Kodak Retina II (type 122)

The type 122 Retina II camera is a very uncommon model, there are probably fewer than a hundred in collections around the world, with instruction books rarer still, so I thought I'd take the time to lay out a basic user guide, and describe the features of the camera, while I have this one here for servicing.

The layout of the controls is fairly conventional, but there are one or two quirks as you will see.

The rectangular window on the front of the top cover is the viewfinder. The two round windows are for the rangefinder, which has a separate eyepiece, and which shows a magnified image.

The shutter is a conventional Compur-Rapid type, and must be manually cocked for each exposure.

Shutter speeds are set by rotating the outer rim to align the desired speed with the white arrow beside 'Kodak'. As with all Compur-Rapids like this, the 1/500 speed can only be set *before* cocking the shutter.

Aperture settings are made by aligning the chrome pointer with the desired aperture setting on the scale at the bottom of the shutter.

This example has had a flash synch mechanism added, visible at the 7 o'clock position.

The film advance lever is clearly visible here, on the left of the picture, and you can see the stop post fitted at the edge of the top cover at around the 8 o’clock position relative to the axis of the advance lever.

On the raised top cover beside the advance you can see the shutter release lock button.

On this example the original release lock button has been lost and replaced with a simple screw. The original button would have been round, approximately 6mm in diameter, slightly domed with concentric grooves.

The frame counter counts upwards, not back to frame number 1 as on many later Retinas, and so will not lock the film advance when the end of a film has been reached.

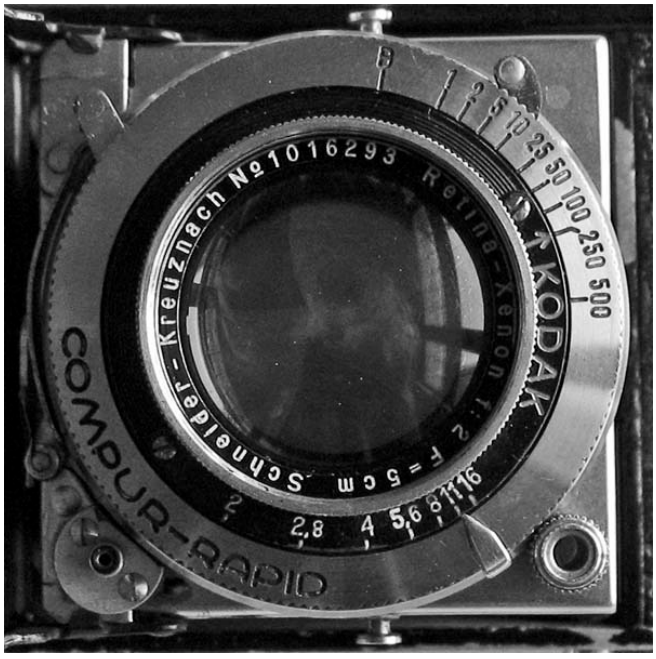
In front of the frame counter is the shutter release button, and behind the frame counter is the cable-release socket.

The rewind knob is on the right-hand end of the top cover in this picture.

The advance-rewind setting button is on the end of the top cover near the film advance lever, and the spring-loaded rewind knob release button is on the opposite end, bedside the rewind knob.

The eyepiece for the viewfinder is just to the right of centre of the camera top cover, the rangefinder eyepiece at the very left-hand end of the top cover, as you hold the camera.

The shutter and lens assembly are fixed in a helical focus mount. The focus must be set to the infinity position by rotating the focus ring before attempting to close the front cover by depressing the top and bottom release buttons on the front standard.



The front cover is opened by depressing the chrome button on the base plate, and then swinging the front cover all the way open with your thumb.

Also the base plate you'll find the depth-of-field calculator.

The shutter release

The shutter release is a long-stroke arrangement, and can be stowed away flush with the camera top plate to prevent any accidental damage, or just to make it easier to store the camera.

You may stow away the shutter release with or without the shutter being cocked, and regardless of whether the front of the camera is opened up or is closed.

To stow the shutter release button, push release lock button beside the frame counter in the direction of the engraved arrow, and while holding it , gently depress the shutter release fully, then finally while holding the release button down, let the shutter release lock button return to the rest position. This will lock the shutter release down flush with the top cover.

