

AP TEST BRONICA SQ-B 6X6cm MEDIUM FORMAT CAMERA • £1600 IN KIT • FULL MANUAL OPERATION • COMES

# Basic Instinct



David Tarn was recently introduced to his first ever Bronica – the budget-priced SQ-B. He took it out and about in Yorkshire for a field test

**IRONICALLY, THE BRONICA SQ-B doesn't have a B setting on it. Every camera I have ever owned had a B setting. 'I didn't get where I am today by using cameras without B settings.' It is good having Reggie Perrin back on the box, isn't it? Even if it sadly lacks Reggie himself. Still, enough of this diversion and back to the review, eh?**

The camera does have shutter speeds ranging from eight seconds to a mechanical 1/500sec, which will work even without a battery. This should cover most photographic needs. I am somewhat baffled, though, by the omission of a B setting. You can use T settings if you buy additional lenses, anything

other than the standard Zen-zanon PS/B 80mm f/2.8 that comes with the kit. Otherwise, the only way to obtain an exposure longer than eight seconds is to utilise the camera's multiple exposure facility.

Anyone who has read a few of my reviews will know I have a preference for cameras like this one – uncomplicated, mainly manual and capable of providing large negatives. In short, cameras that have not advanced too much since the Box Brownie. In this particular case, for Bronica, this is a retro step – it has taken a more advanced camera, the SQ-Ai (fuel-injected, is it?) and reduced the spec to make a more B for Basic camera. This camera is for real hands-on photography. 'I



not work when attached to the SQ-B.

So unless you already own an SQ-Ai, or intend getting one, you may as well stick to the Finder S, which also has no meter. A waistlevel finder comes with the camera as standard.

didn't get where I am today without learning photography with an all-manual camera.'

## FOCUSING

IF YOU HAVE BEEN used to a camera that spoon-feeds any user with autofocus, autoexposure in umpteen modes, DX coded film and a motordrive, once you get your hands on the SQ-B you'll realise you have to start taking part in your picture-taking.

One thing you will need in addition to the camera is a separate means of determining exposure – the meter is just one of the things Bronica decided to ditch when stripping down the SQ-Ai. The best method is a handheld meter which will give you incident readings. But if you own another camera, you could use the TTL system on that to calculate exposures. Be sure the camera is giving the correct exposure for film the same speed as you have loaded in your Bronica.

Bronica makes a number of prism finders for the SQ-Ai – all of them will fit the SQ-B – and several have built-in meters but, unfortunately, these meters will

I have no experience of Bronicas – I confess I've never owned one – and, until now, I've never had one for review. Talking to other photographers, I have come to the conclusion that brand loyalty is very strong. Once happy with a particular make of camera, it becomes the best – nothing can beat it. This is perhaps explained by the fact that once you have bought into a system – particularly in medium format – you are more or less stuck with it, because to change would be horrendously expensive.

The Bronica, though, is very well built and of such a high quality that I can understand this make having some very loyal fans if this is a typical example of its work.

Ironically, the SQ-B also comes with the SQ-Ai instruction manual, presumably because the main changes are only the lack of aperture priority and the aforementioned loss of metering. To atone somewhat, there's – thankfully – the compatibility with the rest of



All cranks, controls and settings are manual and this shows you the finder view



WITH 80mm F/2.8 ZENZANON LENS AS STANDARD



the Bronica S and PS Zenzanon lenses, close-up attachments, SQ and SQi film backs, S and SQi prisms, the speed grip and the entire range of Bronica focusing screens.

### REFLEX MIRRORS

A MEDIUM FORMAT SLR camera needs a much larger reflex mirror than its 35mm counterpart. This large sheet of glass flapping about inside the camera can cause noticeable vibration, resulting in unsharp pictures, especially at slow shutter speeds. The simple solution is a mirror lock-up facility.

