

100 Top

Color-Print Films

Once again, we pick our favorites

by the Editors

Five years ago, there were 47 major-brand color-print films on the market. Today, there are...47 major-brand color-print films on the market. But while the total number of print films has remained constant, there has been a shift toward speed: Five years ago, just five films faster than ISO 400 were available, while today there are 11; conversely, five years ago there were four films of ISO 50 and slower, while today there is only one.

With advances in film technology coming in leaps and bounds, today's faster films are as good as yesterday's slower films. So today you can pretty much use ISO 400 as your everyday print film, and the ISO 800 films don't cost you much in terms of image quality, while giving you tremendous low-light and action shooting capability.

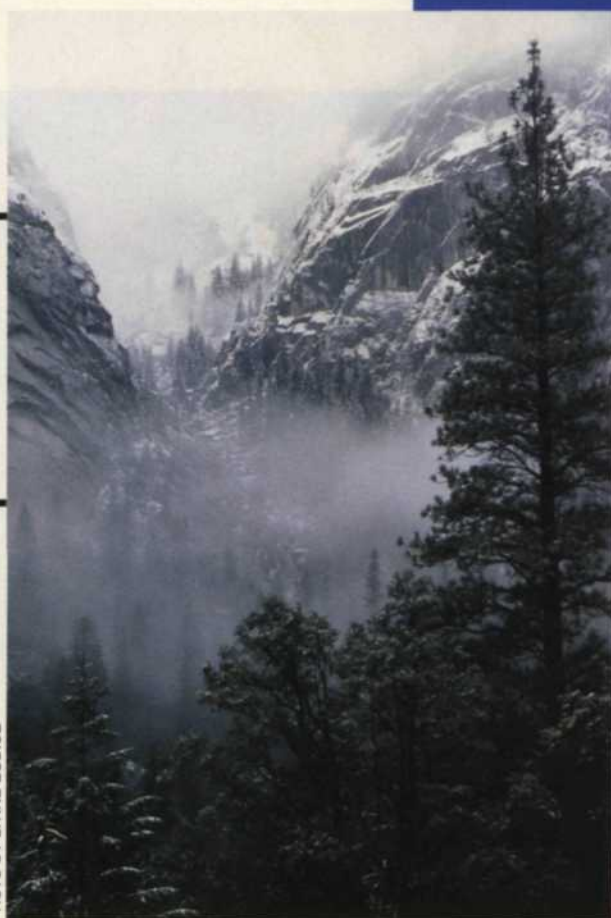
Interestingly, though, when we polled our editors to determine their current favorite color-print films (as we do every year), and tallied the votes, we found only three faster-than-400 films in the Top 10. There are two reasons for this. First, while most of us do frequently shoot with ISO 400 and 800 color-print films when we aren't shooting slide films (our usual preference), we mostly use the same four films, thus leaving six more positions open on the Top 10 list. Second, while today's faster films *are* as good as yesterday's slower ones, today's slower ones are better still—in image quality and color rendition. In other words, the old maxim still holds: For the best image quality, use the slowest film that will let you get your shot.

Anyway, here are the results of this year's poll. Our list includes five members of last year's, along with five new selections. As always, the films are presented from slowest to fastest, in alphabetical order by manufacturer.

Agfa Vista 100

A repeat selection from last year's list, Vista 100 uses Agfa's "Eye Vision Technology" to reproduce things much as the human eye does, without employing a fourth emulsion layer. Images show high color saturation, yet pastel tones are reproduced accurately. Results are good under fluorescent illumination, and image quality and reciprocity characteristics are excellent. Agfa Corp., 201/440-2500; www.agfa.com.

PHOTO BY LYNNIE EDDICE



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Fujicolor Superia 100

There's lots of great technology in Superia 100 (and the other Superia films), including a fourth color layer for exceptionally realistic colors (even in fluorescent lighting), optimized spectral sensitization for more-faithful rendering of red and purple, two-stage timing DIR couplers to generate additional color brilliance, and more. But the bottom line is, this is a terrific film, with miniscule grain, tremendous sharpness, excellent contrast and beautiful colors. Fuji Photo Film, 800/800-FUJI; www.fujifilm.com.



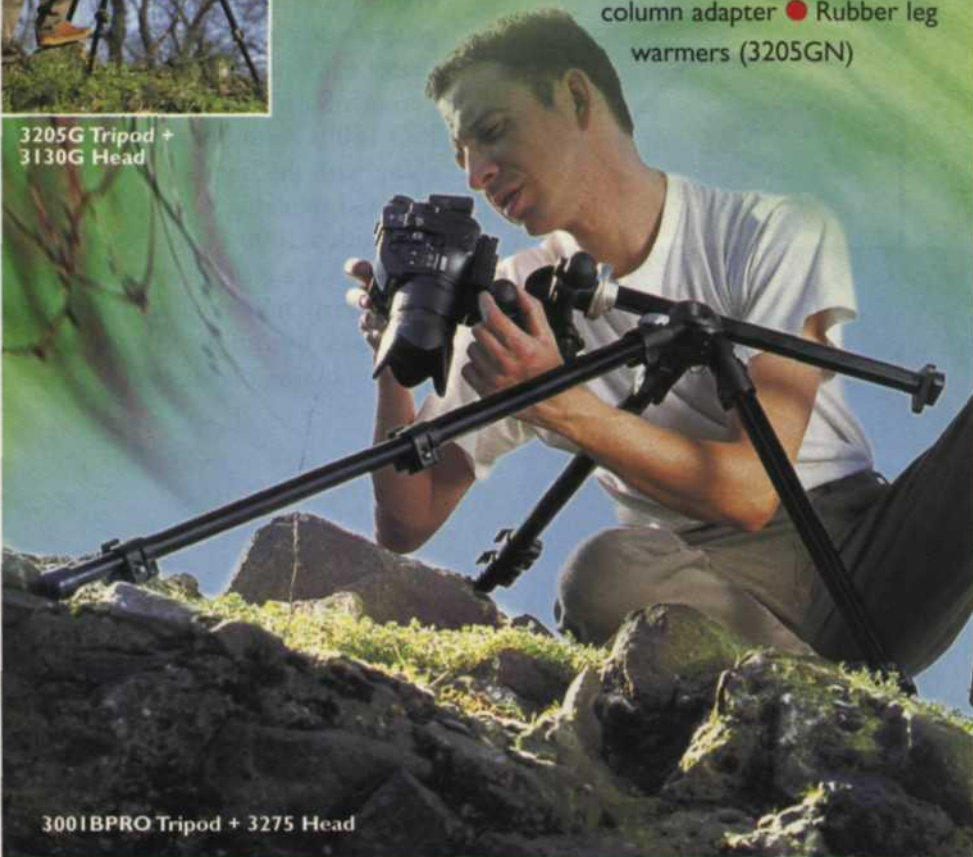
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Kodak Professional Supra 100