Here you can see the shutter release stowed flush with the top cover.

To return the shutter release button to the usual working position simply slide the lock button in the direction of the engraved arrow again and the shutter release button will pop back up into working position.

The film advance

Film advance on this model is by lever, and in this case the short lever swings through an arc of only around 90 degrees before hitting the stop. You'll need to swing the advance lever four or more times to advance the film by one frame. The film advance has a built-in ratchet mechanism so you can complete the advance in tiny bites if you so desire, but I suspect you don't. This isn't exactly a 'rapid-advance' lever.

I have read on the Internet that the advance stroke was limited from an original 180-degree swing to prevent film from having the sprocket holes ripped out. Certainly the top cover is held in place with a cylindrical-headed screw that would have formed a very useful stop if the advance-lever was able to swing through a 180-degree arc, and the stop at 90 degrees does have the look of an after-thought, being simply riveted into the top cover.

I'm not entirely convinced of the ripped film story, as the film is pulled through the camera by the take-up spool, the sprocket simply acts as metering mechanism to lock the film advance when the next frame has been advanced fully. I believe earlier films had a somewhat more fragile base than those made at the present time, so perhaps that explains it.

At the right-hand end (as you hold the camera) of the top cover is the advance-rewind button. When set to the **A** position a ratchet is engaged that prevents the film from moving backwards, and the advance mechanism will only correctly if advance-rewind button is left in that position.

The button must be set to **R** to release the ratchet to allow the film to be rewound into the cassette. There is a slight detent at the **A** position to prevent it accidentally moving during use.

More about the film rewind mechanism

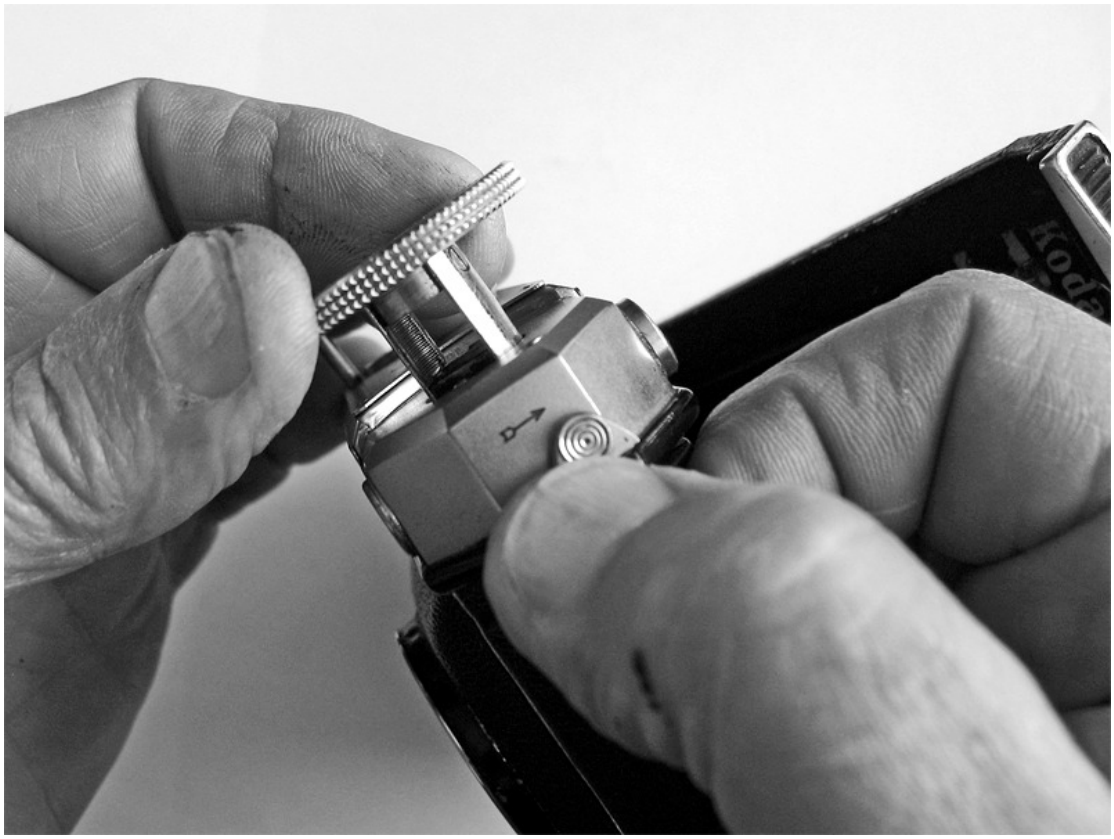
The film advance shaft is slotted to allow rangefinder viewing through the shaft. This requires that the top section of the rewind shaft stays stationary to allow viewing whenever the film is being advanced, while the lower section rotates freely with movement of the film.

