

## My Journal on my Canon T90, by Alan Brown

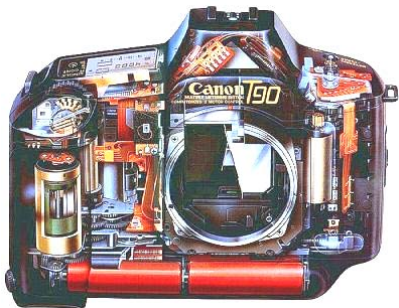


Well, I've done it: I purchased the legendary Canon T90. The amazing thing is that I never knew it existed even though I have been an avid Canon manual focus camera enthusiast for decades. The only explanation I have is that I was deeply involved in a relocation around that time (1984) and I mostly gave up on photography for quite a while. So the T90 phenomenon completely passed me by – what a shame!

My current collection includes an A1 with the motor drive and 533G flash.<sup>1</sup> I also have an AV-1 that I enjoy just snap shooting with. I have two AT-1s one of which I have loaned out to my son for a photo course – I used to use the AT-1 for B&W pictures but gave up B&W photography long ago. I'll try to add some pictures of my collection at some point.

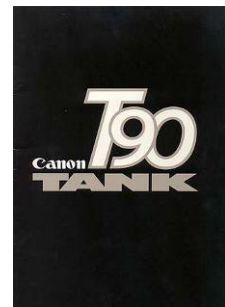
My FD lens consists of the following:

- Canon 17 mm f4 super-wide.
- Canon 24 mm f2.8 wide angle.
- Canon (2) 50 mm f1.8.
- Canon 35 – 105 mm f3.5 zoom.
- Tamron 80 – 220 mm f4.5 zoom.
- Canon 500 mm f8 reflex.



While I have been waiting I have been reading up on the T90 and have to admit that I have some trepidation about owning the camera. It is a very complex camera. It features 3 motors to drive the film advance, the shutter and the automatic rewind. It has an amazing continuous mode of 4.5 frames per second! That's faster than most expensive DSLRs these days. Anyway, one concern I have is that the LCD display is notorious for getting dim or

dark with age. Another concern is that the shutter can lock up due to sticky electro-magnets and give the dreaded "EEEE" indication. It is 20 years old and Canon no longer supports it so I started looking around to see what kind of support is available and it goes the full spectrum of "wouldn't touch it with a 10 foot pole" to a couple of outfits who claim to be able to support it. One place that gets my recommendation for now is called "[Camera-Care](#)."<sup>2</sup> Proprietor, Steve, claims that he can repair just about anything associated with the T90. So, with some caution I'm awaiting its arrival – I may be dropping Steve an email to get the T90 repaired. Gosh, it sure gets some real nice [reviews](#) on the web.<sup>3</sup> It's been called the "Tank" by those who liked it in the past.



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I must comment on why I'm sticking with the old Canon manual focus cameras. I was really upset when Canon came out with their new auto-focus EOS cameras and did not make backward compatibility to their FD lens possible. In my mind that was a deliberate marketing move to force Canon-users to discard their collection of FD lens and go out and spend thousands (an easy thing to do) to have an equivalent collection of lens. I'm sorry, but I'm not going to do that! My current lens collection serves me perfectly and I'm sticking with it. There seems to be a lot of others who feel the same way I do and thus the FD, manual focus counter-revolution is born! So, it's March 19, 2007 and I am waiting for my T90 with great anticipation. It's supposed to arrive tomorrow – I can hardly wait!



March 20. It has arrived!<sup>4</sup> I was really excited. OK, I have it in my hands and suddenly even after reading the on-line manual I realized just how ignorant I was about its operation. First, load the 4 AA batteries. Ahah! Life! What's this? It's on "bulb." Now how do I get it into the regular Program mode? More reading of the manual – there, that's fixed. Now to load the film – it's supposed to be simple, right?

Eventually, I managed to figure it out and it really was quite simple. It was a bit of a problem keeping the film leader from raking the Duralumin shutter but with care it can be done. The rest of the evening I went between the manual and the camera first to get it off timed shooting then continuous. After figuring things out it became second nature.

So I'm excited about going out for my first shoot. The camera is shown with my Canon 35 – 105 f3.5 zoom lens. It's probably going to be my over-all lens until I get into special situations, then the other lens from my collection will come out. One small disappointment: there is an abrasion on the right side of the tower and it looks UGLY. Apparently the high-impact plastic under the paint is a brown color. I'll have to see if I can get some touch-up paint to cover it up.

### The first shoot.

Saturday March 24. I decided to take the T90 for a test drive with my son Alan Jr. riding "shotgun." The planned route was Salem, NH and then back home. The first shot was out in the back yard with a test shot of the ice-capped pool with the shadow of the garage. This was done with center weight metering so the deep shadow is very apparent. I think the balance between the shadow and the lightness of the pool side is a good one. The grass – still green – has good color depth. See endnote on how the pictures were processed.<sup>5</sup>



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On the Van shot, I set the camera to “partial metering” which is a broader version of spot metering with the camera aimed at the side of the van (door open). Alan Jr. did this shot. As you can see the background is somewhat overexposed to accommodate some bracketing for the wide variation of lighting.<sup>6</sup> I’m somewhat satisfied with that test. Now it’s off to Salem.



**The Salem traffic-jam.**



As you can see, we were stuck in some of Salem’s legendary traffic (spilling into Methuen, Ma) so out of boredom, I did some shooting out through the window of the van and a shot out the side with the window down (note the mirror). Center weighting was chosen with expected results – deep shadows but nice, blue sky. Yeah, yeah, why was I headed north on Route 28? I missed exit 1, Salem NH because I was talking with Alan Jr.

