

Which of the two Caroline Hirsches has the expensive Linhof monopod, and which is using an improved replica at half the price?



by HERBERT KEPPLER



The only thing more unfortunate about the Monomatic-stativ monopod than its \$182.50 price tag was that Linhof discontinued making it.

Hadn't I been embarrassed enough—raving about and recommending a near-\$200 monopod in my March 1999 column—without having Linhof pull the rug out from under my one foot, so to speak? Alas, I had been searching for years for the maker of this once-seen, long-remembered, elusive 11-ounce high-precision monopod, that automatically extends from 14 inches to anywhere between 25½ and 58 inches in a matter of seconds and folds as swiftly. Just as I'd found at last that the maker was Linhof, the monopod was about to disappear.

(For those of you who may not remember why I think a monopod is a great aid and why the Linhof is a great monopod, I've condensed what I'd written in the March 1999 "SLR." See box on following page.)

Adorama to my rescue! In Europe, Adorama had found a mysterious cache of Linhof monopods and put them on sale here. But the cache was quickly emptied. Linhof then announced that since no parts were available to assemble new monopods, the Monomatic-stativ was history.

"Maybe we should make our own," someone suggested at Adorama. They decided to do just that.

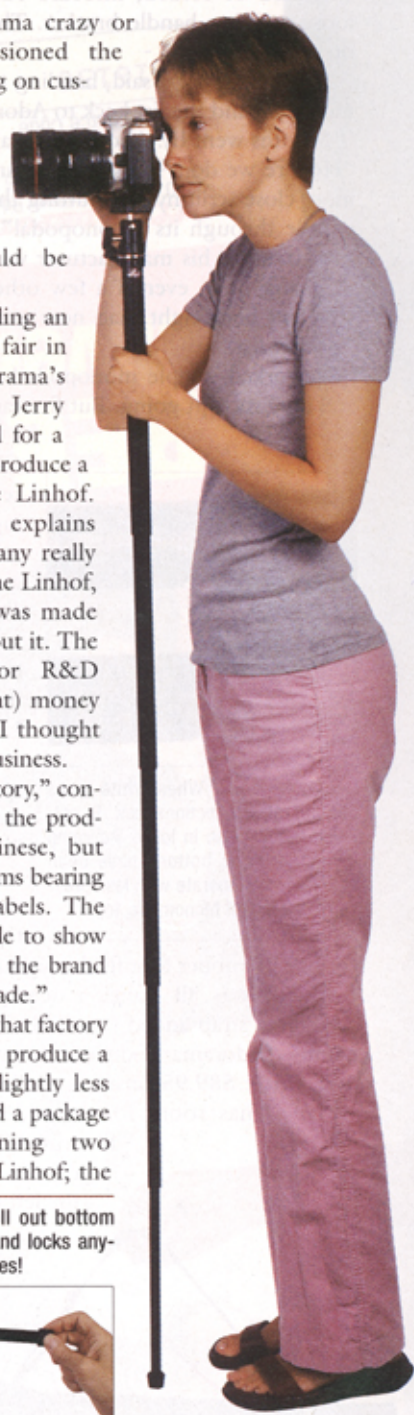
"Is everyone at Adorama crazy or what?" I thought. I envisioned the Adorama sales staff waiting on customers while extruding metal tubing and bending tiny wire springs to just the right amount of tensile strength. Quality-control inspection would be done at the cashier's.

Not quite. While attending an industrial manufacturing fair in Shanghai, China, Adorama's Director of Marketing, Jerry Deutsch, shopped around for a manufacturer who could produce a monopod similar to the Linhof. "All said 'no problem,' explains Deutsch, "but one company really looked long and hard at the Linhof, commenting on how it was made and what it didn't like about it. The company also asked for R&D (research and development) money to build a sample, which I thought was the right way to do business.

"When I went to the factory," continued Deutsch, "most of the products were labeled in Chinese, but there were a number of items bearing top-quality U.S. brand labels. The factory executives were able to show me numerous examples in the brand catalogues that they had made."

