

First Impressions with the 400mm f6.8 Telyt-R.

by David Young.

It was my long standing admiration for the work of wild-life photographer, Doug Herr¹ that got me interested in the 400mm f6.8 Telyt-R. Then my wife, Rose, offered to buy me one for Christmas! By mid-January, I had an early production (1970) unit, in near mint condition, in my hands.

Unlike later production, early versions of the shoulder stock used a simple bent aluminum bar for a handgrip. It had no provision for a cable release which meant that you needed your left hand to focus the lens, your right hand to hold the handle and your other right hand to release the shutter!

So, the first order was to concoct a “pistol grip” out of some hard maple that would accept a cable release. That being done, I was ready!

This is a lens meant to be hand held! With the shoulder stock it is possible for beginning users to hand hold it with amazing success.

Proof of this is the above Heron photo.² It was my first outing with the 400 Telyt-R and I spotted this great bird whilst walking on the beach on Hornby Island. He (she?) was standing on a log, about 30 meters (100 feet) ahead.

Using patience and stealth, I got within 20 feet. The resulting shot was hand-held using a 2X converter with the 400 Telyt.

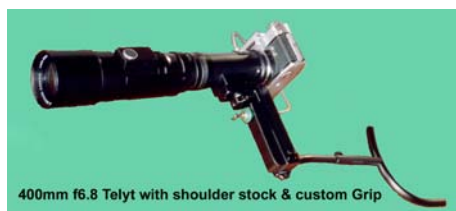
For those of you who have not had the opportunity to handle the 400 Telyt-R, it is extremely light... much lighter than the 80-200/f4 Vario-Elmar, for instance... yet twice as long – over 38.5cm or 15”!

This lightness is obtained by using a simple achromatic doublet in what is essentially a long hollow tube. Leitz replaced the normal helicoid focusing threads with three polished rails. The focusing tube has a lock-button that falls naturally under your thumb. You press the



*Great Blue Heron – on the beach - Hornby Island, B.C.
Full Frame – Hand held – Leica R8 with winder, 400mm f6.8 Telyt-R + 2x Converter*

button and push or pull on the front tube to focus. Releasing the button locks the focus. The system is intuitive to use, though there is a short learning curve. Once you’re used to it, it’s incredibly smooth and blindingly fast!



The Telyt-R has neither auto-diaphragm nor DOF scale. The aperture range is from f/6.8 to f/16 in half-stops and there to f/32 in full-stops. But, all of this is moot, for the lens is almost always used wide open!

The lens comes apart in the middle, for easy carrying/storage. Alternatively, you can replace the lens head with the 560mm f6.8 lens head.

Leica made a 60mm extension tube (14182) to fit between the lens head and the mount-tube to reduce the minimum focus distance to about 2 meters (6 ft).

I’ve not used this tube, but have used the 14134-* extension tubes between the lens and camera body with very good success.

I’m told that because of the simple, two element design, there is some curvature of field. Well, if it’s there, I cannot see it. What I do see is a razor sharp lens with creamy smooth backgrounds.

There is some image cut off from the mirror – which shows as a dark fuzzy band in the top of the finder. It is more noticeable with the R8 than with the SL. And, of course, this only affects the finder, not the photographs!

At 400mm f6.8 Telyt-R is a sunny day lens, even with ISO 400 film. It is virtually free of flare and provides a brilliant, high contrast image. However, there is some noticeable vignetting when it’s used with a 2x converter. (See photo).

The Telyt is a superb piece of kit. It is light, quick to use, breaks down easily to carry in my backpack and is startlingly sharp!

I don’t know how I lived without it!

¹ www.wildlightphoto.com

² more at www.horzon.bc.ca/~dnr