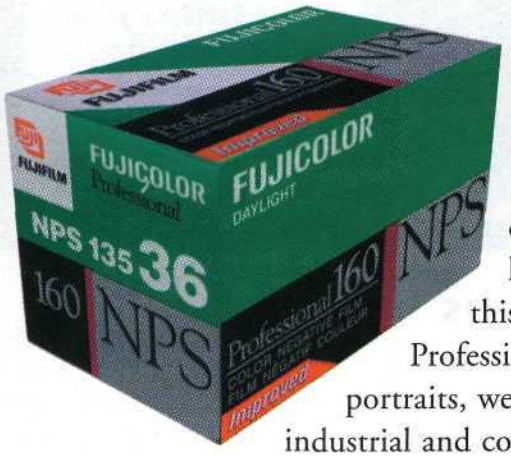
Fujicolor NPS 160 Professional

A great film for people—and other subjects, too!

by Jack and Sue Drafahl



As films continue to evolve, we see a more aggressive trend toward professional lower-contrast color-negative films. Fuji's latest film improvement in this field is NPS 160 Professional. The target market is portraits, weddings, architectural, industrial and commercial photography. But just because it's labeled a portrait film, doesn't mean this film can't be used to record other difficult scenes that push the limits of capturing full image detail.

So, what makes NPS 160 film better for capturing certain subjects than other types of films? Portrait photographers would be quick to respond that good color reproduction of flesh tones is most important. The more accurate the flesh tone, the more realistic a photograph. The film's grain structure plays a big part too, since the finer the grain, the better the skin-tone values will reproduce. Portrait photographers often use soft-focus effects, and since the physics of film displays its grain pattern in areas with soft focus, fine grain structure is critical. This film is also adaptable to a variety of mixed lighting situations the photographer might encounter.

The common thread that makes NPS 160 Professional excel is a lower contrast level than many high-saturation color-negative films available today. This lower contrast level

NPS 160-'s N-Real-Tone Technology helps color reproduction not only under odd lighting like fluorescents, but under natural lighting such as open shade, too.

ALL PHOTOS BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL

gives the photographer better control over the scene contrast levels. As the exposure latitude increases, so does the shadow detail. Since many portraits offer extreme scene range with the white wedding dresses and black tuxedos, the amount of detail captured from white to black is critical.

When we attended Brooks Institute of Photography many years ago, one assignment was to photograph a white bar of soap on a black towel so that detail could be seen in both. The solution required special processing, just the right lighting, and some very complicated darkroom printing. What we wouldn't have given to have borrowed a roll of this film to accomplish our assignment in a fraction of the time!

Fuji's NPS 160 Professional's four-layer film is part of a new N-Real-Tone Technology that reproduces colors as they are seen by the human eye. This is possible with a combination of the latest film technologies that provides the best film for difficult lighting situations. The film speed is a true ISO 160, with an exposure latitude that expands over a seven-stop range.

