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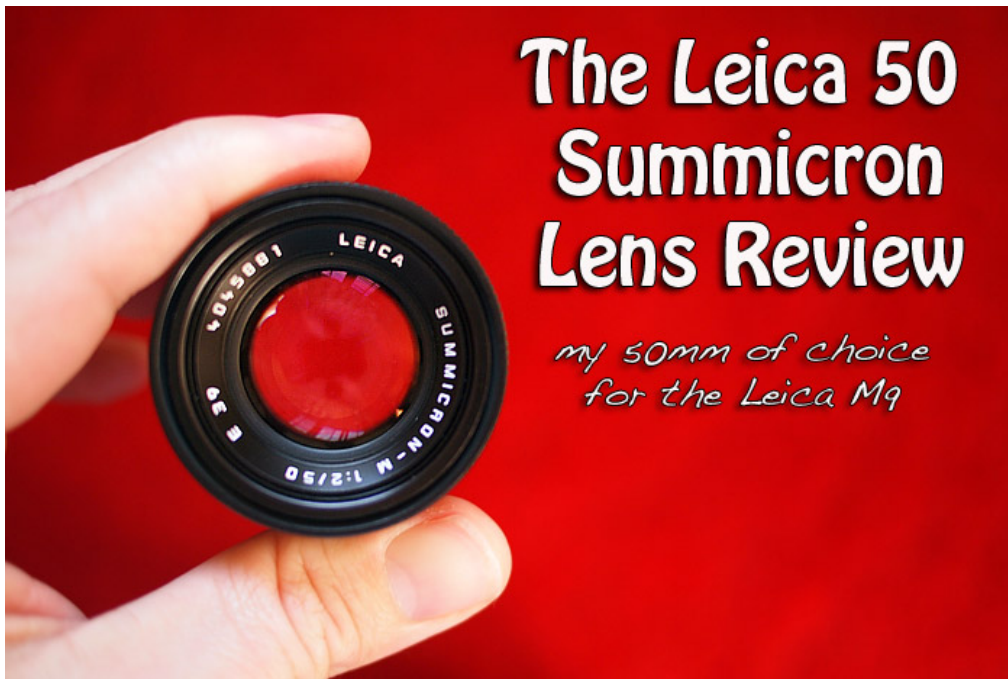
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The Leica 50 Summicron Lens Review

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Leica 50 Summicron Lens Review

2010-02-01 - The 50mm focal length comes in many flavors in the world of Leica. The 50 Summicron, Summilux, Summarit...ugg. So many 50's but luckily I have had a lot of time 😊 It has been a long journey fore me trying to find a set of lenses that I could be happy with on my **Leica M9** that fit within my budget. I just do not have the funds to buy a full set of Summilux glass, and even if I did I would probably feel bad about spending all of that money on lenses! It's a slippery slope really. On on hand Leica M owners can go out and buy something like a **Voigtlander 50 Nokton 1.5** and get amazing results. This lens is inexpensive and seems to deliver superb image quality from what I have seen (there will be a guest article/review of that lens coming this week) but for those of us who really want a "Leica" lens on their Leica camera, a Voigtlander, no matter how capable, is not going to cut it so we look for a Leica to attach to our beloved camera.

I have shot with Voigtlander, Zeiss and Leica on my M cameras and something about the Leica lenses keep me coming back to them. Wether it is their build, their style or their unique color signature I am pretty much hooked on Leica. But do not take that as a negative or a "stab" at Voigtlander and Zeiss. Both companies make some great little lenses for the Leica M mount and the Zeiss ZM range is considered by

many as a true alternative to Leica. Today I am here to talk about Leica and one of the classical focal lengths for 35mm photography. The ever so popular 50mm. I feel that one could do 95% of their photography with just a 35 and 50mm lens which is why I enjoy having both, but the 50 has been the focal length I have really enjoyed shooting for the past couple of months. So if you shoot an M mount camera and are looking for a nice Leica 50, what are your choices for a new current production lens?