As a result, you cannot check that film is correctly loaded and is advancing by simply watching the rewind knob to see if it is turning.

Now onto a few notes as to how the camera is actually used…

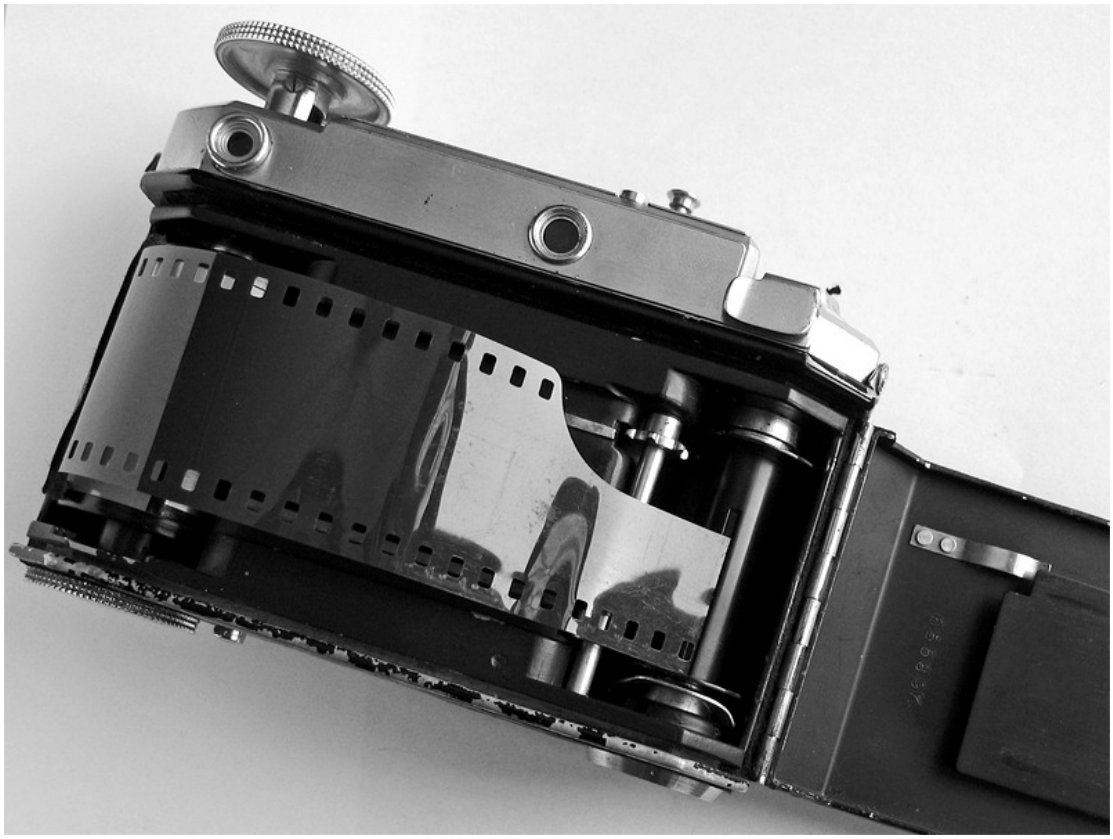
Loading a film

To load a film first raise the rewind knob by swinging the spring-loaded release button in the direction of the arrow, and holding it there while pulling the rewind knob upwards.



Open the camera back by lifting the tab on the side and swinging the hinged back open.

Insert the film cassette and push the film leader into the slot in the take-up spool.