Satisfied, Deutsch gave that factory the order to engineer and produce a Linhof-type monopod. Slightly less than a year later, I received a package from Adorama containing two monopods. One was the Linhof; the

Aw, you're pulling my leg: Pull out bottom section and monopod extends and locks anywhere between 25½ and 58 inches!



other, physically identical—almost. “What do you think?” asked Deutsch. I took a closer look and tried out the Chinese monopod, listing everything I found wrong with this pretender: aluminum (instead of brass) tripod screw, sticking sections, wrong finish, sharp tubing edges, leg sections that squeaked when extended or folded, insecure rubber foot, loose carrying handle bracket. The list went on and on.

“Take it away,” I said, handing the Chinese monopod and the list back to Adorama.

Months went by. Another package arrived. “How’re we doin’?” asked Adorama. After more close scrutiny and putting the newest sample through its “monopodal” paces, I had to admit his manufacturer was getting the hang of it, even if a few other things that had been right, had now gone wrong. Another list.

Reworked sample monopods kept coming and my lists kept going. But five samples later,

I felt that the Chinese were really cooking up a good monopod storm. Deutsch’s cohorts had created an almost exact replica.

Now, thought I, let’s see how this monopod could be made better than the Linhof. My eye went right to the two small white, spring-loaded locks that were stiff and pesky to push in. Could the spring pressure be less and the locks themselves elevated a bit so they’d be easier to push?

Could the rubber foot fit the leg tubing more smoothly?

And it was all done, a neat green carrying case and adjustable strap added (the Linhof came naked) and a new name—“Adorama Podmatic”—emblazoned on the monopod. Price: \$89.95, instead of Linhof’s \$182.50. The case has room for an added ballhead, such as my favorite \$24.95 Slik Compact. Oh yes, the Adorama Podmatic’s on the left on the preceding page.

Near-matching monopods (below): You’ll have a hard time distinguishing Monomatic, left, from Podmatic, right.



Doubling in brass: Monomatic anchor screw, left, is identical to Podmatic, right, but Podmatic’s rubber facing is better textured.

Read why a monopod’s great and why the Linhof-Monomatic-stativ was the greatest.

You set up your tripod, ready to shoot. Then the guard comes over. “Sorry, no tripods allowed.”

You’re trying to get a good shot of that panda but the crowd is jammed up around the cage. There’s no room for a tripod to steady your tele-zoom.

You’re at a concert or an amusement park and there’s no way to get your tripod operational. You’re off on a fast moving nature or scenic shoot and you just need a bit of steadiness insurance for that long exposure or small lens aperture. A monopod to the rescue. And I’ll bet you can think of many other instances when a monopod would have been just right, and a tripod impossible or inconvenient.

But what monopod? Most are $\frac{1}{3}$ as pesky to set up and fold as a tripod because they have the same lever or collar locks. But years ago, a friend whipped out of his coat jacket a 14 inch metal stick resembling a cop’s nightstick. He extended it to eye-level by pulling out the rubberized end and there the monopod locked automatically. He could also vary the height as needed.

Collapsing the monopod was equally magical. He pressed two small white buttons on bottom leg extension, pushed down on the top of the monopod, and it again became 11 inches.

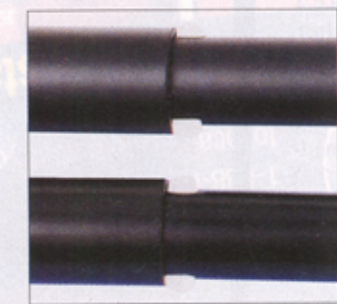
I neglected to learn the origin of the monopod and my friend is long gone. But after searching for years, I found it—the Linhof Monomatic-stativ. Put a small ballhead atop it and you could amaze the crowd and have the lightest, smallest and fastest operating high-precision monopod. But the price! Ugh. A Linhof high \$182.50.

Worth it? Yes.



Precision fit: Five Podmatic leg sections fit perfectly, operate precisely—like Monomatic.

Podmatic plus: Zippered green carrying case with room for ballhead comes with monopod.



Duplicate locks: When white locks pop out, all leg sections lock. To collapse tripod, push in locks. Adorama Podmatic locks, bottom, have been engineered to operate with less pressure than Linhof Monomatic, top.