Your Leica 50mm Options

For those who want to stick with Leica for their 50mm you a few options when buying a new current production 50. The least expensive is the **50 Summarit**. At \$1395 it is certainly not “cheap” but hey, it’s about as low as it goes for a Leica lens. At the time of this writing I have not shot with the 50 Summarit so I can not comment on the quality of the lens but if it is anything like the rest in the Summarit line, I am guessing it is really really good. The Summarit is small and has an F2.5 aperture, so it’s not the best for low light work AND IT DOES NOT come with a hood. That is an **extra**.

Next in line is the subject of this review, the **Leica 50 Summicron**. It is not an Aspherical lens and it is a classic design dating back to 1953. Over the years it has morphed into what it is today, a simple, small, well built heck of a 50! I love the design of this lens with it’s pull out hood and small size. This lens ups the ante a bit with a buy in price of \$1995 new, but it even comes with a Leica leather pouch and as mentioned, the built in hood 😊

The third 50 in the Leica line up is the **50 Summilux ASPH** and this is the mother of all 50mm lenses. Its fast 1.4 aperture is it’s main draw and its price is nearing the “I must be insane to but this thing” territory. At \$3795 (Feb 2010 pricing) this is a lens you buy when you want the best and most versatile 50mm created.

Finally, you have the worlds fastest most exotic and fastest lens for 35mm photography with the **Leica Noctilux F0.95** lens. At \$10,495 it is just way out there as far as pricing goes but man oh man is it beautiful. If I had the means to do so I would own one. The drawbacks with this lens is its size and weight. But that \$10k buys you a world class “stupid fast” lens as well as a lethal weapon in case anyone ever tries to rob you. He he...

Not all of us have a spare \$3800 laying around, let alone \$10,495 so where does that leave us? I used to own the 50 Summilux ASPH and I remember buying one NEW at B&H Photo for around \$2000. Prices have since gone up (about 4 times) and these days it is getting harder and harder for me to justify Leica purchases. This is why I decided I had to finally settle on a three lens kit for my M9 and STICK TO THEM! Buying another 50 Lux was out for me because if I did that, well, I would not be able to buy a 35 to go with it. My lens budget consisted of about \$4800 and my goal was to get three really great lenses for that money. My search for a 50 led me to try out the 50 Summicron.

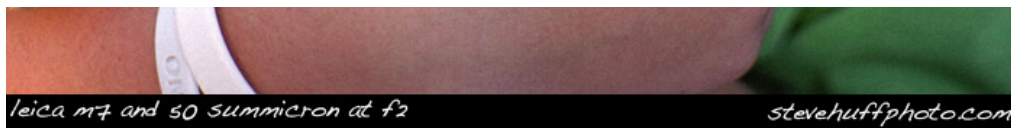


Enter the 50 Summicron

My first experience with the 50 summicron was on film. When I bought a Leica M7 years ago it came with a 50 cron and I shot that combo every day. Man, that was a beautiful combo. Talk about classic. I was soon tempted by the beautiful all black Leica MP and sold my M7 but I kept the 50 summicron and used that lens to shoot 90% of my homeless project. It never failed me, never let me down, and never ruined an image due to flare (many say this lens flares bad, but I have yet to see it in ANY of my shots..use your hoods, I do!). I must have taken 2-3,000 images with this lens on my MP. Never an issue with anything! Here is an image I shot years ago with the M7 and 50 Summicron.

