Agfa RSX II 100

An already-excellent pro slide film gets even better

Text and photos by
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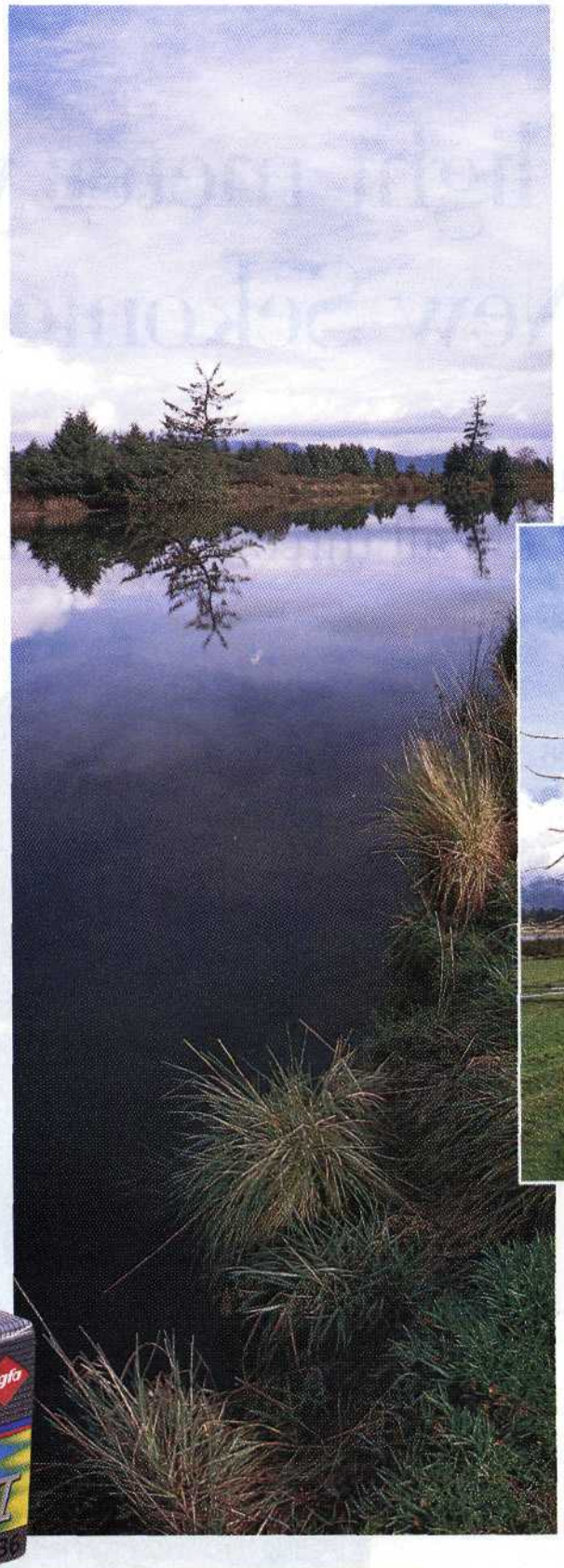
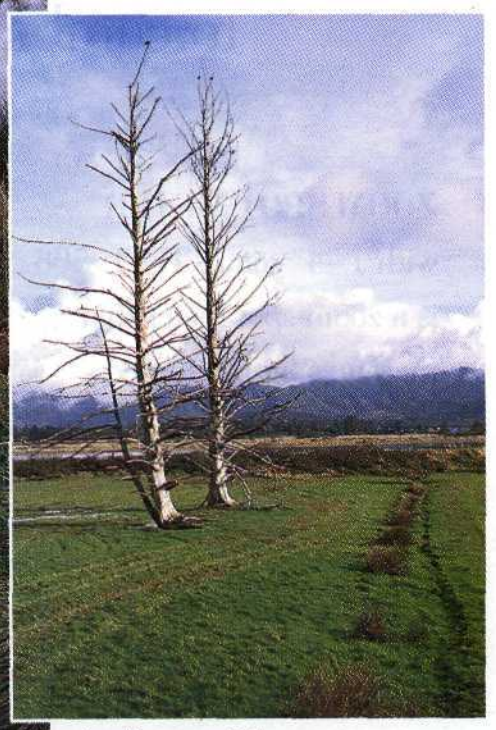
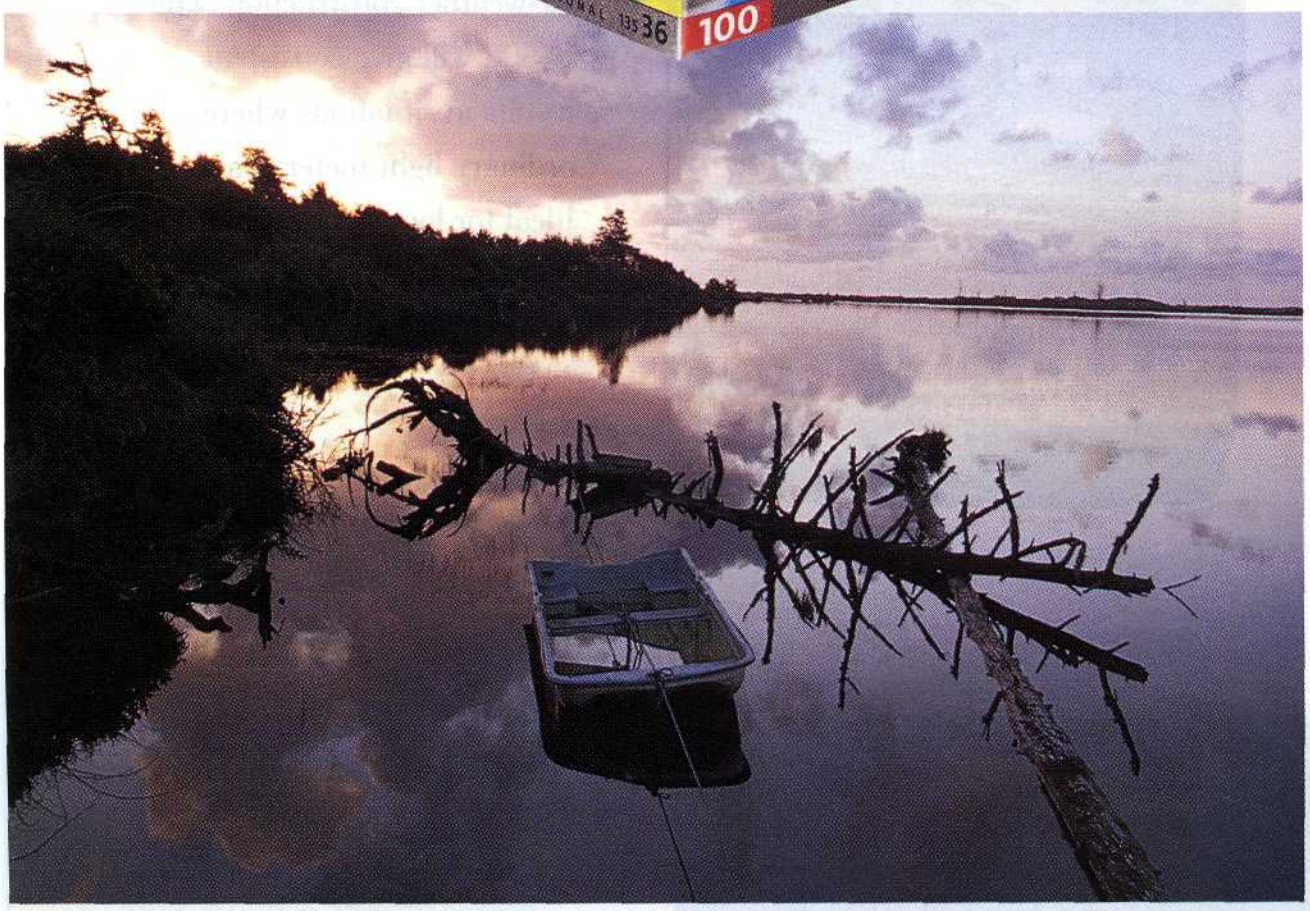




