

natural gloss

PRO DARKROOM 1

John Tinsley tried out Ilford's new ultra-high gloss Melinex-based colour negative paper which brings Cibachrome quality to RA4 hand processing

When Ilford Cibachrome first came out twenty or so years ago, it was an instant success. Not only was the paper easily processed in the home darkroom, but the mirror like gloss finish lent a depth and brilliance to colour prints that had not existed before. For many, the transparency/direct positive print process using Ciba was the preferred way of producing the best possible colour print.

In addition to the super high gloss, Cibachrome's ICI Melinex polyester base is very durable. It is almost impossible to tear, and is very stable dimensionally. Until comparatively recently, this high gloss surface was only available in Cibachrome colour positive products. Then it became available in large size sheets and rolls for neg/pos printing in photo finishing laboratories from Fuji, Konica and Kodak. Now, Ilford are offering the material in boxes of 8 x 10" and 12 x 16" sizes as well as larger sheets and rolls. Whilst Ilford are producing this material for both EP2 and RA4 processes, we tried out the RA4 paper, Ilfocolor Deluxe.

Modern colour papers are becoming very fast, and many people now are working in total darkness - Ilford recommend this for their new paper. With Ciba gloss paper, the problem was distinguishing the emulsion side from the back in the dark, and even under enlarger light it is not always possible to see whether the paper is the right way up. This new Ilford paper is quite different, the emulsion surface being instantly recognisable by feel, and you don't have to wait until too late to find out that you have exposed the reverse. We compared it with Agfa's standard gloss RA4 paper, one of the better papers around.

Ilford's paper proved to be about 10% faster than the Agfa. Generally, also, the paper needed a lighter filtration pack, the recommended 'start' filtration being 40Y,30M compared to a normal Agfa setting of 60-65Y and 25-30M. A 10 x 8" print from a 35mm negative needed an exposure of 4.5 secs at /8 using a Durst CLS450 colour head. Colour grading was straightforward, perhaps even easier than with the Ciba pos/pos process, but like all polyester papers, you are never quite sure that the colours are exactly right, although that seems to be a current problem with the RA4 process generally. In general, the Ilford paper gave more neutral greys than the Agfa, with much more 'punch' to the image.

We had no problems with processing the paper in standard RA4 chemistry, but did tend to have minor shifts in colour if the paper was not processed immediately after exposure. Ilford hint at a possible problem here by recommending a fixed delay between exposure and processing of at least five minutes if a run of identical prints are needed from one negative, for press release prints, for instance.

In every other respect, the paper behaved impeccably, giving good, rich colour with excellent saturation and sharpness.

This is the paper to use for standard commercial photography. The gloss surface is resistant to finger marking, and the print will take a large amount of handling before it shows any signs of it. It can be mounted using standard spraymount, or by heat providing the press does not exceed 80°C. It costs £36.46/100 sheets in 10 x 8" size, £43.78/50 sheets in 12 x 16" size, and is available from branches of KJP.



It isn't possible to reproduce the metallic, reflective sheen of the colours in John Tinsley's test print accurately (above). If you have always thought that the colours of Cibachrome were due to the dyes used, think again; these C-type prints have a similar crispness, without excess contrast. On the left, the upper test (from Kodak's Gold II 200 test neg) is on Agfa RA4 paper, the lower on Ilfocolor Deluxe.