Kodak's Professional Supra 100 is a photojournalist-oriented film, like its higher-speed Supra brethren. As the slowest member of the team, it offers the finest grain (it's Kodak's finest-grained ISO 100 color-print film), the greatest sharpness and the richest colors. It also offers the photojournalistic features of accurate colors, wide exposure latitude, the ability to handle a wide variety of lighting conditions very well, and no need for refrigerated storage. Eastman Kodak Co., 800/242-2424; www.kodak.com.

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PHOTO BY LYNNE EDDICE

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AgfaColor Portrait 160

Another repeater from last year's list, Portrait 160 still has the lowest published granularity rating of any general-use color-print film (it shares a 3.5 rating with Ferrania Solaris FG100, but at ISO 160 is $\frac{2}{3}$ -stop faster), along with the highest reported resolving power (150 lpm with a 1000:1 ratio test target). As its name implies, it's a great people film, with lower contrast and slightly muted color reproduction to reproduce skin tones beautifully. It's also handy for photographing contrasty scenes and subjects.



PHOTO BY RON LEACH

Fujicolor Superia X-TRA 400

Voted in once again, Superia X-TRA 400 features the image quality of an ISO 100 film, with ISO 400 speed. Fujifilm's 4th Color Layer technology incorporates a cyan-sensitive layer for extremely accurate color rendition under a wide variety of illumination types (including tricky fluorescents and mixed lighting). Colors and skin tones are beautiful, and the film performs equally well in ambient light and with electronic flash.

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PHOTO BY MIKE STENSVOLD

PHOTO BY LYNNE EODICE



Kodak Professional Portra 400VC

The fourth repeat member of our list, Portra 400VC is our favorite available-light portrait film, offering a combination of speed, fine grain, beautiful skin tones, wide exposure latitude and a little extra color punch for those drab existing-light situations (the VC stands for Vivid Color). Portra 400VC handles hard-to-reproduce colors well: A purple dress and a purple flower might look the same to the eye, but they'll often photograph differently—or the dress and flower might appear different to the eye but photograph the same. Portra films reproduce colors much as they appear to the eye. Portra 400VC is a little grainier than Supra 400 (and Portra 400VC's natural-color counterpart, Portra 400NC), but image quality is excellent, and skin tones are beautiful.

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Kodak Professional Portra 800

Another repeater from last year's list, Portra 800 is a beautiful people film with a speed of ISO 800. It's great for low-light wedding and portrait photography, but it also serves admirably for action in harsh sun (with its good tonal scale) and under cloudy skies (with its high speed). And unlike its slower "brothers," Portra 800 matches the amazingly fine grain of Kodak's same-speed Supra film. Like Supra films, Portra films scan very well—important for anyone who wants to use their images digitally. Portra 800 has a normal balance, like that of Portra 400NC.

Konica Color Centuria 400

Offering super-bright colors, fine grain and great sharpness, Color Centuria 400 employs Konica's Centuria Crystal, Coupler and DIR Coupler technologies for improvements in every area over its fine VX400 predecessor. It's a great general-purpose film, equally adept indoors (with and without electronic flash) and out. Konica Photo Imaging, 201/574-4000; www.konica.com.



PHOTO BY RENEE CHODOR

PHOTO BY MIKE STENSVOID

Fujicolor Portrait NPZ 800 Prof.

Fujifilm's 800-speed color-print film knocked our socks off when we first tried it back in 1993, and each generation has got better and better. Today, there are several versions, and the newest and best is Portrait NPZ 800. Color rendition, grain and sharpness are all amazing for an ISO 800 film—so good that you can use this as a general-purpose film rather than just using it when high film speed is needed (although fast films cost more than slower films). And the great image quality translates well into digital form—NPZ 800 scans beautifully. Wide exposure latitude (-2 to +4 stops), good skin tones and fine performance in unusual and mixed lighting are bonuses.



PHOTO BY MIKE STENSVOID



PHOTO BY JACK & SUE DRAFAHL



Fujicolor Superia 1600

Sharing the title of "fastest color-print film available today" with Fujicolor Press 1600, new Superia 1600 utilizes Fujifilm's 4th Color Layer and Fine Σ (Sigma) Technology for accurate colors in a wide range of lighting and remarkably fine grain for the ultrahigh film speed. If high film speed is the main requirement, this is the one to use. ■



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