Leica M7 with 50 Summicron at F2 and Fuji Reala film scanned on a Nikon Coolscan V

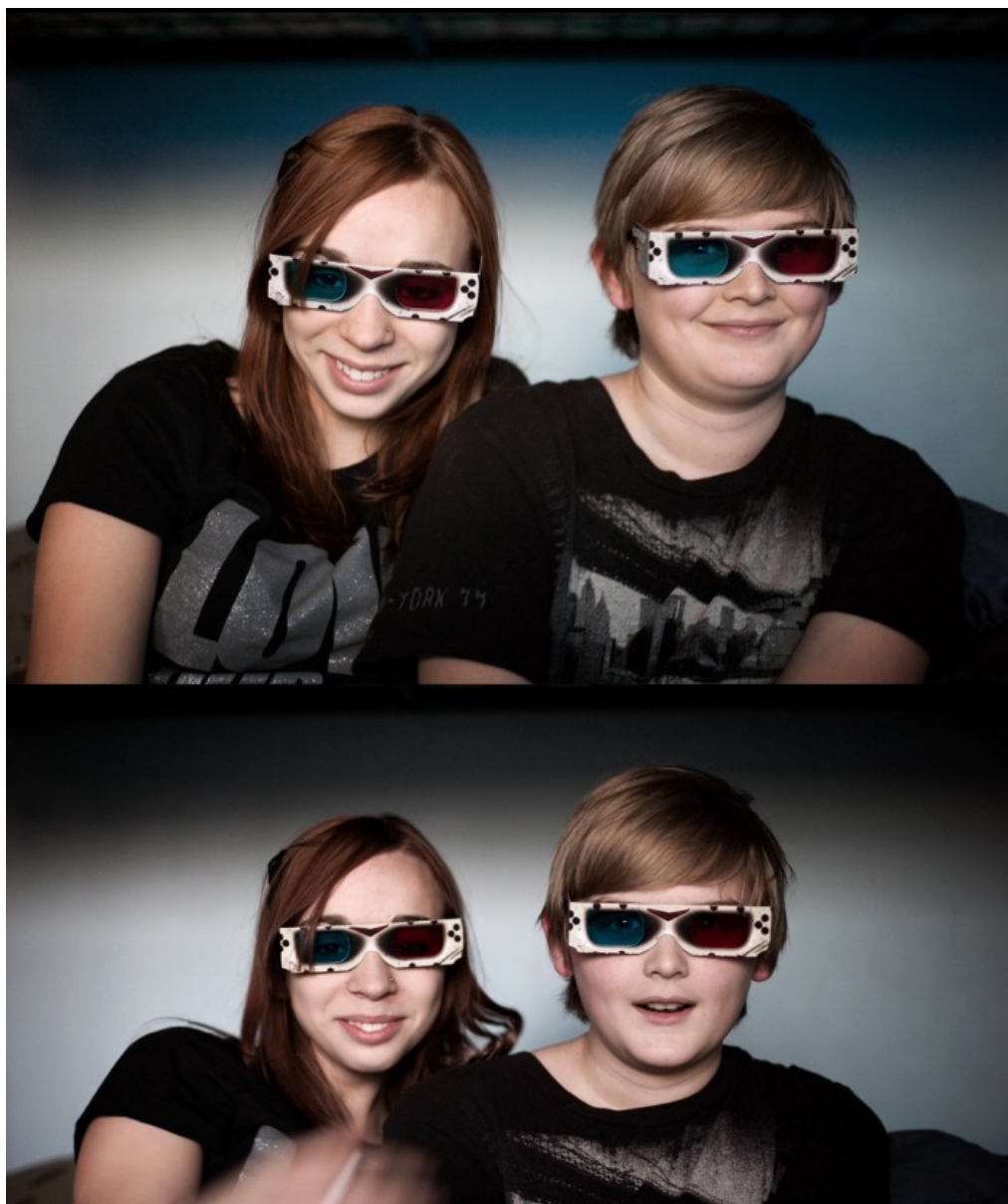


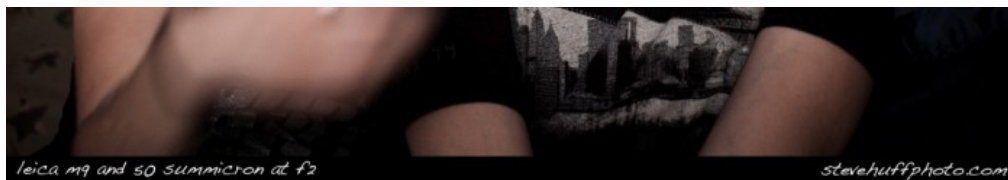


That's The Look I'm After!