The film engineers at Agfa are at it again. They introduced the results of their recent work at Photokina 98—a new line of professional slide films called RSX II. When the RS+ family was improved to RSX, we saw improvements in color saturation, tonal separation, and pushing characteristics. In addition to these great features, the new RSX II films are designed to provide better shadow rendition and, as Agfa states, "precision down to the last detail."

It may seem that improvement in only the shadows would have little



Agfa's recently improved RSX II 100 is a versatile pro slide film with better gray balance and base density in the shadows. The result is a film with a more saturated level of black and an expanded contrast range, which in turn deliver improved color brilliance and better push characteristics. Grain is very fine, even in out-of-focus areas and skies, sharpness is excellent and neutral tones remain neutral, even with push-processing. This is a fine film for scenic and nature photography, yielding beautiful, realistic images.

effect on the overall image. Not true. Agfa's improvements to the shadow density include a better gray balance and an increase in base density. The result is a film with a more saturated level of black and an expansion of the contrast range. These two together provide the resulting image an improved overall color brilliance, and better pushing characteristics.

You might think that balancing the color in the shadows would not be critical. After all, in most cases, you can barely see those areas. The truth is that one of the key factors in maintaining a true color image is the gray tones. If they are not pure from the blackest black to the whitest white, the entire image will look off-color.

Some films may have good gray-tone reproduction, but when pushed, they pick up the crossover effect. For those unfamiliar with crossovers, they work this way. When the film's black and white reproduction scale is taken beyond its limits, you will find a tint of color in the shadows. In order to correct it, you must use a color-correcting filter. For example, if the shadows are green, you would use a magenta filter for correction. If the film has a good gray-scale balance, then the filter will correct the problem. If the highlights turn magenta using the filter, you are in trouble. The answer is to start with a film that has a true balanced black and white scale like the RSX II.

