

amateur
photographer
**TEST
REPORT**

BY REX HAYMAN



The AZ-1 — a nice looking camera that should be quite popular with those who like semi-automatic compact SLRs.

FUJICA AZ-1

Following Fujica's ST series of SLRs is the Fujica AZ-1 — yet another compact 35mm SLR, but with a difference. The Ai-1 is Fujica's only aperture-priority semi-automatic camera. The ST605, ST705 and ST801 are (mechanical) shutter-priority semi-automatics. The ST901 is a fully automatic SLR with a limited manual override facility.

The next logical step was to make an aperture-priority semi-automatic SLR with a continuously variable electronic shutter — the AZ-1. It is sort of a half-step "down" from the ST901 model. Whereas the ST901 has continuously variable (electronically controlled) shutter speeds from about 20sec to 1/1000sec, and a fully automatic diaphragm, the AZ-1 has continuously variable (electronically controlled) shutter speeds from 1/1000 sec through an aperture manually chosen by the photographer. In addition, the AZ-1 has manual shutter speeds of 1/1000sec, 1/250sec, 1/60sec

and B, ± 2 stops override on the AE (automatic exposure) setting.

I suppose it's nice to be able to choose manual shutter speeds on a semi-automatic camera, but if they are limited to only three speeds (plus B), what's the point? You might as well stick to a purely aperture-priority camera with no facility for manual shutter speeds if the alternative is only a choice of three anyway. And since you can choose to select a .2, .1, -1 or -2/ stops override (while on the AE setting) why would you use a manual speed when the camera can do the "work" for you? Except, of course, to let the camera function with failed batteries.

The AZ-1 is marginally smaller and lighter than the ST901. It has the same standard 55mm f/1.8 lens as the ST705, ST801 and ST901. The only apparent disadvantages of the AZ-1 compared to its older brother, the ST901, is its more limited shutter speed range, its

lack of the fully automatic facility and a series of red LED dots indicating shutter speeds in the viewfinder compared with the digital LED shutter speed display in the ST901's viewfinder. The AZ-1's advantage over the ST901, however, is a saving in the order of about £40 (and size and weight).

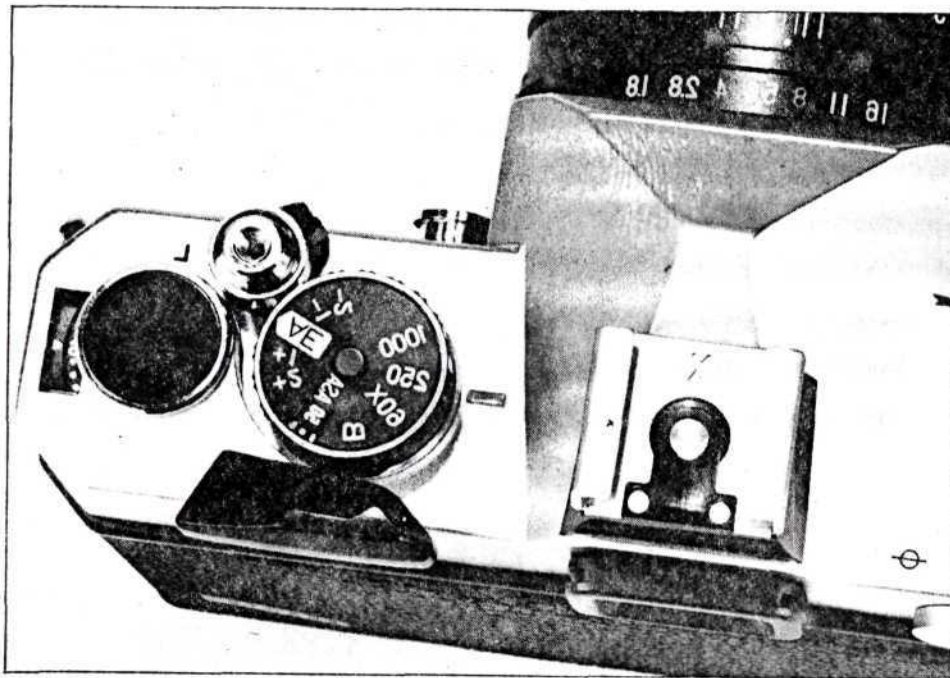
HANDLING

The AZ-1 is comfortable enough to hold (it would be more so for someone with smaller hands than mine). A curious trait is that focusing is sharper in the viewfinder if my eye is not right up to the viewfinder rearsight. The AZ-1 comes with a rubber eye-piece and if it is just touching my eyebrow then focusing is sharp, but if I press the camera a bit closer, then the viewfinder image becomes blurred.

