

# An Owner's Review of Mamiya 645AFD

by **Spencer Lookabaugh**  
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This is more or less the camera that started film photography for me. Since developing an appreciation for [Joey L](#)'s work, I wanted to shoot medium format. The focus falloff and rendering was just so surreal compared to full-frame and crop-sensor cameras that I had been shooting with. Unfortunately, the cost of entry was a little steep for a digital back. After doing some research I stumbled upon film 645 cameras. And so it began.

Now that was a few years ago. As someone that wasn't getting paid to shoot at the time, even the 645AF, the cheapest of the lot, was out of my price range. I ended up buying a beat up Mamiya 645 Super instead. Coupled with a decently clean 80mm lens, I started shooting like a madman. I learned that film was a little more difficult to work with that I had originally imagined and the camera got shelved for a while. The next few times I picked it up, the motor drive withered away and I unfortunately had no other way to advance the film. I searched the



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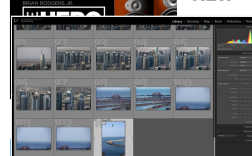


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Finally, I started using digital backs for select projects here and t  
was shooting on the current (at the time) [645DF+](#) and was in love with  
medium format again. But not every job required it and I wasn't about  
to buy one for personal work. And again, I found myself shopping for  
another film camera. I decided that for digital back integration and  
overall ease of use, I was going to ante up and buy an AF model 645.

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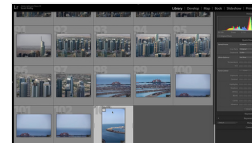
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It's actually not a hard decision even though there are four to choose from. After doing a bit of research, I found that the biggest difference between the 645AF, 645AFD, 645AFD II, and 645AFD III is digital back compatibility. The newer the camera, the newer the back you can use on it. Considering the backs that I had been using would fit an AFD, I saved a few hundred dollars and went with it. The slightly improved autofocus of the newer models wasn't a huge factor for me considering it's mostly a portrait camera.

After shooting with it for a few months I have few bad things to say, and those are nitpicks. The camera itself is built pretty well, it's plastic on the outside but it doesn't have much flex to it so it feels solid in your hands. Compared to any full-frame DSLR, the viewfinder is massive, and that helps tremendously for manual focus and composition considering I wear glasses. The button layout is fairly simple and nearly identical to the digital 645DF and DF+ bodies. Aperture and shutter speed get their own dials, and ISO is set on the back with an annoyingly unresponsive set of up and down arrows. The mode dial and the meter are about the same as any digital camera as well. Overall, operation is easy if you've used any digital camera with interchangeable lenses.



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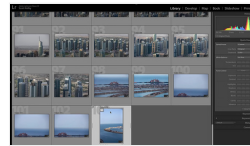
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Let's talk about image quality. While this is mostly up to the film that you put through it, the lenses play a part in your final result. With film cameras, the lenses really do make or break a system as there are often few and in the world of medium format, no third-party brands make lenses. I have had no problem with any of Mamiya's lenses. The standard 80mm (50mm in full frame terms) is tack sharp from f/2.8 as is the 45mm (28mm), and these are my main lenses. Lenses up to 300mm are available for sports (good luck with the autofocus) and portrait work. For those looking for the maximum resolution, slow





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Autofocus is definitely a touchy subject for this camera. You have two modes: continuous and single, and they both run off of a single autofocus point in the center of the frame. The continuous mode is downright awful and unusable, but single is snappy given enough light. In darker situations, you'll want to manual focus. Only having a center point means a lot of focusing and recomposing. It doesn't bother me, but I know many people have issues with it.

I will address the elephant in the room: negative size. For digital shooters, the rendering of 645 film is pretty wild. I know it was for me initially. For more serious film shooters, however, it's often seen as the professionals' 35mm in that the negatives are tiny in comparison to 6x7, 6x9, and large format systems. I totally get it, it is the most economical though with 16 frames a roll versus 8 a roll (ridiculous right?) from my Fuji GSW690 that spits out monstrous 6x9 negatives. Why then would I not stick to 6x7 and larger for a relatively similarly priced camera? Well it doesn't make a ton of sense but the somewhat smaller camera (compared to the RZ67 I used to own or the Pentax 67), more shots per roll, and a similar look to medium-format digital come together to give me reason enough to shoot this at every shoot alongside my [X-Pro2](#).



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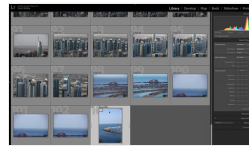
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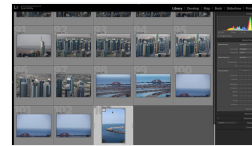
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The Mamiya 645AFD and its siblings are workhorses of cameras. You can't really go wrong with buying one. The lenses are readily available online, they're still repairable by a number of facilities around the U.S.A. (and most likely the rest of the world but I've never had to look), and the images are downright gorgeous. If you're thinking about getting one, I would suggest it over any other 645 camera for its versatility and price. It certainly isn't perfect, but it gets the job done and doesn't cause me any hassle and that's a good camera in my book.

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*Spencer Lookabaugh is a lifestyle and portrait photographer located in Columbus, Ohio, as well as an employee of Midwest Photo Exchange. He is a firm believer in printing, shooting film and digital, and the power of photography. He also shoots landscape work in his spare time.*

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