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Finally, after a short visit to COMPUSA we headed home where I did some spot metered shots at Ham Radio Outlet (HRO). The



shot of the beam antenna was taken using a couple of clicks of the roof and then a single click at the beam.<sup>7</sup> Results were good, I think.

### Lake Massabesic, 28 bypass.



Finally, on the way home I took a couple of shots in the spot metering mode where lake Massabesic's brightness was moderated by a couple of clicks on the field, one on the shadows and one on the lake. Results: the lake looks a bit overexposed but the winter-burned

landscape looks about right, maybe still a little dark for my taste – that's close to what I wanted – for this time of year. Later during the summer, I might give more weight to the lake to emphasize the blueness of the lake which would make the landscape a richer green – that might work for me. I'll revisit that idea. This picture reminds me – I must take a trip up to Kimball pond in Canterbury and take some shots there – then compare them with some shots I took in previous years with my A1 and a [Panasonic PV-DC 2090](#)<sup>8</sup> digital camera. I had some problems with color shift with the digital camera and exposure problems with the A1. Perhaps the T90 with its multi-spot metering will do the trick.

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Here's a good test for the T90's averaging mode. I think it came out great. The sky isn't saturated and the landscape is not dark. Good balance. The shadow in the foreground was from a cloud above.

Well, the shoot was over so I rewound the film at the 19<sup>th</sup> frame and took it into RITZ. When I picked the pictures up the old-timer there said that he had sold T90s in

previous years and thought it was a great camera. I agree. It's a darned shame it had only a one year production span. That makes it a bit of a rare camera body. I'm glad I have one.



I have ordered the 300TL to go along with the camera as it uses off-the-film metering so I'm anticipating some interesting flash shots at some point.<sup>9</sup> Here's a word about ADORAMA where I ordered the T90. I think their rating of "E" was reasonable considering the wear spot of paint on the viewer tower but it has had excellent performance so far. I'm not pleased with the fact that it took two tries to get the 300TL – the first unit was a 299T which I kept as it goes

along with my "A" series cameras and features zoom and shuts itself off after 30 minutes of non-use. David at ADORAMA was nice enough to give me a \$10 break on the second order for – I hope – is the real 300TL. Stay tuned.

The 300TL meets all my expectations! Through the lens exposure control rules! There are other features that I have not explored yet but my initial impression of this flash is that I'm impressed. It's a powerful flash that solves many exposure issues that I've had with my other excellent Canon flash units in the past.<sup>10</sup>

[Here's an excellent web link for looking at the T90's features.](#)<sup>11</sup> It's out of Malaysia but I recommend it as an authoritative website on the Canon camera phenomenon.

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### Good example of averaging metering versus spot.

Here's a good example of averaging metering versus spot. First, let me say that both types of metering have their place. I consider averaging metering a sort-of no brainer form of metering. But you could say it does give a better overall metering of distant landscape shots. When you are shooting from the hip it's a good way to get your exposure bracketing at least within later exposure manipulating range. The T90 offers a multiple spot metering feature where you can take up to 9 spots of highlight areas and shadow areas – you can actually see the bracketing move around as you “spot” different levels of exposure. If you want to put emphasis on a certain area such as a person's face you can hit the face with several presses of the spot button and that area will be given priority over the other spots.

#### Lake using averaging metering



Here the camera was just pointed at the highlighted lake. As you can see the shadows are dark with little or no detail. The exposure here is artificial in that this is not what the human eye would see. The lake would be brighter – the shadows would have much more detail

#### Lake using multiple spot metering



Here I put the camera into the spot metering mode and did several “spots.” Several of them were done on the foreground one in the deep shadows and one or two on different parts of the lake. The result shows a bit of washout of the lake detail which is fine with me. More importantly the foreground show more detail from the winter-killed grass to the yellow colored moss further back. The green of the bushes in the background now becomes more apparent. I'm mostly satisfied with this picture.

So there you have it. I'm very happy with the T90. One thing of note – the T90 does not offer a multi-segmented exposure matrix mode – that feature was offered shortly afterward in the next generation cameras. I'm mostly happy with the combination of partial metering (a broader spot that actually combines averaging and spot) and multiple spot metering. It works well for me.

See Endnotes below.

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<sup>1</sup> I also have the 577G flash – one of Canon's most powerful flashes. It looks very similar to the 533G but comes with this HUGE battery pack you wear on your side with "C" cells.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.camera-care.com/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.camerareview.com/templates/reviews.cfm?camera\\_id=331](http://www.camerareview.com/templates/reviews.cfm?camera_id=331)

<sup>4</sup> This is my T90 taken with my Nikon 5700 digital camera with automatic flash settings.

<sup>5</sup> All pictures were scanned on a Canon LiDE 20 with no color or gamma correction. I may scan the negatives at a later time for better resolution and exposure range.

<sup>6</sup> If you are using a LCD monitor, be sure to align your viewing for proper brightness and contrast – otherwise these pictures may look a bit underexposed.

<sup>7</sup> You can take up to 9 spot clicks – each click brackets the overall exposure. Multiple clicks on the same spot give that spot more weight in the metering. Nice feature.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.w1vtp.com/images/2090.gif>

<sup>9</sup> You can use the same multi-spot metering mode with this flash. That should resolve some of the exposure washouts I have had in the past using flash.

<sup>10</sup> The 300TL offers a Guide number of 118 at ISO 100 that's as good as the 533G and compares well with the guide number of 157 for the 577G. Impressive!

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.mir.com.my/rb/photography/hardwares/classics/canont90/htmls/concept.htm>