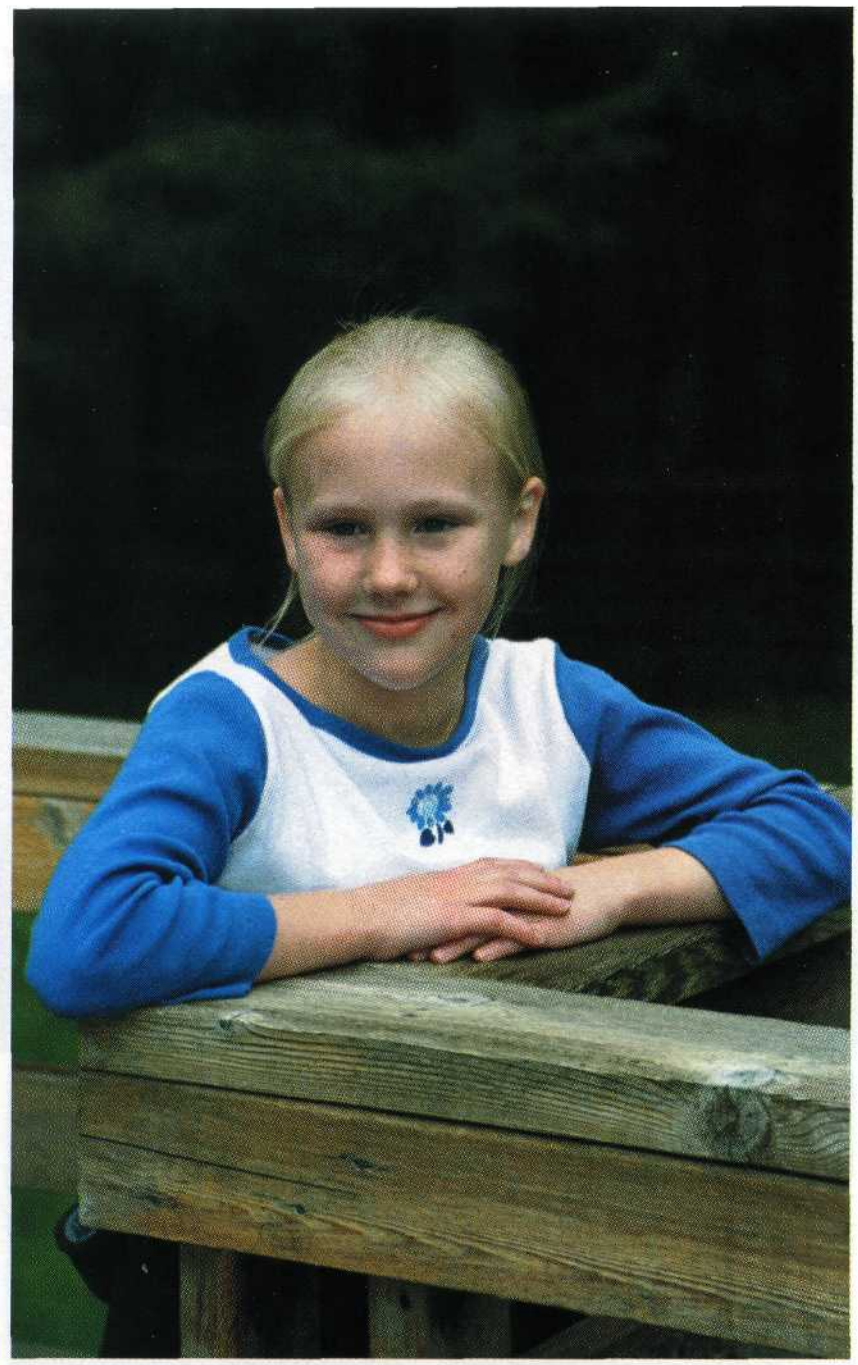
This medium-speed film is designed for daylight exposure, and does require some filtration for other types of lighting. To obtain the best results from this film you should use an 81A filter for open shade, and high-color-temperature situations. At the low-color-temperature end of the scale, such as portraits taken in early morning or late in the day, an 82A filter would be the best choice. Electronic flash requires no filtration, and can be treated the same as full daylight lighting.

Long exposures present a different problem. Fuji recommends that this film be used for exposures shorter than ⅛ second, and there is no reciprocity correction needed for ¼ to 1 second, but 2 seconds requires +½ stop exposure. Fuji does not recommend using this film beyond a 2-second exposure, but from our great results, we're not really sure why.

We have to be honest and tell you that our main photo expertise is not portraiture, but here we are testing a portrait film! We love testing film, so bring on the kids, dog, dad, mom, and whoever else gets in our film test way and we'll see what develops.

We did set up several portrait situations for the test, but decided to include a wide cross section of other subjects to see how the film handled each lighting situation. Our testing started in a local fishing harbor and then moved inland to visit a family enjoying some fun after school. Along the way, we stopped to test long exposures on some waterfalls and streams we found nestled in the shade and partial sunlight. We used both a Nikon F5 and a backup N8008 that still keeps on clicking. We bracketed a couple of scenes, but generally, we metered for the areas where we wanted the most detail. It didn't take long to collect eight rolls of test images, but the problem was deciding which ones to send to the magazine.

