

Film Selection and Processing Options

By Wes Odell

Several people who have re-located to Sun City and need information on film processing have asked us what film we use and where we get it processed.

In almost all cases we use "slide film" (which is a positive transparency.) Our favorite is Fuji Velvia 100 (not the older 100 F). Very recently Fuji has brought back to the market their old and very successful Velvia 50 (ISO = 50).

For routine stuff Wes uses Kodak Elite Chrome "EB" Imported. It is the "consumer version" of Kodak's Ektachrome VS (as in Very Saturated. Where VS and Fuji Velvia are "refrigerator films," Elite Chrome is not, thus giving it a lot of casual flexibility where you can always have a roll or two in your camera bag. Marge sticks solely to Velvia, and her work shows it. Wes uses Velvia for the "good stuff."

While you can purchase "refrigerator film" at places like Fox Photo and Precision Camera in Austin, doing that requires a road trip. We don't know of any local stores that carry professional (refrigerator) film. A couple places carry Elite Chrome in single rolls, but they charge around \$6 or \$7 per roll. On the road, we've even seen some highway bandits charge \$8 per roll.

We always purchase 36 exposure rolls.

At B&H, the above films cost per roll:

Velvia 100 (RVP-100) \$5.55

Elite Chrome (EB – 100) \$3.99

Prices do vary from time to time.

Elite Chrome also comes in other ISO speeds. We haven't tried them.

For "Print Film" we use and recommend Fuji's new line of Professional films. For "people" and other "soft subjects" we use Fuji 160S. A 36 exposure roll costs (recently) \$2.99 at B&H. In this case "S" stands for "soft" as opposed to their other 160 ISO professional film, 160C, where the "C" stands for more "Contrast." (We buy all our professional film from B&H.)

For faster ISO's Fuji's new professional line includes a 400 and 800 ISO.

Fuji has a line of "consumer" films, but their prices and quality don't justify their use when compared to the above professional films. Incredibly, while many major camera and film manufacturers are discontinuing their film lines, Fuji's recent announcement of the new professional film lines and Velvia 50 makes them stand out.

Where do we get film processed?

If it's print film, we just take it to HEB and get the cheap service since all we want are the negatives and some small prints for proof sheets. We have just learned that Costco will develop and put images on CD's for a reasonable price. The image size on the CD is about 18 meg, which is far more than we used to get from HEB, but HEB may have changed. If you can get an image file of 18 meg or larger, you can do pretty nice work in Photoshop with that. When we scan, we can get between 24 and 32 meg depending on what scanner we use. An 18 meg file will print a 7"x10" or so image without adding any pixels, so an 8x10 or a bit larger can be made easily if the image is good to start with (no shakes and in focus.)

Slide film is a different story. Some report good results by taking rolls of 35mm slide film to HEB. We prefer to use either a professional lab or a good quality "pre-paid mailer." Fuji mailers (for 36 exposure rolls) cost \$4.25, but the turnaround via Fuji can take a week or three. Fuji, Kodak (\$8.99), and A&I mailers are available via B&H. We don't like Kodak because their numbering and other printing on the slide mounts leaves too much to be desired. If you want a fast turn-around mailer, use A&I which costs \$8.49 a mailer. Sending a mailer requires \$1.30 NOW postage. They pay the return postage. (Fast means faster than Fuji, but not as fast as Borge Andersen, below.)

We prefer to use a professional lab in Salt Lake City to develop slide film, which is the lab the pros used during the 2002 Olympics. Their quality is superior. They will print up to four lines on a slide mount (such as date, number, your name, subject title, film type, etc.) Wes mails First Class, or if there are several rolls he can mail Priority Mail in the Flat Rate Envelope/box for \$4.80 or so. If, for example, he mails it on Monday, it will be back on Friday or Saturday. He leaves his Credit Card number on file with them. If you want to try them, mention his name. They charge \$6.75 per roll and charge you the postage, usually \$4.00 - \$6.00, which makes it more economical if you're sending in more than one roll at a time.

Their mailing address is:
Borge Andersen & Assoc
234 South 200 East St
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Do the numbers and you'll find you can get professional film, and professional service at a reasonable cost.

You can get mailers and film by phoning B&H on their toll free number: 1-800-947-9953.

Word of caution: Fuji has recently shut down its Phoenix processing center, so if you purchase mailers, you'll need to get their new address or live with a long delay for forwarding. Also, the USPS new rates have increased your cost from 63 cents to \$1.30.

Why not go with the best? The lab the pros use.