

Buying a secondhand Nikonos 111

by Peter Rowlands

The Nikonos 111 was manufactured from 1973 until 1980 and was the last totally mechanical amphibious camera built by Nikon. As such it has remained a firm favourite with those who still like the reassurance of mechanical reliability.

New Nikonos 111's are obviously no longer available so, if you want one, you will have to buy secondhand and this is where you need to know what to look for when choosing one.

The external appearance is usually a good indication of how hard a Nikonos 111 has been used but, because the camera is robustly constructed, it doesn't necessarily mean that the internal workings should be suspect.

One area of the outer body to check is the silver chromed ring into which the lens fits. This is retained by three small Philips screws and there is a small O ring between it and the main casing of the outer body. If this O ring has not been regularly maintained there could be a build up of corrosion which eventually bridges the O ring. Check that there are no signs of corrosion in this area. If there is, it is not the end of the road as it is quite simple to remove to clean the O ring and groove.

Remove the flash port blanking plug and check the condition of the threads. There shouldn't be any corrosion in this area and the three contact pins should be straight and clean.

Having removed the lens, lift out the inner body with the levers at either side of the outer body. You can now check the area where there may be a terminal problem.

If, in the past, someone had tried to remove the inner body with the lens still in place and if they had used a lot of force trying to do so, they may have "cracked the top



The external appearance is usually a good indication of how hard a Nikonos 111 has been used. This one had been lost underwater for a year and then found again! The lens front port is clean because there was a close up lens attached.

Despite such a long immersion, the camera was still fully functioning and totally dry internally. It eventually went on to be featured in an advert for Nikon in the original Underwater Photography magazine.



If the O ring between the chrome lens mount ring and the outer body has not been regularly maintained there could be a build up of corrosion which eventually bridges the O ring.

body". Evidence of this can only be seen by taking the main O ring out of its groove and checking it just behind the frame counter window. If a Nikonos 111 has this problem there will be a vertical hairline crack across the O ring groove.

If such a camera were to be used underwater, this crack would



Fire the shutter and watch how smoothly the wind on lever moves out. If it is at all sluggish the chances are the camera needs a service.

cause a small amount of water past and onto the frame counter/wind on assembly. Parts are no longer available to repair this fault and the only way to make an attempt at repair is to remove the top body, gently open up the crack and fill it with warm araldite. This will probably cure the problem but there



Look out for a hairline crack in this area which has usually been caused by trying to remove the inner body with the lens still in place



Remove the flash port blanking plug and check the condition of the threads. There shouldn't be any corrosion in this area and the three contact pins should be straight and clean.



Turn the shutter speed dial to 'R' and the film sprockets should rotate freely in either direction. set it to any other setting and they should click into place and only rotate when the film is wound on.



Check that the inner silver rewind fork rotates freely when the rewind lever is down and that it engages when the lever is lifted and rotates with the rewind lever.

would be no guarantee so any camera with such a fault should be avoided.

If the camera you are inspecting does not have a hairline crack you can now make further checks as to the camera's condition.

Fire the shutter and watch how smoothly the wind on lever moves out. If it is at all sluggish the chances are the camera needs a service. Even if it isn't sluggish I would suggest having any secondhand camera serviced before use just in case there are any hidden internal problems. You can build the cost of a service into the offer you

make for the camera.

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These are the obvious areas to check and if your camera passes all these tests then you shouldn't be taking a risk but many buyers arrange with the seller to have the

camera serviced first on a 50:50 basis so that if there are any major internal problems you will know before it's too late.

The Nikonos 111 provides a mechanical reliability which is still much appreciated today and a good condition secondhand one will give many years of service either as a main camera or as a trusted back up.

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