



The Sekonic New Professional L-V Universal Exposure Meter

Under license from Weston, between 1953 and 1963, the Japanese company Sekonic made four models of exposure meter that were, in essence, copies of contemporaneous models in the 'Master' range. These were the L-III Professional of 1953 (a copy of the Master II), the L-V, the L-104 of 1960 (a copy of the Master IV) and the L-3b of 1960 (approx.) which was a budget version of the L-III Professional.

The L-III Professional and the L-104 are readily found for sale on auction sites. Occasionally the L-3b or the re-badged 'Anglo' model shows up. The model that **NEVER** appears is the L-V!

Why is this? Well, of course, it is extremely rare. Very few examples are in the public domain or posted on websites. Very little information is available concerning its production and distribution.

So, having obtained a decent example, thanks to the help of my friend David, let's take a look at it:

The meter casing of glossy black enamelled metal is virtually the same as the L-III Professional, which, in turn, is the same as the Weston Master IIs and IIIs. Indeed, from the front this meter does not appear to be very different. The dual scales for high and low light levels are the same as the L-III as are the ASA film speed window, luminance, shutter speed and aperture scales. But there are two pointers, one silver and one red. The red is marked up 'Re' for reflected light readings, and the silver, 'In' for Incident light readings: Self-explanatory, if unexpected.

And the meter designation: L-V, in full, Sekonic New Professional L-V Universal Exposure Meter: The back plate refers to it as the L-5, so there's no confusion here. But the L-104, Sekonic's version of the Master IV doesn't appear until 1960 and is itself a massively updated and modern design compared to the Sekonic (or Weston Master) models II / III.

It is unlikely that the dated design of the L-V (model 5) could post-date the L-104 and Master IV designs. Surely it must pre-date them and be a follow-on from the L-III Professional, hence the use of the word 'New' in its name. We do not know its exact date of introduction, but it must have been close to that of the L-III of 1953, maybe '54 or '55. Could it be of later introduction? Well, we have a date for the budget Sekonic or Anglo L-3b of 1960 and the L-V also resembles these.

Turning it over, the real differences of this meter become apparent. Immediately, there is no hinged baffle over the cell to switch between high and low ranges. The cell diameter is noticeably smaller than any of the other Weston Masters or their Sekonic equivalents. The cell is also recessed almost a centimetre into the unit's body with a collar that accepts accessories.



III.1 (left) shows the rear, cell side of the L-V with the aperture lever fully across to the left, the cell completely exposed. III.2 (right) shows the lever across to the right and a small aperture which scales the cell for the higher luminance range on the meter.

And there is a diaphragm with a lever that leaves the cell fully exposed if open (III.1) or covering it with just a small central aperture if closed (III.2). This feature must have

been expensive compared to the hinged baffle. Was it incorporated to circumvent existing Weston design patents?

Though little information about this meter appeared on its auction listing, I could see from the photographs the uniquely designed leather case with a stitched bulb patch that accepted a spherical diffuser fitted to the meter when stored, and a circular external pocket for other accessories (Ill.3). The three accessories I had hoped for, housed with the meter in its case, were indeed present in the package: A big sigh of relief!

I was able to find out about these accessories and the way they should be used thanks to an L-V instruction manual being available on Mike Butkus's wonderful site (ref. below). The manual, translated presumably directly from the Japanese, contains several grammatic and descriptive errors, but does list and explain all of the accessories: There are the Photosphere (or Lumisphere), a Photodisk (flat diffuser), a Photogrid (honeycomb) and a Hood (snoot). They are shown here, fitted to the meter, in illustrations 4 to 7 respectively. The hood, which cannot be incorporated into the case, did not come in the package, so illustration 7 is taken from the manual.



Ill's 3,4 and 5, left to right respectively: The leather case(rear) with the patch covering the Photosphere fitted to the meter and the external wallet housing the Photodisk and Photogrid. The Photosphere fitted over the cell and the flat Photodisk.

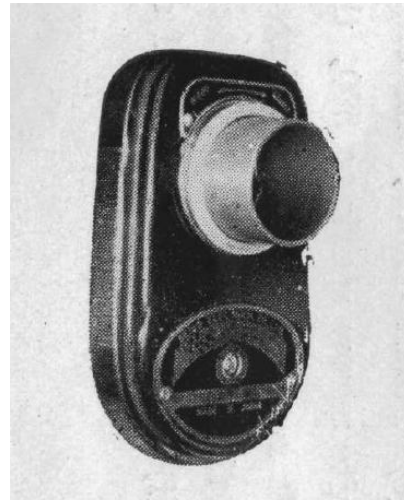
The instruction manual gives us an explanation for the use of these four accessories, the aperture control and the use of the red and silver pointers:

The aperture can only be used fully open or closed with reference to the lower light scale or upper scale. It cannot be used to scale or titrate lighting measurements in any other way: A pity. The two diffusers can be used for readings across both aperture settings and light scales.