Another slightly annoying characteristic is the virtually non-existent wind-on lever stand-off position. Only the minimum stand off angle is permitted by the hinged plastic-

tip of the lever wind. When shooting quickly, some shots are "lost" because the shutter won't fire unless the lever wind is allowed to fully return. This fully returned position leaves practically no room to keep my thumb behind the lever, ready to wind on quickly after the shot is taken. To remedy this situation, either Fujica will have to design their lever winds for more stand-off angle, or put more space between the pentaprism/viewfinder rearsight and lever wind. Sports photographers will not find this an easy camera to use quickly and surely.

Perhaps those who like to pretend that they are sports photographers will like the AZ-1, because (for about £90 extra) you can get the Fujica Auto Winder. This will overcome the fast shooting and winding-on problem; it will wind-on for you at the rate of about two frames a second (depending on the light level if shooting on the AE setting). But the auto winder also adds



DATA PANEL FUJICA AZ-1

Country of origin: Japan.
Format: Full frame 35mm, 24 x 36mm.

STANDARD LENS

Fitting: 42mm Praktica-type screw thread with lock.

Focal length: 55mm (other: 43-75mm f/3.5-4.5 zoom).

Maximum aperture: f/1.8.

Minimum aperture: f/16.

Click-stops: At full stop settings only.

Diaphragm: Automatic.

Minimum focusing distance: 1Gin (approx).

Elements-Groups: 6-4.

Filter size: 49mm screw-in.

VIEWFINDER

Type: Fixed eye-level pentaprism.

Field of view: 90 per cent vertical, 92 per cent horizontal.

Magnification: 0.96x at infinity with 55mm lens.

Screen: Ground glass matt.

Focusing aids: Horizontally split image spot with micropism collar.

Information: 7 red LED spots indicate selected shutter speeds.

Rear sight features: Grooved for mounting eye-cup, etc.

EXPOSURE CONTROL

Type: TTL, centre-weighted, full aperture.

Cell(s): Silicon photo diode (SPD).

Auto/Manual: Automatic exposure (AE) aperture-priority with manual override for shutter speeds 1/1000, 1/250, 1/60sec plus B and ± 2 stops override on SE setting.

Film speed range: 25-3200ASA.

Meter EV range: EV2 to 18 (with 50mm f/1.4 lens and 100ASA film).

SHUTTER

Type: Focal plane, cloth, horizontal run.

Speed range: $\frac{1}{1000}$ sec AE settings; manual speeds 1/1000, 1/250, 1/60sec plus B.

Mechanical/Electronic: Elec-

tronic with mechanical release button which also serves as meter switch when slightly depressed — this will also "lock" the selected shutter speed.

Batteries: Three 15V silver oxide.

Battery check: No, but viewfinder LEDs won't light with exhausted or incorrectly installed batteries.

Flash sync: X-sync 1/60sec (marked with X on shutter speed dial).

Delayed action: Yes, 8sec delay set via own lever and activated by depressing time button under lever.

Cable release socket: Yes.

Shutter lock: Yes.

FILM TRANSPORT

Single-stroke lever wind, 140° winding angle, narrow stand-off position by folding plastic lever tip.

FRAME COUNTER
Additive, self-zeroing, numbers 12, 20 and 36 in red.

FILM REWIND

Release button and rewind knob crank.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Shutter will not operate on AE setting(s) with exhausted batteries, but manual speeds may still be used; hot shoe with auto Hash control contacts; X-sync lead socket; depth of field preview button (non-locking); tripod bush and auto winder contacts on base plate; folding rewind cranks; back opens by pulling up rewind knob; press-on lens cup.

SIZE: 133 x 87.5 x 50.5mm (body only).

WEIGHT: 580g (body only but with batteries).

ACCESSORIES INCLUDED: Carrying strap, front lens cap, viewfinder rubber eye-piece, soft case.

SELLING PRICE (APPROX): £190.00.

DISTRIBUTOR: Fujimex Ltd, Faraday Rd, Dorcan, Swindon, Wilts.

Above left: Shutter speed control (note the ± 2 override on AE), firing button with lock, and wind-on lever.

Above: Delay timer lever (concealing the chrome firing button) and the lightly sprung but unlockable depth-of-field preview button.

about 274g (10oz without batteries) to the weight of the camera and a fair bit of noise, too. No sports photographer wants more weight if he/she can help it. The question we all must ask ourselves is: Would you pay about £90 for something which you can do for free with your thumb?