When Leica released the M8 I sold the MP to fund one. I mean, *finally* there was a digital M and of course I succumbed to my desires. Yep, I had to have one. I also sold the 50 Summicron because I decided I was going to go for a 50 Summilux for the M8 and I was silly like that. I wanted the best and that is what I bought. I remember people saying how much better the lux was over the cron so I never even thought to try it on the M8 (which was probably a mistake). Anyway, to make a long story short once I bought the M9 I tried a bevy of 50's including the 50 Summilux, 50 Noctilux F1, 50 Noctilux 0.95 and even the Zeiss 50 Planar (ALL reviewed on this website BTW in the [Leica section](#)). When I say I "tried" them what I mean is they were sent to me for review. I did not buy them all! After loving and shooting with a 50 Noctilux F1 for a while I decided I really needed a 35 so this is when my search began. I had Leica dealer [Ken Hansen](#) send me a 35 Summarit, 50 Summicron and 90 Elmarit, all three new in box. The first lens I tried out of the three was the 50 cron and my first reaction was "Ahhhhh....thats the look I am after".

Leica M9 and 50 Summicron at F2 - ISO 1250



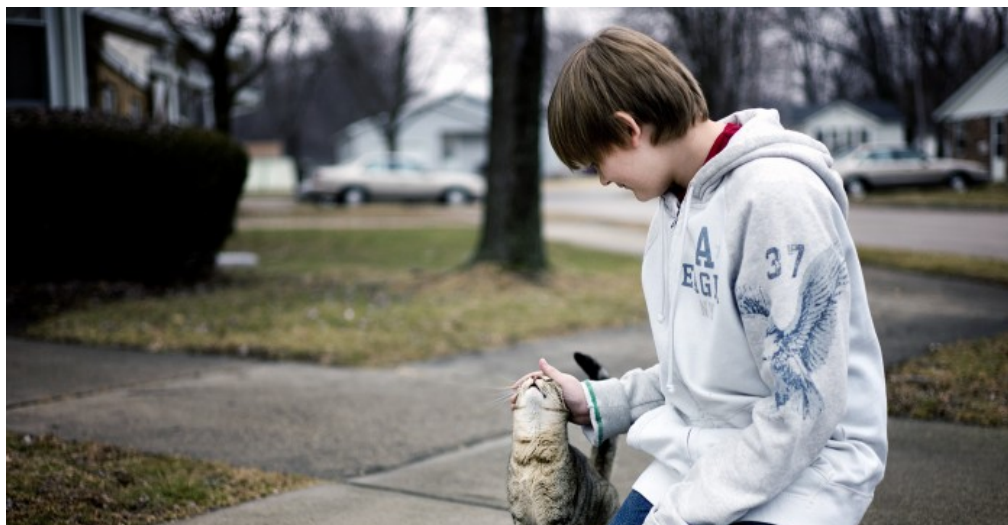


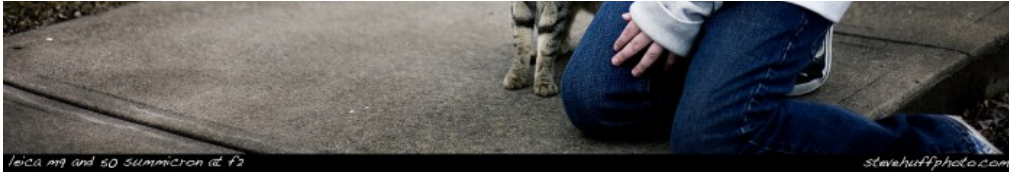
The image above was a quick snap at ISO 1250 in lower light at F2 and I was very happy with the “look” here. The lens seemed to have it all. It was small, well built, coded, not insanely priced and with its slide out hood made for a perfect 50mm solution on the full frame M9. Here is a youtube video I made to show you how big the lens is as well as how nice it looks in real-life-video. BTW, the video was shot with the [Olympus E-P2](#) and [Panasonic 20 1.7](#) lens, a great combo for video!