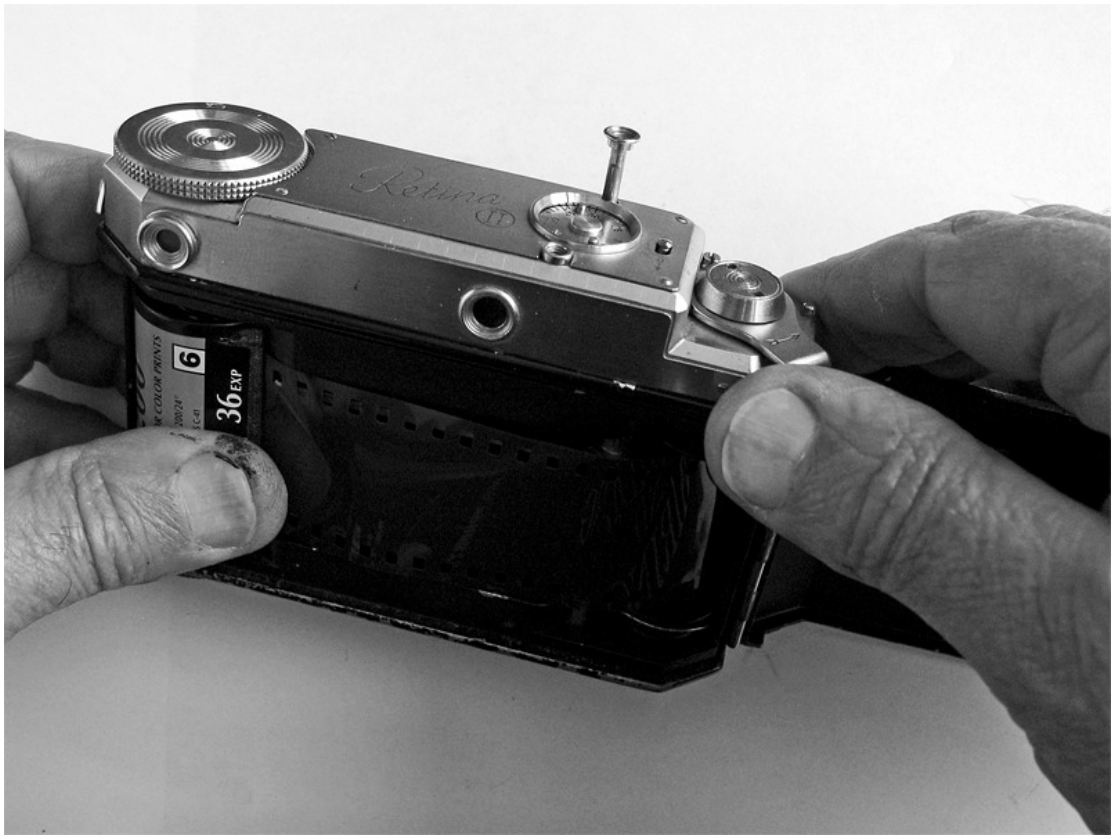
While again holding its release button across in the direction of the arrow, push the rewind knob gently back down into position. It will probably be necessary to rotate the rewind knob anti-clockwise while holding some tension on that release button until you feel the lock engage with the rewind upper shaft.

The rewind knob will now be fixed to allow viewing through the rangefinder, and the lower section inserted into the top of the film cassette will be able to rotate freely.

This is almost identical to the rewind knob mechanism used on the later type 142 Retina II cameras.

Make sure the advance-rewind button is set to A.