Focusing is really easy with the AZ-1. It has a big bright focusing screen, mostly ground glass with a horizontally split centre-spot surrounded by a large micropism collar. However, the rear-sight could be a little larger for my liking; spectacle wearers will no doubt find difficulty in seeing all four corners at the same time. When fitted with the rubber eye-cup there is a problem in seeing all four corners simultaneously. And it even further limits the space between the viewfinder rear-sight and lever wind.

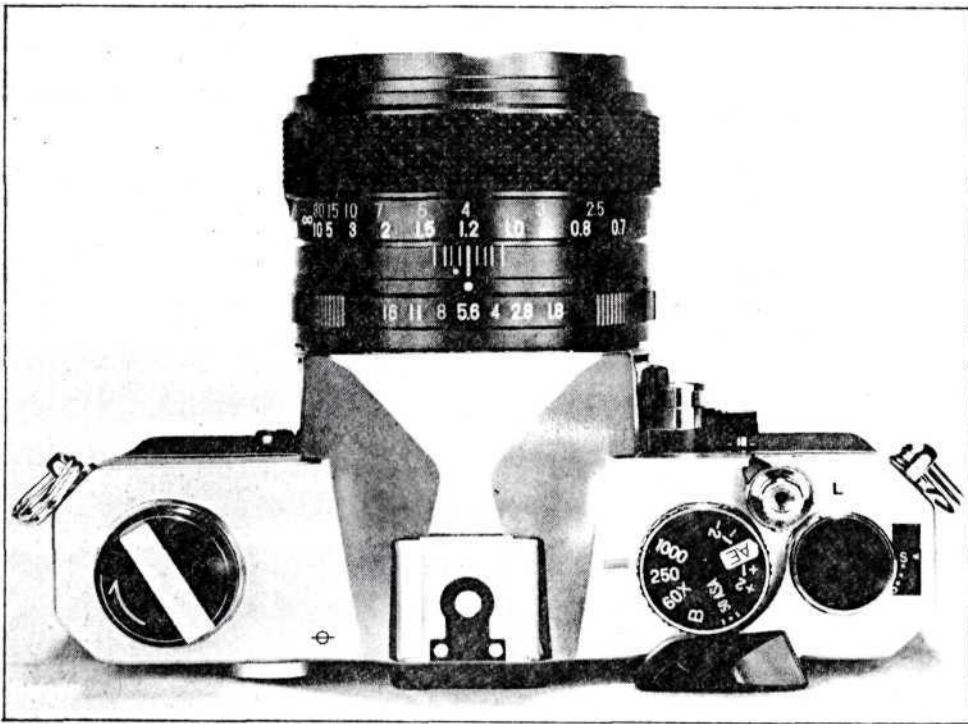
Film speeds can be set from 25-3200ASA easily by pulling up the shutter speed dial on the top plate. The depth of field preview button on the front of the body is in a good position right under your right middle finger for easy operation, but it does not lock. But then, there's not often the need for a lock. The lens also has the usual depth of field scale but with a colour coding — f/1.6 is marked in blue on the lens, f/11 in yellow, f/8 in green, f/5.6 white, f/4 red, and the rest in white. The depth of field lines are marked on the top of the lens barrel in the

colour corresponding to the f/stop numbers. This is a good idea since the lines are so close together.

If you want to use the 8sec delayed-action shutter release timer, push its lever down and then press the little chrome button which is then revealed — then "get the lead out" to join the group. If you also want to use the timer to shoot a picture of, say, a close-up subject when the light(s) are behind the camera, you can still use the AE setting, as long as you tilt the viewfinder rear-sight cap. If you don't, the light entering the viewfinder will prejudice the light reading and you may get an underexposed picture.

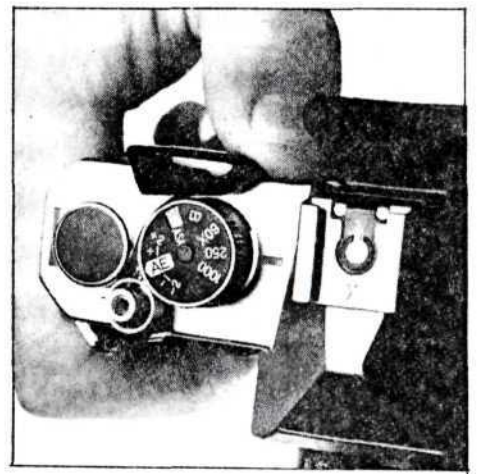
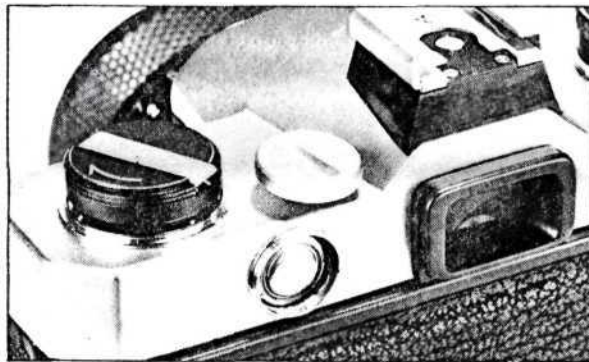
IN THE VIEWFINDER