The 50 Summicron Bokeh

Cool video eh? I really fell in love with the lens and also the 35 and 90. YES! I finally found my three lens kit but the 50 is my favorite of the lot. I started shooting with it and really liked the results. Not only is it bitingly sharp at F2, it has a really great signature as well as nice bokeh. Some say the bokeh of the 50 is “busy” or not so nice, but I disagree somewhat. To me, it has that Leica look and feel. This lens also happens to be a Mandler design so enough said 😊 It may not have that perfect smooth modern bokeh of the 50 Lux ASPH but really, the bokeh of the summicron is just fine and will not make someone look at your image and say “Ewwww, look at that bokeh!”. The truth is, only us photo geeks stress over such things. 😊

Leica M9 and 50 Summicron at F2





The Leica M7 with the 50 Summicron at F2 - Tri-X film



*leica m7 and 50 summicron at f2 with tri-x 400**stevehuffphoto.com*

The Summicron or the Summilux?

Really, the only drawback of this lens when compared to the 50 Summilux ASPH is that it is F2 instead of F1.4 and it may not be as “perfect” as the Summilux. But perfection is overrated these days and I started to realize this fact when I hit 40. Seeing all of my own imperfections made me ask myself why I used to be so obsessed with finding “perfect” lenses. A lens will not make or break a photo unless it is pure crap, and there really are no “crap” Leica lenses! Basically, it’s all about speed and speed is expensive in Leica world. At about \$1800 cheaper than the Summilux, the 50 cron is a no brainer for those who want a fantastic lens at a better price. As I have said, the Summilux is probably the ultimate all around 50mm lens for ANY 35mm system. It beats the pants off of any Nikon or Canon 50, and yes, even the beautiful **Canon 50L** which I owned for a while. If you have the funds, a summilux would be well, perfect! But if you want a tad but more of a classic rendering and do not mind a “slower” F2 design, the Summicron has its own kind of magic. Basically with Leica lenses you just pick your “flavor” and price range. 😊

When you buy this lens it comes with the usual Leica leather pouch seen here:



“The Old 76” - Leica M9 and 50 Summicron at F4





Since it has been in my possession I have shot with the Summicron in a variety of situations. I shot one paid job as well as my usual family and dumb animal photos. I even took it to St. Louis, MO and shot some old abandoned factories in mid day sun, again with no flare issues at all. The lens performed amazingly well for me. Never once did I say "Damn, I wish I had this lens or that lens". I was amazingly 100% happy with this 50 on my M9! Here are a few shots from my visit to St. Louis and the old factories, all of them with the 50 Summicron. Keep in mind these have been "processed" and are my final images. I did post an out of camera image in the "sharpness" section below with a 100% crop so you can see the amazing detail of this lens and camera combo. BTW, my "processing" of these files only consisted of using the "Ink" filter in Nik's excellent [Color Efex Pro filters](#).





Sharpness & Detail

As I have stated, this lens is SHARP! Even at F2 you will not be able to complain about the sharpness of this lens, unless you have a bad copy or an out of alignment rangefinder in your camera. My M9 was recently calibrated to perfection and I can safely say that the combo of the 50 Cron and M9 ROCKS. It rocks HARD. Here are a couple of samples with 100% crops embedded. Be sure and click on the image to get the larger version and to see the 100% crop at a true 100%. I think these tell you all you need to know about sharpness so newspaper text or wall clocks should not be necessary 😊