The Bronica incorporates such a facility, but it is badly designed and over-complicated. I can't really explain that statement without reference to another camera – my own. On my camera I turn a lever and the mirror is up and out of the way until I turn the lever back down. I can take as many or as few pictures as I want in this mode or I can change my mind, take no pictures at all and just put the mirror back down for normal viewing.

The Bronica has three settings for the mirror-up switch. Normal means the mirror is down for viewing; single locks the mirror for one frame only; and continuous keeps the camera in mirror-up mode until you've reset it.

The main problem I had with the Bronica mirror-up design was that once you have put the mirror up in either single or continuous mode, there is no way to put it back down again without firing the shutter. You can avoid losing a frame of film by using the multi-exposure switch and the lens cap or by taking the back off but why should such a simple device be so complex? Bit of a cock-up on the design front there, as far as I'm concerned!

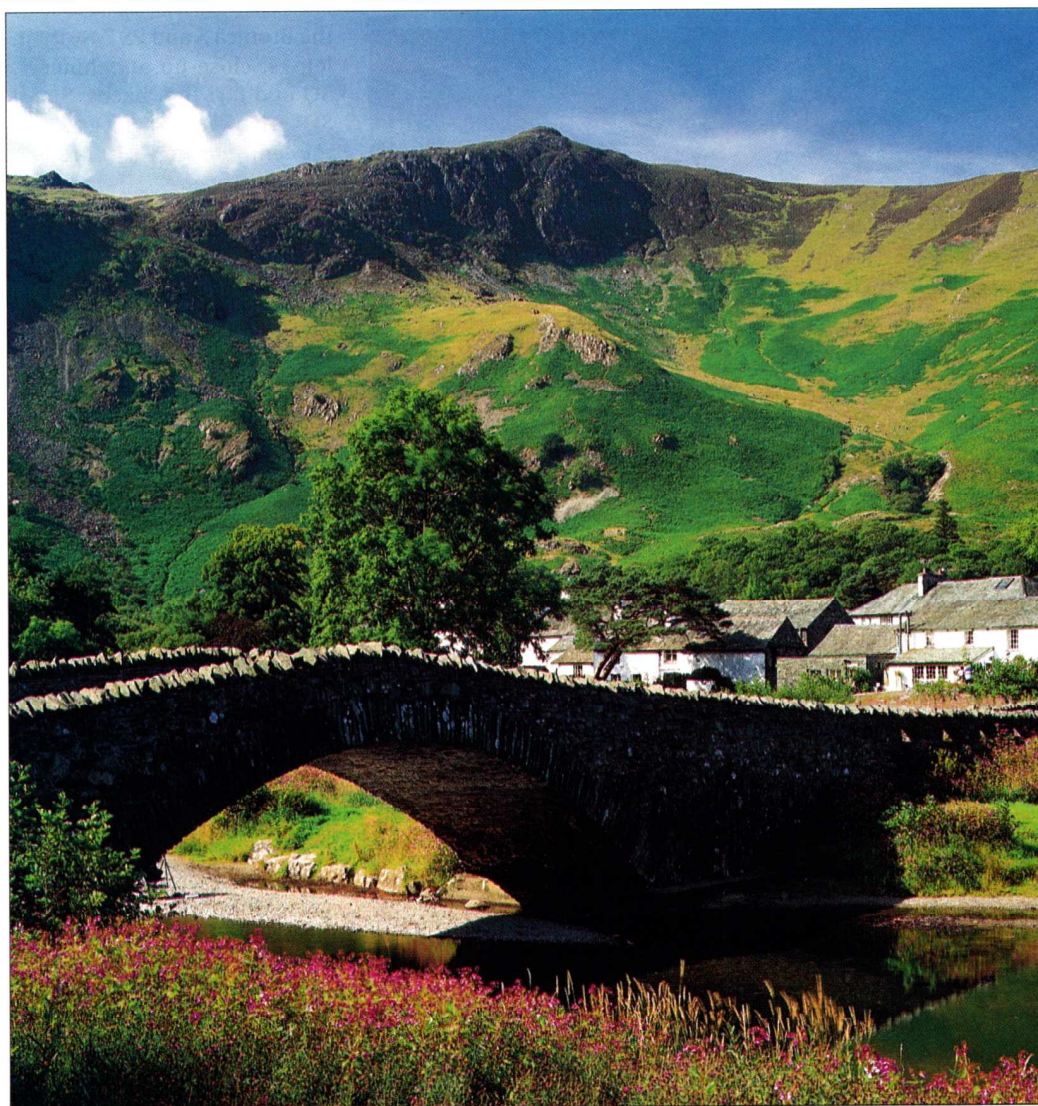
### MODULAR CONSTRUCTION

LIKE MOST MEDIUM FORMAT models, the whole camera is modular in construction and comes apart or fixes together with reassuring firmness. There

**Left and above left:** These two shots show the resolution quality of the standard 80mm f/2.8 Zenzanon lens



## AP TEST BRONICA SQ-B



### DATA FILE BRONICA SQ-B

**Camera:** Bronica SQ-B  
**Country of origin:** Japan  
**Format:** 6x6cm on 120 rollfilm  
**Price:** £1599 for kit which includes camera body, waistlevel finder, 80mm f/2.8 Zenzanon lens and 120 film back  
**Non-standard lens:** 40mm f/2.8 (equivalent to 28mm in 35mm format)

### SHUTTER

**Type:** in-lens leaf shutter  
**Speeds:** 8-1/500sec – no B or T  
**Flash sync:** all speeds  
**Mechanical:** 1/500sec  
**Self-timer:** no

### EXPOSURE

**Modes:** manual only  
**Metering:** none  
**Film speed range:** none on camera or back

### VIEWFINDER

**Type:** interchangeable waistlevel finder with magnifier  
**Magnification:** 1x  
**Information:** battery check

### OTHER FEATURES

**Film transport:** manual hand crank – motordrive will not attach  
**Multiple exposure:** yes  
**Mirror up:** yes  
**Power supply:** 