Now let's talk about pushing. Agfa's improvements to the new RSX II emulsion are designed to allow one stop of pushing while maintaining true gray tones and

Flash photos indoors and out look great on RSX II 100, whether the flash is the sole source of illumination or used for fill. Skin tones are excellent with flash or daylight, and natural colors are saturated and accurate. Improved shadow rendition expands the contrast range for added color brilliance. This is a great film for general use on a wide range of subjects.

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color saturation. The only change you should see in a one-stop push with this film is a slight increase in contrast. You can push this film two stops in exposure, but expect a slight decrease in shadow density. The color saturation and grain pattern at the two-stop push are excellent, but it will not be a perfect match to the normal and one-stop push.

The one-stop push allows for very flexible shooting situations. With a one-stop increase or decrease in exposure a possibility, you can vary the contrast in a commercial shoot yet still maintain the same color balance and color saturation levels. The difference between the one stop over and one stop under is not a great amount, but you never know when this contrast control may come in handy.

We rarely know what subjects or where we will be shooting each new film test. Living at the Oregon coast, we know that weather often plays a big part. The three-month lag time between the testing and publication eliminates a lot of holiday images. Christmas images tend to look funny in March. When we get a new film to test, we shoot and process one roll as quickly as possible to check the ISO speed and to make sure all our systems are operational. Then we generally plan a trip that will allow us photo options that best suit the film's capabilities. We also keep a camera loaded with the new test film and take it with us when we run errands or walk on the beach.

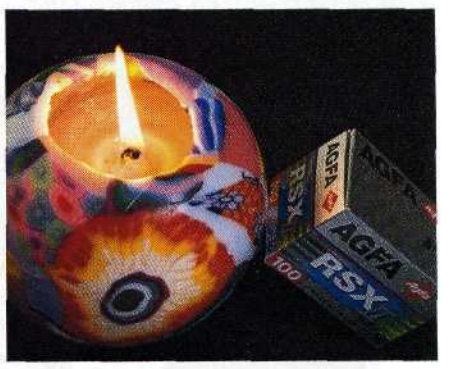
We had several rolls of the ISO 100 version of the RSX II chrome film for testing, but Mother Nature was not cooperating. The weather turned really bad. The winds were in excess of 85 miles per hour, we lost power for a day, and it hailed and rained for 7 days in a row. When the weather did provide an opening for a couple of hours, we made a mad dash outside. As we started to shoot, a general theme seemed to crop up in our images. Everywhere we went, we saw reflections. Reflections of trees, boats, and clouds made for some very interesting compositions. There seemed to be water everywhere, so we decided to take advantage of it. (What else could we do?) Flash tests were made of the last remaining flowers in our garden before they collapsed under a hailstorm, and a salamander we rescued gladly posed for his portrait.

Our final test was a little unfair to Agfa. We set up a box of new RSX II 100 film against a colorful candle used during the power blackout. We lit the candle, opened a window so sunlight could filter in from the side, and used a strobe on rear sync. This was a big-time mixed-lighting test. We made a wide exposure bracket and processed normal, push one stop, and push two stops. This was a really tough test and we had serious doubts if any of the images would look good. To our surprise the mixed-lighting shots at normal and one-stop push were almost identical on all counts. The two-stop images had a slight increase in D-max, but were more than satisfactory for most professional applications.

We had a hunch that we would like RSX II since we had been pleased with its predecessor, RSX. The results looked great! The reflection images recorded a very wide acceptable exposure latitude. The images that we bracketed at ±0.7 stop were all acceptable for professional applications, and some of the ±1-stop images we added to our stock photo files. We found the grain to be very fine both in the out-of- focus areas and in the blue skies where it always shows first. The color balance and color saturation of the two-stop push were almost identical to the normal and one-stop push images. The colors clearly separated and did not blend into each other. The blacks were a very solid black and the whites were clean, which gave the other colors a more natural appearance.

The bottom line on RSX II is that it works great! It will offer both professionals and amateurs alike a new choice of transparency films for most any job. At the time of this review, only the RSX II 100 was available. In the next few weeks we will be receiving the other two members of the family, RSX II 50 and 200, for more extensive testing. We guess that means our weather report will be for more rain. Oh, well....

For more information on Agfa films, contact Agfa Corp., 100 Challenger Rd., Ridgefield Park, NJ 07660; 800/243-2776; on the Internet www.agfanet.com. ■



RSX II 100 handled the toughest challenges—mixed light sources and push-processing—quite well. For the top photo, the film was normally exposed at ISO 100; for the middle photo, pushed a stop to EI 200; and the for bottom photo, pushed two stops to EI 400.