So not only do you get amazingly sharp detail even wide open at F2, you get the Leica buttery smooth Bokeh and color. I converted all of the images from DNG/RAW using ACR 5.6. The 2nd shot of the old Brick Warehouse is pretty impressive when viewing the full size file. You can click [HERE](#) to download it if you wish 😊

CA/SENSOR BLOOM/PURPLE CRUD

In some of my shots with the 50 cron I did see some CA/SENSOR BLOOM/PURPLE CRUD. I list all three because back a few years ago it was always referred to as CA (chromatic aberrations) and generally popped up during high contrast situations. People always blamed the lens even though it never showed up on film images. Then, more recently the “sensor bloom” term came into play. Now we blame the digital sensors. The fact is that almost ANY lens will exhibit this “purple crud” (my name for it) on any digital camera but many digital cameras today fix this issue with in-camera software and processing so you never even see it. The M9 does NOT correct for this so if you shoot in a situation with high contrast like tree branches against a

bright white sky and the exposure if not quite right, then you may see some of this “purple crud”. I have seen it the M9, D700, Canon 7D, 5D, etc. I have also seen it with just about every Leica lens, Zeiss lens, and Voigtlander lens (except the Noctilux F1..hmmm). Here is a sample with some CA/SB/PC:



This can be corrected in **Photoshop** or your image editor of choice so to me it is not a big deal and is something that comes along with digital.

FLARE

I love running this website and one reason it is so enjoyable is that I get e-mails from all of you guys with cool info, samples and submissions for articles or pics. I am having a blast on a daily basis. Andrew Logan, one of the readers of this site also shoots with the 50 Summicron and sent me an e-mail with images he has taken with it that show lens flare. This happens with some lenses more than others when shooting in direct sunlight. Personally I have not had one issue with flare when shooting the 50 summicron but I always had the built in hood extended when shooting in sunlight. Anyway, Andrew said I could use his examples so I will post what he says is the “best example of how badly the lens can flare” - Please note that I asked him if the hood was extended and he did not remember so it is possible this was without the hood extended. Thank you Andrew for this example 😊





Again, in my thousands of shots with this lens on the M7 and the hundreds of shots on the M9 I have not seen ANY flare but thought I would post this so you know that it is possible.

Low Light with the 50 Summicron

I did not get much of a chance to shoot REALLY low light with the lens yet, but when I do I will add to this review. I see no problem shooting in low light with this lens. For now, *here is one at F2, ISO 2500 with the M9.*



Leica m9 and 50 Summicron at F2 and ISO 2500

stevehuffphoto.com

PROS & CONS

PROS:

- For a Leica lens, its price is not to astronomical...yet.
- The size and build is just about perfect for a 50mm lens.
- At F2 it is plenty fast for 98% of situations. The other 2% will cost you \$1800 more for the lux 😊
- It's bitingly sharp, even wide open at F2.
- Has a little bit of that classic look without the softness and distortion.
- The color is nice and I like the Bokeh.
- Comes with the Leica leather lens case.
- Great warranty.
- Widely available, always in stock and if bought new it is 6-bit coded for the M8 and M9.
- Slide out hood/shade is great!

CONS:

- It's still almost \$2000!
- Can give you CA in some situations.
- Some users say it can flare easily though my experience differs.