As expected, the domed Photosphere is used for incident light readings in general photography in much the same way as an Invercone works on the Master IV and later Masters. On the calculator dial the silver pointer is used. This type of reading is most suited to transparency film where the exposure is pegged to the brightest part of the subject, not its shadow.

The flat Photodisk is also used for incident light, but more specifically in the studio or other environments where the lighting can be controlled. Individual light sources can be measured and so balanced to give optimum contrast ratios for the task in hand.

Typically in a studio portrait the meter and Photodisk would be used to measure and adjust the main lamp and fill-in lighting.



III.6 (left) shows the Photogrid baffle attachment, used for reflected light readings. III.7 (right), taken from the instruction manual, shows the Hood, with its capture angle of 50 degrees, used for reflected light measurement at low levels. (picture © Mike Butkus)

The Photogrid (III.6) most clearly replicates the hinged baffle, so characteristic of the Weston Masters. The red pointer on the dial is used with this, and the aperture must stay fully open. The higher luminance scale is referred to. As expected, this is designed mainly for reflected light measurements, and the manual suggests that it should be used about 15cm from the subject (the Masters are more versatile in this respect, with the meter operational at any distance from the subject). But the Photogrid can also be used supplementarily to the Photosphere to determine exposure across varied subjects and contrast ratios.

The Hood (or Snoot) (III.7) is the one accessory I don't have. It is basically just a shade and restricts the capture angle of the cell to 50 degrees, most closely replicating the capture angle of a camera's standard lens. For reflected light use only, it is used for low lighting conditions, cell aperture fully open and the lower scale on the meter. The plus two (+2) weighting factor on the red pointer is used to fix the correct exposure point.

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The Sekonic New Professional L-V remains something of a conundrum: The casing and its front face are substantially the same as a Sekonic L-III Professional or a Weston Master II or III. On the rear, the cell arrangement departs from the norm considerably. It is smaller, recessed, has an over-engineered aperture control, and supports four accessories, not just one (as with the Weston Master IV onwards with its Invercone).

In marketing terms, these accessories, and the manner of their use as supported by the dual pointer calculator dial, unquestionably position this meter towards the professional, and partly studio-based photographer. One would expect the manufacture quality to reflect that marketing aspiration.

Yet there are one or two undermining features: Why is the meter face cover plastic (as used in the budget L-3b), and not glass? And why oh why haven't they included a pointer lock as present on the L-III Professional? Trying to use a meter for incident lighting readings without one is extremely difficult!

International marketing of this model was clearly problematic. An insight into this issue is provided by Gregory K on a post on Simon Spaans' Flickr site. Describing the L-V as 'The first professional system meter', it was sold in the home Japanese market, not necessarily with all four accessories. There was also a presentation edition in a purple velvet-lined box which was complete, and very expensive.

Sekonic's main potential export market for the L-V would have been the USA and here they faced import restrictions and legal wranglings which may have been over patent infringements. As a result, they were only distributed for a short time, probably much less than six months, and units were sold off in the rest of the world. It's high pricing point may have contributed to the model's failure in the wider market and early discontinuation.

The bottom line: A classic case where marketing failure = curtailed production = few examples survive = *VERY* rare = highly desirable = hellishly expensive.

It's an equation we collectors make calculations with from time to time. Sometimes it works for us, and sometimes it doesn't.

And the Sekonic L-V? Well, Gregory K indicates that in The Netherlands in 2007 a complete fully working boxed set went for 80x its original asking price, that's after cost-of-living adjustments!

I found out that this model existed over ten years ago: not much information, just a single picture and a few remarks. I never dreamed I would see one physically, or that I would own one. My example is good and I paid a lot for it...

...but not eighty times its original price!

Sources:

Earliest listing: From Lester A Pfeffer, list compiled 1983:

<https://www.westonmeter.org.uk/sekonic%20LV.htm>

Simon Spaans Collection and Gregory K posting:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/lux4u2/6587843779/in/album-72157643231996434>

Mike Butkus's Instruction Manual Site (please note that the downloadable manuals are copyright Mike Butkus):

https://www.butkus.org/chinon/flashes_meters/sekonic_l-v/sekonic_l-v.htm

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