

ALPA[®]
OF SWITZERLAND

THINGS
ARE SIMPLE
AT THE TOP

WARNING: The experience of holding an Alpa camera for the first time may precipitate intense dislike of mass products. All-singing all-dancing all-automatics will no longer satisfy. Especially at risk are discerning persons who have retained their appreciation of genuine craftsmanship, quality and reliability.



The ALPA 12, prototype, September 1996

Tops and flops – a short history of ALPA

Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum
Vergil

1918

December 19th: the company Pignons SA was founded in the village of Ballaigues/Switzerland. Initially, activities were limited to supplying mechanical parts to manufacturers of watches and other precision instruments.

1933

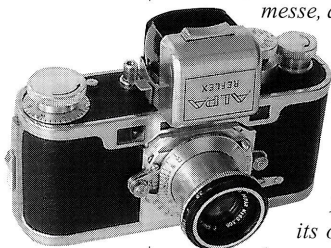
Pignons SA made first contact with the technical designer Jacques Bolsky (born in the Ukraine under the name of Bogopolsky, died in the early 1960s in the USA as Jacques Bolsey). Happily, the chance offered by Bolsky was seized at Ballaigues. His proposals involved the expansion of the company into the manufacturing of photographic cameras.

1942

While war raged all around Switzerland, Pignons produced a first series of ALPA Reflex cameras. Although the world had too many problems to take much notice of these premieres, a few of the new cameras nevertheless made it as far as the USA.

1944

In that year, the Spring exhibition at Basle, the Mustermesse, at long last introduced the ALPA Reflex to a wider public. It can rightly be regarded as the year in which ALPA entered the exclusive world of top-of-the-range cameras.



ALPA Reflex

1951

Pignons, resp. ALPA, has never produced its own lenses, preferring to buy them from the most reputable manufacturers in Europe and later in Japan, too. From 1951 onwards, the 50 mm lens MADE IN SWITZERLAND of Kern Aarau played a special role. The 1:1,8 Switar introduced that year was replaced after 1958 by the Macro-Switar which in 1968 was given a reduced largest stop of 1:1,9.

1952

That year saw the presentation of the second ALPA-generation, designed by André Cornut and showing major technical advance: in place of the sheet-steel construction a new die-cast alloy body was introduced as well as the ALPA bayonet lens mounting. The new body was extraordinarily robust and of remarkable, purely functional, beauty.



ALPA 6b

1959

With the b-models the typical ALPA film advance lever made its first appearance. It had to be operated front-to-back rather than in the more common back-to-front mode.

1964

With the model 9d ALPA achieved a technical master stroke: one of the earliest cameras with a TTL (through-the-lens) exposure meter.

1966

The third ALPA-generation appeared: the model numbered 10 with a redesigned upper body. At the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s, Pignons produced around 200 ALPA cameras per month. This was a huge number for a camera that was manufactured manually by skilled craftsmen but is, of course, only the output of a few minutes on an automated camera production line.

The 80s

The model 11si marked the technological apex as well as the end-point of the ALPA 24x36 mm SLR development. The production of ALPA 11si cameras fell throughout the 1980s to reach a low of 4 to 5 per month. Alarm bells started ringing in earnest at every supplier with an outstanding account at Pignons when on July 14th 1989 the company sold the building in which the ALPA cameras had been made for so long.

1990

On August 14th 1990, bankruptcy proceedings were instituted against Pignons SA at Ballaigues. How and why did one of the world's most distinguished cameras reach such a low point?

Remark 1: It is easy to be wise after the event.

Remark 2: Similar comments to those we are about to make below may be made about a number of other well-known camera manufacturers.

We feel that the reasons behind the decline and fall of ALPA's original owners are primarily the following:

1. Lack of interest in the product and lack of personal engagement by the decision-makers of the firm.
2. The company did not concentrate on its core business but split itself up into too many other activities. Its core business was the design and manufacture of high-quality, hand-crafted cameras for a small but demanding circle of connoisseurs and enthusiasts. In other words: ALPA.
3. The ALPA cameras produced in the 1980s did not match the spirit of the decade. Today, on the other hand, we are witnessing a veritable renaissance of classical mechanics at the highest level of quality. Some sensitive photographers are beginning to realize that the enjoyment of their art—which is what it should all be about, really—gets buried under an avalanche of ever more automated gizmos, banks of flashing lights, multi functional buttons fore and aft, information displays so complex that heavy tomes of instruction manuals are not enough to explain it all, with the whole show run by current-guzzling, battery-killing and often far from quiet electric motors. Moreover, the marvels of modern electronics have a disagreeable knack for breaking down under less than ideal environmental conditions.