Leica M7 and 50 Summicron at F2 - Tri-X Film





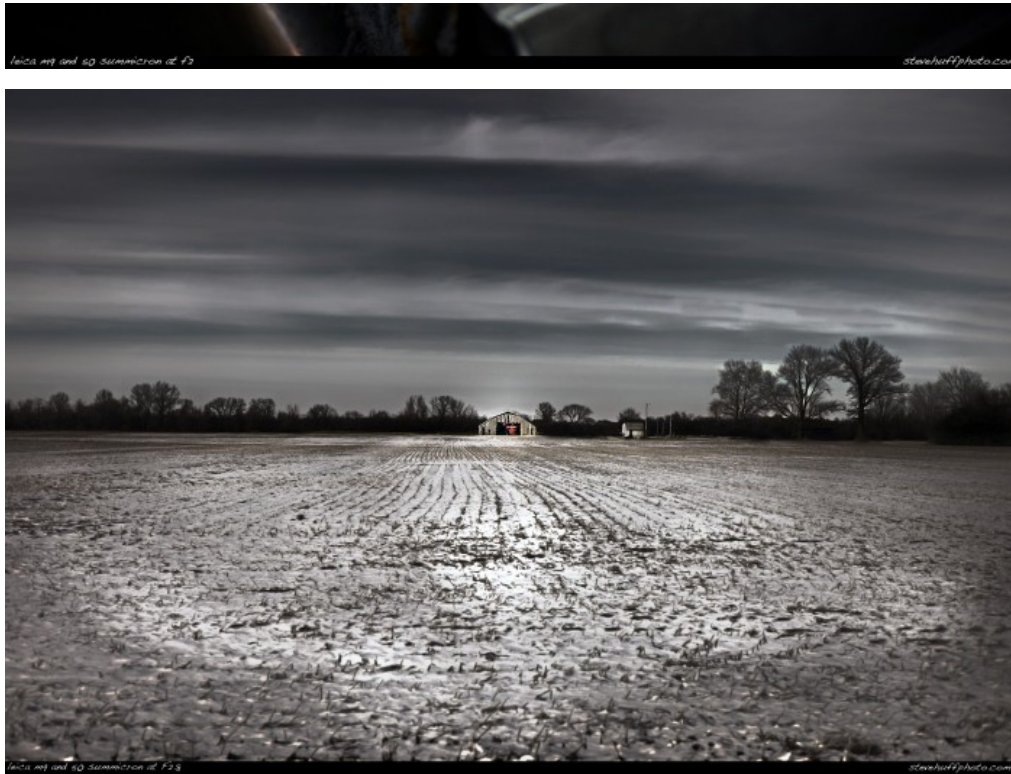
My Bottom Line Conclusion

It took me a while but now that I own and use this lens on an almost daily basis I have to say it may be my favorite all around lens for the M9 replacing the [35 Summicron](#) but I also adore the 35. As I shoot the M9 more and more I am beginning to realize that I am a 50mm kind of guy and for an all around 50, the Summicron is fantastic. It may not be a 1.4 lens, and it may not be as perfect and “smooth” as a summilux ASPH but this lens was designed by one of the greats and there is a reason it has been in production for well over 50 years. The current version of this lens is made in Germany, has 6-bit coding, a slide out built in hood and comes in a silver box with leather lens pouch/case. This is my 50mm of choice not because it is the “best” but because it has so much going for it with it’s cost, size, build, rendering and speed. I love this lens and it may just be the one that sticks with me for a long long time.

I bought mine from Leica dealer [Ken Hansen](#). He always has Leica glass in stock and is a legend in the Leica community for service and being an all around great guy. If you e-mail him be sure to tell him I sent you! I do not make any money from mentioning him but he does let me use lenses from time to time to try out and review. Great guy, and great Leica dealer.

B&H also sells this lens [HERE](#), and you can also find it at [Amazon](#). With that, here are a few more images from the M9 and 50 Summicron. Thanks for reading the review, I hope you enjoyed it!







The last image was shot on Tri-X film on a Leica M7





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Posted by [Steve Huff](#) at 5:19 pm

Tagged with: [50mm](#), [f2](#), [Summicron](#)

11 Responses to "The Leica 50 Summicron Lens Review"

1. **Walt** says:

[February 1, 2010 at 6:15 pm \(Edit\)](#)

By and large, an excellent review but I wouldn't say that bokeh is a strong point with the 50 CRON. The image with your son and cat is a case in point. This is a lovely image but the caffeinated out-of-focus elements in the background are rather distracting. The same is true for the image of the fire hydrant. The bokeh is somewhat jarring. I have owned many samples of this lens over the years and flare was also a problem more often than not when shooting in bright conditions (particularly with the M8 due to the added filter up-front).