1x6V battery



**Above and top:** Tricky metering situations, such as large sky areas or variable lighting, can't be metered in-camera – the SQ-B has no meter! You must use a handheld meter or a TTL system from another camera

is nowhere to put the dark slide once you take it out – a simple slot somewhere else on the camera body or back is all that is needed and it would make life so much easier. But no, you're left looking for somewhere to put it before you can take a picture and searching everywhere to find the damn thing again after you have taken one. At least, I am.

Film loading is pretty standard for a medium format camera. There is no need to fully remove the back; you just open it by squeezing the back-cover release buttons towards each other. You can then remove the film holder and thread a new film on to the spool. When the arrow on the film aligns with the one on the holder, close the camera back and wind on to frame one.

Following my two most recent reviews of medium format cameras, I was very pleased

to find that the Bronica has a cable release socket. It's in an odd place, on the side of the camera, but at least it's got one.

There is an impressive range of additional lenses available from Bronica, ranging from a super-wide 40mm to a super-priced £8000 500mm. All lenses are leaf-shutter design, so flash sync is at all speeds – super news for social photographers wanting fill-in flash. Wicked!



**The modular set-up of the SQ-B** comprises lens, camera body, waistlevel finder and 120 film back



## VERDICT

THE CAMERA IS GREAT in the value-for-money department: 'I didn't get where I am today without knowing great value for money when I see it.' There isn't another serious 6x6cm camera available new for under £1600, so if you're after square format, check this camera out. It's a lot less money than either the cheapest Hasselblad or Rolleiflex, and those savings continue when you start buying lenses. No, its only serious rival is its better-specified big brother: Bronica's SQ-Ai.

**Below:** The square 6x6cm format lends itself to 'half and half' sky and land compositions, such as this high-point view of a farm on the Yorkshire Moors

**Right:** The format is also ideal for cropping, as is done here to show this cone tree growing on the North Yorkshire Moors