ALPA 9d

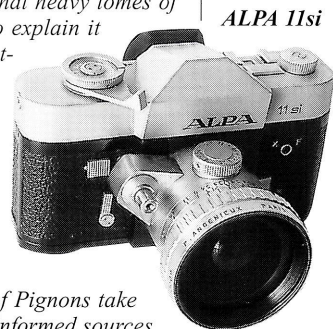
1990–96

Why did the simple bankruptcy case of Pignons take six years to reach a conclusion? Well-informed sources do not lay the blame entirely on the overworked official receiver's office. Instead, they hint at the peculiar social, economic, political and even religious complexities in this rather remote corner of French-speaking Switzerland.

1996

On February 29th 1996 we (Capaul & Weber, Zürich/Switzerland) purchased the world-wide rights to the brand name ALPA from the bankrupt Pignons SA.

With the new ALPA 12 a new chapter in the history of this great brand has been opened: faithful to traditional principles, original in their interpretation.



ALPA 11si

We cordially invite you to explore our Web-site where you will find continuously updated information about the ALPA-world and where you may communicate directly with us. We look forward to the contact with you:

<http://www.alpa.ch/alpa>

Things are simple at the top:

ALPA[®] 12

μηδὲν ἄγαν

Solon

Before we can list the main features of the ALPA 12, be warned and do not say later that nobody told you. Many a strong character has found a life-long love after direct physical contact with an ALPA, losing all interest in mass-produced equipment. The ALPA 12 is an exotic camera, quite off the beaten track of camera design. It is built exactly the way we (Capaul & Weber, Zürich/Switzerland) like it—no compromise whatsoever towards present-day majority tastes. A pretty good comparison, in some ways, would be to the legendary original American JEEP, in some other ways to the British MORGAN sports car or, in yet other aspects, to the unrivalled Swiss HÄMMERLI target rifles and pistols. One has to feel, to sense, to touch, to hear that which will grip and will not let go again. Head, heart and hand, all come together when you handle an ALPA 12.

Our foremost design goals are reliability and robustness. Simplicity along with a painstaking regard for the highest standards of quality and precision are our means for achieving these. That is why the ALPA 12 is purely mechanical. The owner of an ALPA wants to hold a functioning camera in his hands even when—and especially when—a sand or a snow storm is raging, when the humidity has reached above 100% and the temperature has risen or dropped beyond tolerable limits. The central point is not whether you ever *need* it but whether you *can do* it whenever you want.

Who produces the ALPA 12? The concept is the idea of Capaul & Weber. Construction, development, production and technical after-sales service are all in the capable hands of the best specialists imaginable: Seitz Phototechnik AG, Lustdorf/Switzerland. Everybody who has heard of Hermann Seitz, his sons Peter and Werner Seitz and their Roundshot-360°-cameras knows what they stand for: technological know-how combined with the very best skills of the craftsman and the engineer. They fit ALPA to the dot.

How much does the ALPA 12 cost? A great deal, we are sorry to say. Technological perfection coupled with small production runs have their price. We inform genuinely interested prospective buyers personally.

“Sounds like art,” the instructor says.

