ON TRIAL

**La Sardina**

A camera that looks like a sardine can? Now here’s an idea that only one company would possibly consider, but if you want something truly different…

Report by Paul Burrows.

*Lo sardina can actually has a proper bodyshell but is recycled for you’ll be glad to know, and there’s a choice of labels, but with lots more options to come. This is ‘El Capitán’.*

when we first received the press release about the Lomography Society’s latest wacky camera-making venture we had visions of real sardine cans being recycled into basic snappers (no pun intended). They’d probably smelt a bit fishy, but you’d get a slim alloy bodyshell with nicely rounded corners and a ring-pull film back. Neat!

Perhaps this is indeed how the idea for the La Sardina came about. Checked out how many variations in colour and label art that’s available around the world — from the Lomography Society’s latest wacky cam. Perhaps this is indeed how the idea for the La Sardina came about.

The answer may lie in the vast variety of brands and Holga recently? In Lomo-speak they’re called “clones” and the plan for La Sardina is to have lots of them which instantly makes them collectible as well as increasing the appeal. To kick off there are four options called ‘Marathon’, ‘Sea Pride’, ‘El Capitán’ and ‘Fischer’s Fritze’.

The instructions came printed on one side of a large sheet which has lots of pictures of sardine cans on the other side possibly to give us a hint of what’s to come. We particularly like La Sirena with its illustration of a saucy mermaid and Ocean Fresh (which is actually anchovies)

To overcome… starting with how to uncurl the peel-off lid to make a light-tight chamber. Consequently, the La Sardina’s body looks like a sardine can and is pretty similar in dimensions, but you’ll be glad to know it’s purpose-built and hasn’t been scavenged from a rubbish tip.

Why use a sardine can as inspiration? Well, the answer may lie in the vast variety of brands and label art that’s available around the world which is right up the Lomography Society’s alley. Checked out how many variations in colour schemes there are for the Diana, Diana Mini and Holga recently? In Lomo-speak they’re called “clones” and the plan for La Sardina is to have lots of them which instantly makes them collectible as well as increasing the appeal. To kick off there are four options called ‘Marathon’, ‘Sea Pride’, ‘El Capitán’ and ‘Fischer’s Fritze’.

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yachts, seagulls and what looks like a tsunami wave on its lid.

Two of the four initial models – ‘El Capitán’ and ‘Fischer’s Fritze’ – come in a kit with a dedicated flash unit which screws into the side of the camera and synchs via a pair of pins. The flash – which is called Fritz The Blitz – has the same colour scheme as the camera and, says the Lomo Society, is the most powerful accessory unit it has ever offered. It’s powered by a single CR123A-type lithium battery and has three power settings (full, half and one-eighth) plus it’s supplied with a set of coloured clip-on filters (blue, yellow and pink) and a white diffuser panel.

The Can Can

The lens unit can be retracted when the camera isn’t in use to allow us a hint of what’s to come. We particularly like La Sirena with its illustration of a saucy mermaid and Ocean Fresh (which is actually anchovies) with

Both the flash unit and the camera are manufactured in China and, as we noted with the Spinner 360°, look very well made indeed. They’re both predominantly plastic, but pretty heavy-duty with all the key fixings being via small chromed screws.

All the controls look pretty durable too, including the film transport knobs which is reassuring because they’re going to get quite a bit of usage and haven’t always looked up to it on some Lomo models. In keeping with the can theme, the camera back detaches completely and film loading simply involves inserting the cassette, securing it by pushing the rewind knob back in and then threading the leader onto the take-up spool. There’s an 180° window set into the back and auto resetting frame counter. The shutter and frame advance interlock, but recocking can be done independently to allow for multiple exposures. The switch for this is really the only control on the La Sardina and has two other settings marked ‘N’ and ‘B’ which select the shutter speeds… well, one speed – 1/100 second – and ‘bulb’ for longer exposures. For the latter, the shutter release incorporates a cable release socket.

La Sardina very much follows Lomography’s keep-it-simple philosophy so the lens has a single aperture of f8.0 and exposure ‘control’ is down to using different speed films or relying on the latitude of colour negative stocks. This is down to using different speed films or relying on the latitude of colour negative stocks. This is also where having the flash is handy so it’s probably well worth the extra investment of $50, especially as its output is adjustable.

The Can Can

The lens has a focal length of 22mm so it’s an ultra-wide with an angle-of-view of 88 degrees. It’s also where having the flash is handy so it’s probably well worth the extra investment of $50, especially as its output is adjustable.

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La Sardina is its happiest working within a prescribed set of conditions as far as the lighting and the subject distance is concerned, but the whole Lomo thing is about ‘suck it and see’ so this may be of limited value because if you can’t see it, you’re not going to know that you’ve meant to, are you? If you’re a bit on the forgetful side, it’s probably best to leave the lens in the shooting position as it hardly protrudes enough to get in the way anyway. The front section of the lens adjusts the focus and there are two settings, one for close-ups (60 cm to a metre) and one for the rest (one metre and beyond). The optical viewfinder provides an idea of framing, but that’s it, although with such a short focal length framing isn’t really all that difficult and there’s also a lot of depth-of-field to play with in terms of the focus.

As with any simple single-setting camera, “Of course, as with all things Lomo, you aren’t meant to take it too seriously and the whole objective is to have some fun with carefree snapping.”

La Sardina can be purchased as the camera alone or as a kit with a dedicated flash unit that’s supplied with a set of coloured fibres and a white diffuser.

The Verdict

One thing is certain, your La Sardina will be a talking point wherever you take it, especially the bright red-and-yellow ‘El Capitán’ which was our test sample. It really does look like a converted sardine can so be prepared to deal with curious onlookers, although this could be a great opening for grabbing some portraits. Of course, as with all things Lomo, you aren’t meant to take it too seriously and the whole objective is to have some fun with carefree snapping.

As it happens, La Sardina is actually quite a good little camera given the lens’s wide angle-of-view and the fact that f/8 at 1/100 second works pretty well with ISO 100 speed in bright conditions and ISO 400 when it’s cloudy or dull. Our only gripe is that there isn’t any way of attaching any sort of a strap (or even a bit of fishing line), but no doubt there’ll be a solution somewhere down the track. Perhaps a nice lanyard pull would work...

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