SLR

Camera-Bag-o-Mania

There's always room for one more!

by HERBERT KEPPLER

Many a year ago, when major camera manufacturers held press conferences, they inevitably included a thank-you present with the press releases and pictures of the new camera. When our esteemed former technical director, Norman Goldberg, was asked by one manufacturer what item would please editors most, he allegedly replied, A photo editor can always use another magnifier or writing instrument. And indeed, we did wind up with many a fine magnifier and some good-quality writing instruments (usually with the name of our benefactor stamped upon it). We also received some odd things such as an electronic piano keyboard, and a Tilley hat from Minolta following a press party at New York City s Explorer s Club. That started my addiction to Tilleys, up to this day (see my photo on top of this page).

To Norman s brief list of most acceptable gifts I would add one more item-a camera bag. And indeed, the most prevalent gift in those days was a bag: big, small, and in between, emblazoned with the name of the company. For one editor, this proved his camera s undoing when his handsome, blue Hasselblad bag was snatched by someone evidently thinking a bag marked Hasselblad must assuredly contain at least a Hasselblad and perhaps a few extra lenses.

Alas, there was no Hasselblad within, but the Leica outfit was a reasonable financial substitute. Personally, I favored black camera-bag gifts on which I could obliterate the name by affixing black electrician s tape over the company s logo.

Any of you planning a photo editor s career to get in on the loot need not bother; those halcyon gift days are long gone. After a recent press conference, I received from one camera maker a single item, a CD containing the press release and pictures. And that was that.

HIDE THAT NIKON: You could depend on Nikon to give editors really good bags at press conferences, but the prominent emblem attracted thieves. Remedy: Hide the name with black electrical tape.

Why was I, and why am I still, so hooked on camera bags? Because I have a continuing need to change equipment depending on how long I will be away, what I am photographing, how much and what type of film I will need, what filters are required, and whether I should carry an accessory flash unit, remote control, etc. The etc. is very expandable. I have in my house what my family has named Bag Mountain. But there is always room for one more.

SLINGER IS TOO SLUNG: First Slinger bag version, although well made, was too deep and long-10 inches inside, less cover.

Although I admire the ingenious designs of photo backpacks and the hearty loads they can carry, I am not an enthusiast of bags that are not immediately accessible. I prefer shoulder bags, preferably carried cross-chest, to prevent them from being lifted by someone who can run faster than I can.

As you may remember from my November 01 column, after I bemoaned the demise of the Linhof Monomatic monopod (despite its horrendous $182 price tag), Adorama inquired whether I thought there would be a market for such a monopod if it cost less. Shortly thereafter, Adorama s director of marketing, Jerry Deutsch, carried a few

GIVING SLRS THE SLIP: Second version of Adorama Slinger's three-inch width (top) was too narrow for many SLRs to slip into easily. Third version's four inches (bottom) provide almost all SLRs a royal reception.

Monomatics to a Shanghai International photo show in search of the best Chinese manufacturer. To replicate the Monomatic, Deutsch selected a tripod maker who had also produced higher precision products.

Within some months, sample Monomatic replicas began arriving at my desk for criticism. After perhaps five successive samples, a satisfactory model arrived. But for good measure, I suggested a few changes to make this monopod even better than the original Monomatic. And so the $90 Adorama Monopod came to be.

This is old hat (Tilley) for many of you who know about the building of the Adorama Monopod, but it is simply a necessary preamble to the next Adorama manufacturing venture camera bags.

I had called the top-selling Tamrac Velocity 7 Photo Sling Pack a great concept in my March SLR column because it could he carried cross-chest, worn on the back, revolved around your torso, used in front, at your side, or even as a fanny pack. However, I had been critical about the small front pockets and two strap buckles that were difficult to open (though now made with better buckles). Still, it was a delightful bag.

In short order, Adorarma was on the phone again. Was the sling-type bag worth another go with larger pockets and many additional features? Yes, I thought so. And thus did Adorama venture into the business of sling-bag manufacturing. Like camera cases of yore, I am ever-ready when asked, to help any photo equipment designer build a better mousetrap. So Deutsch and I put our heads together and envisioned a medium-size, squarish (instead of circular) bag with air mesh end pockets suitable for holding extra film, a water bottle, an umbrella, or even wet socks; a Special rear pocket for a cell phone; a zippered back pocket to hold a passport or other small valuables; four D-rings for extra items; and a solid-cloth outer pocket (instead of mesh) with a Velcro-style hook and-loop closure.

Subsequently, sample sling bags made in China began to arrive in my office. They were to prove the old maxim: If at first you don t succeed, try, try again. Only in Adorama s case, it took five or so trys, from which I have selected three successive ones to amuse you.

While the first sample was superbly made, with excellent zippers and zipper pulls, I thought the designers had really gone overboard on the depth (10 inches not counting space in the lid) and interior length (another 10 inches). Both were too much. A 7½ inch depth and 9-inch length would be much neater, more compact, and quite sufficient. The 4-inch width, we felt, was fine. Mysteriously, the outer exterior pocket of the green hag was finished in a rubberized material. And, to this day, neither I nor Adorama can figure out why. I thought the bag s 4-inch depth was OK. We recommended that

FOUR-SIDED SLINGER: Bag can be accessed from left or right hip **(A)** or even from rear **(B)** if your arms are long enough. And, of course, access in front **(C)** is just fine, too.

All loaded and ready to go...

THE USUAL ARRANGEMENT: Accessory flash can substitute for two vertical lenses, or you can make up your own interior.

the rubberized material be eliminated and a hook-and-loop fastener be used to secure the open outside pocket.

Within a few months, along came Version Two. Not only had the manu facturers cut 21/2 inches from the depth and an inch from the length, which we had requested, but they had also nar rowed the bag width to 3 inches, which we had not. We had lost an inch, making it difficult to insert largish SLRs into the main compartment. Also, the film compartment s inner cover netting was too narrow to accept 35mm film plastic containers. The rubberized outer pocket had been rev ersed so the rubber was inside, and there were still no Velcro-style fasten ers. Lastly, the movable interior padded compartment elements were a bilious orange-yellow instead of the neutral gray seen originally.

Version Three Adorama and I judged to be just right (pictured above). I had envisioned the bag in gray or black only, but was told 20 different bag colors would be available. Good grief, too many. And so the number was cut to six: black, forest-green, gray, maroon, navy blue, and camouflage. The name: Adorama Slinger. The introductory price: $59.95.

While the present Slinger seems just the right size for me, Adorama is think ing about making two more, one larger and one smaller, which may suit some photographers better. And anyone wanting a sling bag should also re examine the little Tamrac Velocity 7 and bigger Velocity 9 bags as well.

I must be more careful criticizing photo products in the future. Suppose I don t like some features of a Canon or Nikon film or digital SLR camera? Who knows what Adorama might make ?

OFF TO IRAQ? Camouflage Slinger may make you less visible. Personally, I'd prefer hunter green or gray.