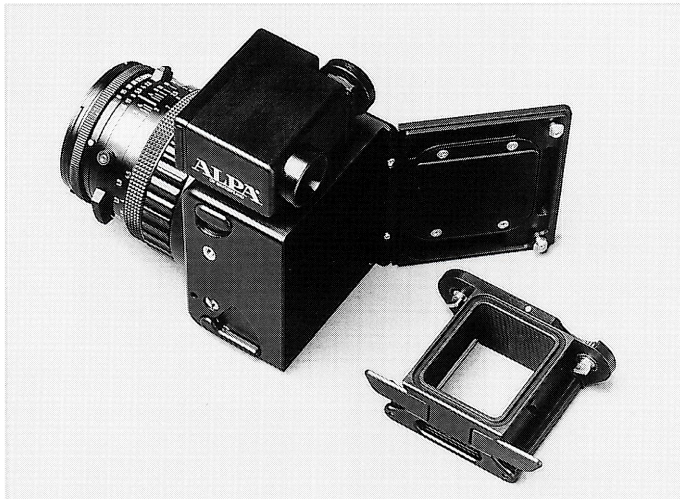
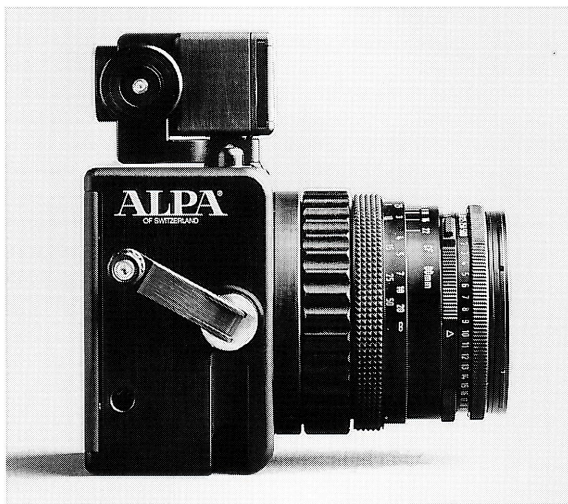
“Well, it *is* art,” I say.

“This divorce of art from technology is completely unnatural. It’s just that it’s gone on so long you have to be an archeologist to find out where the two separated.”

Robert M. Pirsig

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance





The main characteristics of the ALPA 12 prototype:

- Medium format (4.5x6 cm) viewfinder camera
- Interchangeable roll holders for 120 and 220 films
- Mechanical frame counter
- Interchangeable viewfinders with or without rangefinder (uncoupled) of the coincident-image type
- Base length of the 60/80 mm-rangefinder: 37.5 mm
- Uncoupled parallax-compensation
- Field of view and rangefinder visible through the same single eyepiece
- Film advance and shutter draw-up combined by a crank on the right side of the body
- Interchangeable lenses with built-in mechanical leaf shutters (B, 1-1/500 s), probable range: between 40 and 180 mm, the connection body/lens is extremely robust—we have not designed it for very fast lens changes
- There is no integrated exposure meter of any kind

It is possible to use nearly every Zeiss/Hasselblad CF lens with the ALPA 12 after comparatively minor alterations which are carried out exclusively by the manufacturer of all ALPA 12, Seitz AG. Even old and used Zeiss/Hasselblad CF lenses can be so fitted. For technical reasons you cannot use these lenses with a Hasselblad without re-doing the modifications

The way the body is manufactured is extraordinary and quite unthinkable for mass production runs. It is cut out of two pieces of rolled alloy, the same material used for the wing spars of Mach 2 fighter planes

Weight of the body: 850 g, with rollfilm holder but without lens and viewfinder

Weight of the 60/80 mm-viewfinder/rangefinder: 300 g

Width overall: 100 mm

Height without viewfinder: 110 mm,
with the 60/80 mm-viewfinder/rangefinder: 150 mm

Depth without lens: 83 mm

The ALPA 12 is all black

There are some well-assorted accessories around the camera (lens shades, hand grips, belts, bags and the like)

Where can you buy an ALPA? From us and from nowhere else: ALPA, Capaul & Weber, Zürich/Switzerland. We may, at a later stage, open contact or sales points at selected locations around the world. At the moment we want *everything* to go across our desk, all questions, all contacts, all cameras, all requests.

We look forward to meeting others of like mind.

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ALPA®

OF SWITZERLAND

MANUFACTURERS AND PURVEYORS
OF FINE CAMERAS
TO THE WORLD'S CONNOISSEURS

CAPAU & WEBER
VISITS BY APPOINTMENT ONLY, PLEASE
NEPTUNSTRASSE 96, PO-BOX 1858
CH-8032 ZÜRICH, SWITZERLAND
TELEPHONE +41 1 383 92 22, FAX +41 1 382 01 80
E-MAIL: alpa@alpa.ch
WWW: <http://www.alpa.ch/alpa>

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