2. **Thorsten Overgaard** says:

[February 1, 2010 at 7:36 pm \(Edit\)](#)

I like the look in your wife's eyes: I can tell she's looking at a hardworking happy husband playing around with the crown jewels of modern photography 😊



The 50mm Summicron-M f/2.0 is really a magnificent lens (and so is the 50mm Summicron-R f/2.0 for the R system). The Summilux is magic, but what the 50mm Summicron has is usability and charm. It is easy to focus and get sharp pictures with, even when photographing a group of people you can get all faces sharp (whereas with a Summilux the DOF might make that difficult). And at the same time is has that magic look and bokeh.

I know I shouldn't say, but even the old Summicron lenses one can buy for much less are great. They're all Dr. Mandler designs and display outstanding Leica core qualities.

3. **anf** says:

[February 1, 2010 at 8:50 pm \(Edit\)](#)

Thank you once again for the great review. The price range fits my budget and I hope to get my hands on it to test it out soon!



4. **Chris R** says:

[February 1, 2010 at 10:28 pm \(Edit\)](#)

I know you really liked the 50 lux pre asph. The pre is also a classic lens and I wondered how you would compare the two.



Cheers
Chris

5. **Francis** says:

[February 2, 2010 at 12:37 am \(Edit\)](#)

Thanks Steve. I am not sure but I like the oof on this lense it keep things in context...i have to see how well thé context of the picture is preserved with a smmooth crazy bokeh



6. **The Leica 50 Summicron Lens Review | STEVE HUFF PHOTOS | Drakz best Online Service** says:

[February 2, 2010 at 1:23 am \(Edit\)](#)

[...] the rest here: [The Leica 50 Summicron Lens Review | STEVE HUFF PHOTOS Share and \[...\]](#)

7. **richard kane** says:

[February 2, 2010 at 4:04 am \(Edit\)](#)

Steve, assuming I can ever get my hands on one, what lens? Objective is Raw, brutal street photography/reportage...35mm or 50mm, if so, which one, summicron or summarit, what about summilux. The choices are overwhelming and confusing, 1 lens per year, which one do I go for?



8. **daniel** says:

[February 2, 2010 at 4:40 am \(Edit\)](#)

I am using both on a M6 and MP. The Summilux 50 apsh. and the Cron. I always prefer the Cron. price, handling, weight, size... it's just right.



but one thing you forgot to mention:

as the optical formula hasn't been changed since the 70s there are many used ones around. you can get them for around 600\$ and they deliver the same (!) optical performance, though the earlier versions still had the external vented hood (what I prefer) and are somewhat different looking.

9. **James** says:

February 2, 2010 at 8:23 am (Edit)

Thanks for the review Steve. I'm a big fan of the site. I currently have a Zeiss 50 f/2 Planar and thinking about switching to the Summicron. I'm curious what you thought of the two lenses side by side. Was it just the color and bokeh that led you to move on to the cron?



Keep up the great work.

10. **Steve Huff** says:

February 2, 2010 at 9:48 am (Edit)

Hey James,

The Zeiss is great but just gives a different color signature and bokeh. The Bokeh of the Planar "may" be smoother, but I chose the cron to stick with a coded, all Leica lens set. I like the build, feel, and the Leica warranty. Either lens will do the job. Zeiss for the brighter/warmer color and Leica for the more neutral colors.



Also, the Zeiss has an odd filter size and the build seemed inferior as focusing on the review copy I had was kind of sticky. I paid double the cost of the Planar for my Summicron but like Daniel said, you can buy used 50 Crons for about \$800-\$1000 (very rare to see a \$600 cron these days unless it is really beat to hell) so that makes it a very good buy.

Both lenses deliver in the IQ department.

11. **daniel** says:

February 2, 2010 at 10:41 am (Edit)

yes, you are right. I meant about 500€ (and did the conversion wrong).



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