While using the camera manually, selecting your own aperture and shutter speed, you can see none of the settings in the viewfinder frame. However, while using the AE setting you will see a red LED dot light up alongside the shutter speed which the camera has chosen to use along with your chosen aperture. Speeds indicated by the dots are 1/100-1/30sec. The dot may also appear flashing next to the "2-15" notation, indicating that the shutter speed is from 1-1/15sec — too slow for most people for a hand-held exposure with a standard lens. If, however, the dot is alongside the 1/100sec mark and is flashing, then the shutter speed of 1/100sec is not fast enough; you should close down

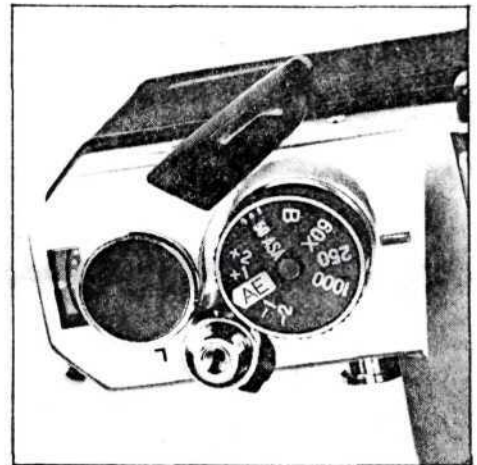


Above: The AZ-1 is a compact camera, and quite light — though not as light as some other compact SLRs.

Right: Battery compartment and grooved eyepiece.



The wind-on lever's stand-off position is too narrow to allow really fast winding and firing. With the rubber eye-piece (supplied) in place, space is even more cramped.



Marked Speeds	Equivalent		Measured		Fraction Equivalent	
	Milli-seconds		Manual	Auto	Manual	Auto
1000	1	u/s-	1.6-	2.4f	U/S*	1/625-
500	2		3.4f			1/416f
250	4	4	5.2		1/250	1/192
125	8		9			1/111
60	16.6	17	15		1/60	1/66
30	33.3		33			1/30
15	66.6	
8	125	
4	250	
2	500	

The actual speeds in milliseconds are an average of ten successive measurements. These actual speeds in milliseconds are the true reading of the shutter.
 The nearest practical fractions serve only to provide a comparison between the measured speeds and those marked on the shutter control.
 Meter Light LV 7 — i/stop over-exposure
 Value Scale LV10 — OK
 (at 50ASA setting) LV 14 — OK
 Notes: Shutter performance taken from a pre-production review sample. Auto speeds indicated in viewfinder rather slow; 1/1000sec very erratic; manual speeds operate without batteries.
 † Outside the relevant British Standard.
 * U/S — unusable speed — gave no exposure.
 ** All auto speeds i-1/15sec all well within tolerance.
 Test performed by H. A. Garrett, Sutton, Surrey.

the aperture until the dot stops flashing.

You cannot, however, close down the aperture hoping the dot will stop flashing //you've still got your digit on the shutter button, brightly depressing the shutter button switches on the meter, and the camera then "locks on" to a selected shutter speed.

It will *not* re-read the scene or change its mind about the shutter speed it's chosen, unless you let up on the shutter button. So it does have a memory.

Take a beach scene with a pretty girl, who you want to shoot contre-jour. Using the AE setting (and the camera's memory), you could point the camera at your hand, slightly depress the shutter button to "lock" the exposure setting, raise the camera and shoot. Or you could use the +2 f/stop override setting alongside the AE setting on the shutter speed dial. Both ways will work.

But take a bike race situation. You're standing at a curve in the track where the bike goes from bright sunshine into the shade of trees on-the corner. If you depress

the shutter button when the bike is still in the sun and shoot when the bike is in the shade, you'll get an under-exposed shot, because the camera has remembered the setting for when the bike was in the sun. So when shooting in this type of situation, you'll have to wait for the subject to reach the place where you want to picture it and *only then* press the shutter release.

Having the meter switch in the shutter button is a good idea, but I'm not so convinced about the advantages of the meter having a memory as *we/1* as the :f2 stop override facility in the camera's design. Neither the memory or the ±2 stop override facility will help the sports photographer very often. Yet both this override and the memory seem to duplicate functions for the photographer favouring the contre-jour shooting situation. Alternatively, I would have preferred to see a *continuously changing* shutter speed readout (via the LED dots) along with the ±2 stop override on the AE facility.