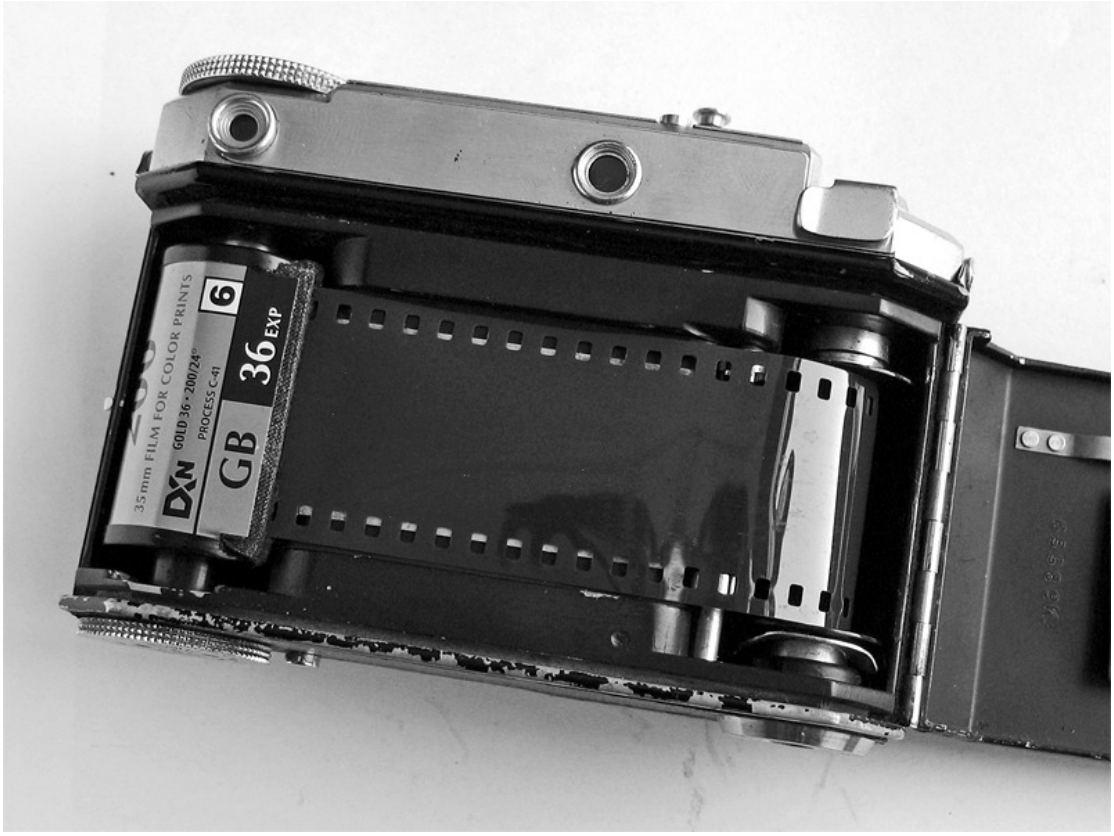
Advance the film with the lever to take up the slack. Around four or five strokes are required to move the film by one frame.



If the film advance locks, then cock and fire the shutter. A component in the shutter prevents the shutter button on from being pressed if it is not cocked.

The shutter is cocked by moving the lever on the cocking ring at around 1 o’clock on the shutter clockwise until it latches somewhere towards the 3 o’clock position.

