn't mean camera shake. We found it possible to take blur-free hand-held images at 1/30sec.

But nothing is perfect, including the RF645. The main problem we discovered was that the viewfinder display was almost impossible to see in bright sunlight. In fact, I was often having to take an exposure lock and facing away from the sun to check the reading. Also, the exposure compensation dial, located on the centre of the camera's rear, can sometimes be easily moved so keep an eye out for this.

PP was lucky enough to test the first sample of the RF645 in the UK along with the 65mm f/4 lens. It certainly proved itself to be a sharp lens with high sharpness evident across the frame.

The centre-weighted average metering system also proves itself to deliver consistent results, even in situations showing a wide contrast range.



This shot was taken in aperture-priority at f/11 and shows high sharpness. It's another example of the accurate meter getting it right again.

## PERSONAL VIEW



I am unashamedly a rangefinder camera fan so you'd be right in thinking I'm biased, but the Bronica RF645 had an instant and obvious appeal. That, of course, would count for

nothing if it handled like cold rice pudding which, I'm delighted to report, wasn't the case.

So, what do I like about it? Well, in two words - its simplicity. You load the thing, then frame up, focus and press the button.

What else do I like? Exposures are spot on, it has got a quiet, vibration-free shutter and focusing is easy. I thought the metering might be suspect (due to past experiences with non-TTL meters being influenced by bright skies), but on three rolls I found no cause for concern.

I did, however, pick up on a few handling niggles. Riding around on a mountain bike I managed to move the exposure compensation control. Luckily, each time I spotted what had happened and corrected it and there is a warning in the viewfinder. This brings me to another handling point. For me, the viewfinder info is awkward to see in bright light and could have been better placed across the bottom.

All in all, though, I liked the Bronica RF645. It gives top quality shots and I can recommend it to any photographer on the move who desires rollfilm quality without the bulk.

## VERDICT

The Bronica RF645 is set to win many friends. Its size makes it an ideal companion for those wanting medium-format quality from an outfit similar in size to a 35mm SLR. For those not looking to build up a huge system, the Bronica could be the ideal choice. It represents better value than the Fuji but faces stiff competition from the Mamiya.

Like all cameras of its type, it suffers from the limitation of a lack of system back-up. Plus its design makes it more suitable for outdoor use than in a studio. But if you can live with these constraints, you'll have a camera with exquisite handling that delivers superb results.

### WHAT'S GOOD

- ✓ Build quality and handling
- ✓ 6x4.5cm format images
- ✓ Excellent results

### WHAT'S BAD

- ✗ Limited system back-up - especially lenses
- ✗ Can't see viewfinder display when facing sun

HANDLING 8/10

FEATURES 7/10

PERFORMANCE 9/10

OVERALL 8/10