Since depressing the shutter release button also turns on

the meter, the shutter button has a locking collar tab. Loading film is quite easy on the six-slot take-up spool, but the rubber eye-cup hinders the back from opening slightly (if it's fitted). Winding on and rewinding are both smooth operations.

SHOULD BE POPULAR

The performance of the standard 55mm f/1.8 lens was very good; however, the performance of the 43-75mm f/3.5-4.5 zoom lens (an alternative) wasn't very good. Its focal length range doesn't really extend far enough in each direction for it to be much more useful than the standard 55mm lens and it's also much "slower" at f/3.5.

Shutter speeds on the sample weren't very good when faster than about 1/125sec; the 1/500sec and 1/1000sec speeds were outside the relevant British Standard. But then the sample we had for review was one of only 10 in the country at the time and was a pre-production model. Production models will no doubt be more accurate.

The Fujica AZ-1 is a nice-looking camera; it's small, relatively light (but a bit heavier than other "compact" SLRs) and is semi-automatic. It's easy to get used to and to use. Fujicas also tend to stand up very well to wear and tear and the "test" of time. I'd rather have this AZ-1 than other compacts I could think of, as it feels more sturdy and business-like. It should become quite popular with those who like semi-automatic compact SLRs.

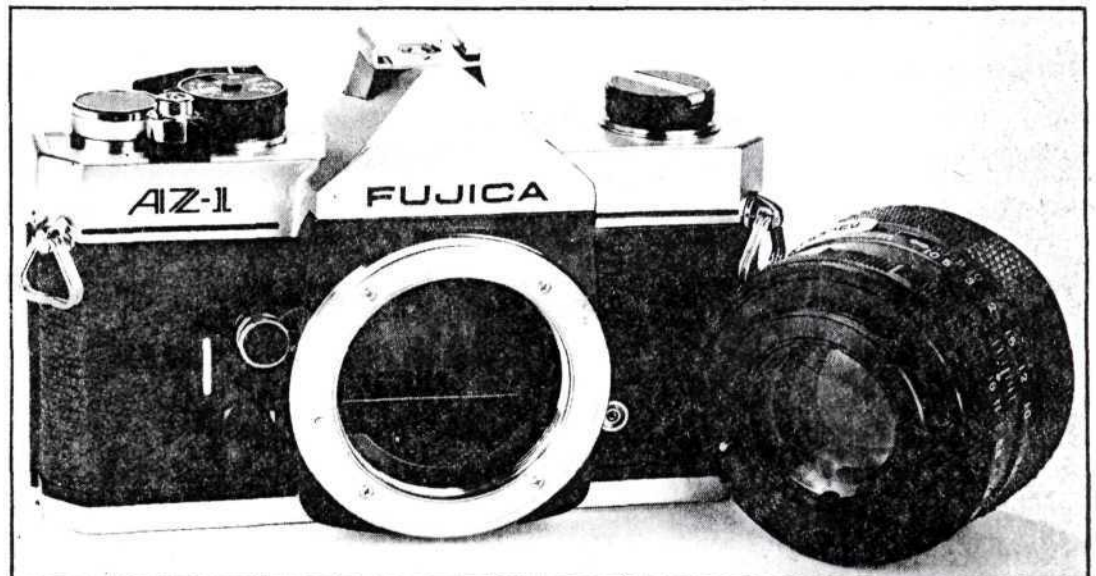
Looking accessible and easy to load, though with the supplied rubber eyepiece fitted it is awkward to open the back.

LENS PERFORMANCE

<i>Fujinon 55mm f/1.8</i>	Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Very good	Excellent
Overall performance					●	
Definition					●	
Image contrast					●	
Balance of aberrations					●	
Notes: Best central definition — f/8 Best overall definition — f/4 <i>Test performed by Jason Adams Optical Co Ltd, Surhilton. Surrey.</i>						

LENS PERFORMANCE

<i>Fujinon-Z43-75mm f/3.5-4.5</i>	Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Very good	Excellent
Overall performance	●					
Definition	●					
Image contrast				●		
Balance of aberrations	●					
Notes: Best central definition — f/16 Best overall definition — 1/8 <i>Strong inward coma and astigmatism present at all focal lengths; the system rattles possibly indicating a loose element.</i> <i>Test performed by Jason Adams Optical Co Ltd. Surbiton. Surrey.</i>						



Fujica AZ-1 and standard 55mm f/1.8 lens.

