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10 Top Color-Print Films

The Editors, March, 2003

We pick our favorites from a fine field

Color-print films have long been by far the best-selling films, mainly due to their popularity with point-and-shooters (although serious photographers and even pros—especially wedding and portrait shooters, and photojournalists—use them, too). Despite the rising popularity of digital imaging—especially among point-and-shooters—color-print films are still selling very well. In fact, three manufacturers have introduced new color-print films—including two entire families of color-print films—since last year's "10 Favorite Color-Print Films" survey.

You really can't go very wrong using any of today's brand-name color-print films, but we do have our favorites, and we present them to you here. As always, they're listed from slowest to fastest, in alphabetical order by manufacturer.



Photo by Jack & Sue Drafahl



1. Agfa Ultra 100

This new pro film replaces Agfa's Vista 100 in our poll (but not in Agfa's film lineup—they still offer the Vista line of excellent consumer color-print films). The deal with Ultra 100 is, as its name indicates, ultrarich color rendition. Ultra 100 actually is a late replacement for Agfa's original high-saturation film, Ultra 50. The new film offers twice the speed, excellent image quality (it's actually finer grained and sharper than Ultra 50), and beautiful colors—rich, but not so rich that the film can't be used for general photography. It also reproduces subtle colors well, and keeps neutral tones neutral. For more info, see the full User Report elsewhere in this issue. Agfa Corp., 201/440-2500; www.agfa.com.

2. Fujicolor Superia 100

This one's been a favorite of ours for quite a while. It's got lots of great technology, 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-FUJII; www.fujifilm.com.

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Digital Camera HQ: See prices and reviews of digital cameras.



Photo by Jack & Sue Drafahl



3. Kodak Supra 100

A repeater from last year's list, Kodak's Professional Supra 100 is the slowest member of Kodak's photojournalist-oriented Supra film family, offering the finest grain (in fact, 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.

Photo by Jack & Sue Drafahl



4. Agfacolor Portraits 160

Another long-time member of our color-print-film favorites lists, Portrait 160 Professional offers 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 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. But it's also handy for photographing any contrasty scenes and subjects.

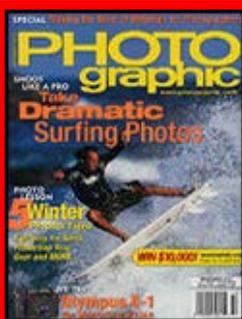
Photo by Jack & Sue Drafahl



5. Fujicolor Superia X-Tra 400

Basically, 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. And it can handle subjects with a wide brightness range very well.

Photo by Mike Stensvold



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6. Kodak Professional Porta 400UC

To replace our favorite available-light portrait film, a new film had better be good. And Professional Porta 400UC (for Ultra Color) is. Like the long-time list member whose place it has usurped (Portra 400VC), new Porta 400UC offers a winning combination of speed, fine grain, beautiful skin tones, wide exposure latitude and a little extra color punch for those drab existing-light situations—especially when the portrait includes a colorful wardrobe or props. But unlike Portra 400VC, which is a little grainier than Supra 400 (and its natural-color counterpart, Portra 400NC), Porta 400UC actually has the same granularity rating as the much slower Portra 160NC! By the way, don't let the name fool you—this is a great film for lots of subjects, not just people.

Photo by Jack & Sue Drafahl



7. Konica Color Centuria 400

Konica redid their Centuria color-print-film line recently, improving the breed and adding the word Super. The new films deserve the moniker, offering improved granularity, smooth tonal gradations and better color reproduction, and are just generally very good films. Our favorite is the middle member of the family Centuria Super 400. Like its 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.

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Photo by Jack & Sue Drafahl

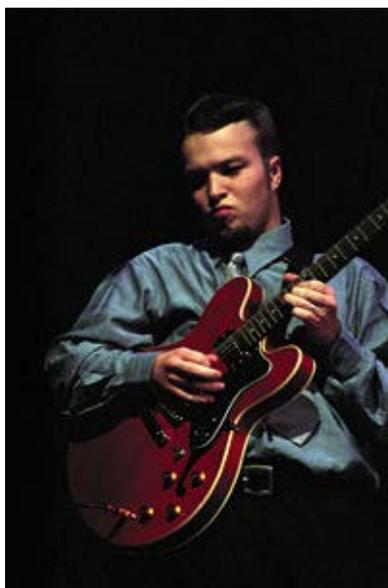


8. Kodak Portra 800

Joining our list for the third straight year, Professional 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 it

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.

Photo by Jack & Sue Drafahl



9. Fujicolor NPZ 800

Fujifilm's 800-speed color-print films have been among our favorites since we tried the first one back in 1993, and each generation has improved the breed. Today, there are several excellent versions, and our favorite is Portrait NPZ 800 Professional. 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 it does cost more than its slower "brothers"). That great image quality translates well into digital form, too—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 Jack & Sue Drafahl



10. Konica Centuria Super 1600

For many years, Konica offered the fastest color-print film around, an ISO 3200 emulsion that produced amazingly good image quality for its superhigh speed. That one's long gone, but Konica recently introduced an ISO 1600 member for its Centuria Super film

family, and Centuria Super 1600 is an excellent superspeed film, offering good color rendition and sharpness, and remarkably fine grain for the speed. We still prefer slower films when shooting conditions permit, but this is a fine choice when such a high film speed is needed.

Photo by Jack & Sue Drafahl



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