We processed the film in C-41 chemistry and laid the

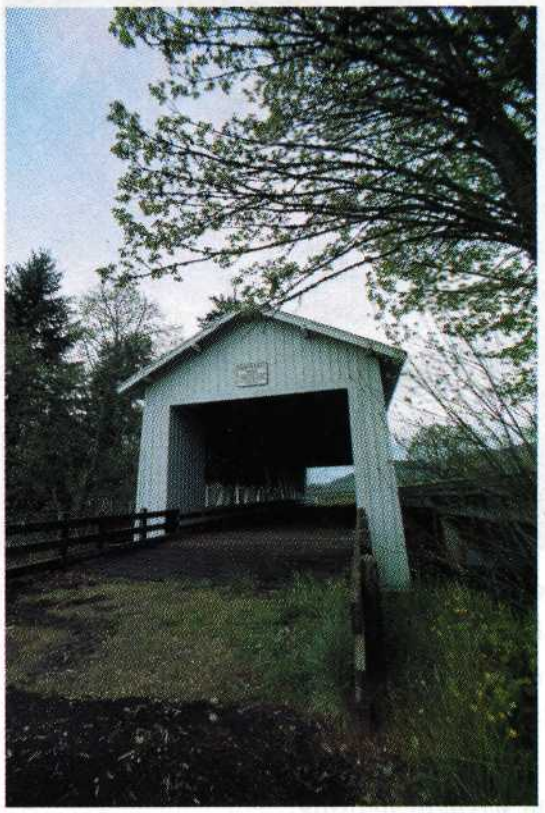


Designed primarily as a portrait and wedding film, NPS 160 is also an excellent general-purpose emulsion, producing rich and accurate colors under a wide variety of shooting situations, while also delivering superb image quality—great sharpness and extremely fine grain. Its ISO 160 speed is ⅔-stop faster than ISO 100 films, with virtually equal image quality.

shots we used a small flash fill, and found the color balance between the sun and flash to be a perfect mix.

Of course, no Drafahl film report would be complete without a few flower photos! Some of the flowers were taken using available light, but when the breeze kicked up, we pulled out the flashes. The film performed well capturing the water moving over the rocks and moss of the waterfalls, even though some of our exposures had been as long as 20 seconds. Go figure!

If this test report had been written a few years ago, this would have been the end, but this is the digital age. All films we test today are also run through film scanners. We always try several levels of color management for each film we test, and found NPS 160 Professional to be easy to scan and balance. We used the default scanner setting and once we had a portrait color balanced, all the other images fell in line. The film's wide exposure latitude produced an extensive range of detail in the digital image, yielding excellent inkjet prints. This film can go either way, traditional, digital, or a combination of both.



Whatever the situation—electronic flash, direct sun, overcast sky—NPS 160 delivers beautiful, accurate color and truly neutral neutral tones. The extra ⅔ stop of film speed over ISO 100 films comes in handy in close-up work and on gray days. This is an excellent film!

rolls out on the lightbox. All the images taken at ISO 160 had excellent density, with detail deep into the shadows while maintaining excellent highlights. Images that were as much as three stops overexposed still held highlight detail and enhanced detail in the shadows. The images at one and two stops underexposed maintained a good range of detail, but picked up a slight grain increase. We recommend staying at ISO 160 or the overexposure levels if you want to maintain maximum fine grain.

In a couple of situations we found ourselves with too low a shutter speed to hand hold, so we did underexpose a few images at –1 stop. The increased sharpness due to increased shutter speed, offset any slight increase in grain.

The family portraits were a pleasant surprise. The skin tones were very natural and we discovered that photographing people was easier than we thought. In several

Fuji has several other professional color-negative films configured either for speed or lighting situations. NPL 160 Professional is very much like NPS 160 Professional except that it is balanced for tungsten lighting instead of daylight. NPH 400 Professional is a higher-speed daylight-balanced film, and NHGII 800 Professional is even faster for those very difficult lighting situations. The film you decide to use will depend upon your shooting situation, but it's nice to know that Fuji offers such a wide variety of professional color-negative films.

Fuji Photo Film U.S.A., Inc.; 800/800-FUJI; www.fujifilm.com. ■