

The way we were

When taking pictures meant waiting for the sun to shine

Family holidays usually have one thing in common. Those out-of-focus, red-eyed holiday pictures in which someone's always looking the wrong way or Auntie Anne's head gets chopped off. Getting a decent picture can be hard and it seemed somehow more difficult when Which? first tested cameras in May 1959.

We reviewed 21 cheap cameras, including the Kodak Brownie 127, then one of the most popular models. Even with such a simple camera (shutter speed 1/50th of a second), there seemed a lot to remember. You loaded a film, wound it on, remembered it took only eight pictures a roll, stood your subject at least five feet away so it had a chance of being in focus, then prayed the sun shone. As we noted, it was mainly good for 'holiday photographs in bright weather'.

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Our experts weren't always sympathetic. In 1959 we dealt with blurry pictures caused by camera shake. We said that, if the shutter release lever works smoothly, camera shake was the 'fault' of the user.

By 1965, we had moved on to automatic cameras such as the Kodak Instamatic 300. These were hugely popular, easy to load and inexpensive. Spend at least an hour with the instruction book and be careful what pictures you take, we cautioned. A person on a bright beach or in snow was asking for trouble: 'The scene shouldn't vary much in brightness between different parts.' Our solution sounded more trouble than it was worth: 'You can often overcome this by pressing the shutter release halfway when close to your subject and the rest of the way at the distance that you want to be.'

One of the most iconic cameras has to be the Polaroid, which took between 15 seconds and two minutes to develop a picture. We devoted a whole article to the Polaroid Swinger (£9 19s 6d) in 1966, describing it as 'the size of a small but extremely eccentric loaf of bread'. It needed a special black-and-white film which cost 14s 10d for just eight shots.

Mind you, the pictures produced some unexpected benefits. In the black-and-white prints, reds came out dark and blues quite light: 'So lips look sultry and a slight touch of sunburn turns into quite a rich tan.'



The Polaroid Swinger, Kodak Brownie 127 and Instamatic were popular in Which?'s early days



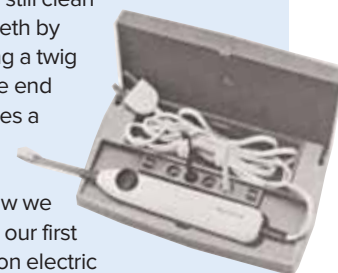
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ON A ROLL Our testers like to get to the bottom of a subject, perhaps never more so than when testing lavatory paper in July 1959. We considered newer, absorbent tissue versus traditional, shiny types. Under value for money, we told you how many sheets you got per shilling.



FALLOUT A July 1963 article titled 'Fallout in food' opened hopefully: 'We hope this report will be of some guidance to members who consider the amount of radioactive substance in their food a matter of consumer interest.' It also looked at whether it was worth buying anti-fallout sweets.

ON TEST 'In some countries, people still clean their teeth by chewing a twig until the end becomes a mat of fibres', was how we started our first report on electric toothbrushes, in December 1963. They (the toothbrushes, that is, not the twigs) seemed in short supply. One model was available only on order from chemists, while you were likely to find the other only in 'the Home Counties'.



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