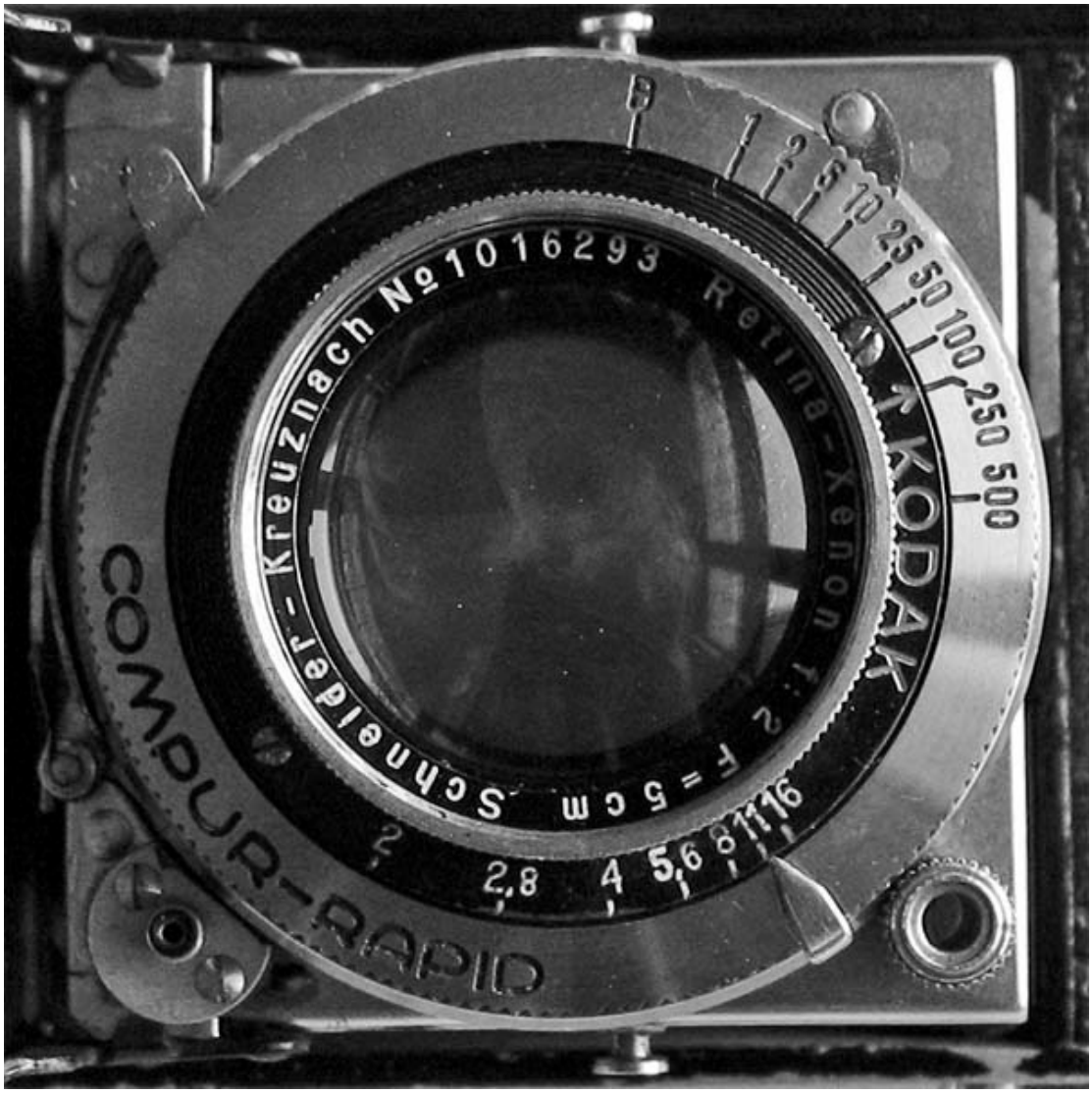
Check the film is lying neatly in place, with the sprocket aligned with holes in the film.



Close the camera back.

Wind and fire off the first three blank exposures, and then set the frame counter to number 1.

Now you'll be ready to actually take some pictures.



As mentioned earlier, the shutter must be manually cocked for each exposure with the cocking lever visible here at the 1 o'clock position on the rim of the shutter.

Set the shutter speed by rotating the knurled outer rim to align the desired speed with the white arrow beside 'Kodak'. As with all Compur-Rapids like this, the 1/500 speed can only be set *before* cocking the shutter.

The camera has a typical double-exposure prevention device, so once the shutter has been fired, you may not fire it again until the film has been wound on to the next frame. You may defeat this feature for intentional double-exposures by cocking the shutter and releasing it directly at the shutter itself rather than with the top-mounted shutter release.

Set the aperture by aligning the chrome pointer with the desired aperture setting on the scale at the bottom of the shutter.

The focus knob is the cylindrical chrome thing at 5 o'clock in this photo.

The rangefinder eyepiece is the one on the left near the rewind knob, and has a magnified view. The viewfinder is the one just right of centre.

Focus on your chosen subject using the rangefinder, adjusting the focus until the coincident images visible in the rangefinder align.

Shift the camera to align your eye with the viewfinder eyepiece, compose your photo and release the shutter.

Advance the film for the next exposure, and continue taking photos until you reach the end of the film.

When you reach the end of the film you will need to rewind the film into the cassette.

To achieve this you need to first move the advance-rewind button at the advance lever end of the camera top cover to the **R** position.

At the rewind end of the top cover, hold the rewind lever firmly in the direction of the arrow and without lifting the rewind knob, rotate it in the direction of the arrow on the top of the rewind knob until the film has been completely rewound.

You will see the top of the advance lever, and the frame counter moving as the film is rewound.

Once you are sure that the film is completely wound back into the cassette., open the back of the camera, and hold the rewind lever across in the direction of the arrow and lift the rewind knob up to free the film cassette and lift it out of the camera.