



The Ritter 8x10: A First Look

By Bruce Barlow

I need to make two things clear: First, I am a good friend, business partner, and fan of Richard Ritter. Second, I bought his new 8x10 camera, and paid the same as others who ordered in advance, so I have received no special treatment other than to get mine first. And at the moment, it's a semi-production model, without all of the black anodizing that the finished model will have. Richard told me to beat it up. He has built two, and knowing him, his will be a crash test dummy. He'll swap me for the finished version later.

Richard Ritter's 8x10 scales down the design of his ULF camera. The focusing rails are carbon fiber, the camera base is aircraft aluminum. These lightweight materials cut the camera's weight to 6 pounds 4 ounces, without lens. This ultra-light-weight has significant benefits: it's easier on my bad back, and it can use the same tripod and head as my Wista (which weighs 3 pounds 6 ounces). Mount a lens (imagine the small, lightweight Fujis), sling a film holder bag over the shoulder, strap on the meter holster, and I can walk my trails with

the dog. In comparison, my Sinar Norma 8x10 weighs 12½ pounds with an 18" rail. With the carbon tubing, Richard can custom-cut lengths to accommodate longer lenses.



The back box is cherry, and the back detaches and rotates on the back to vertical using clips. Rough focus is set using the carbon fiber tubes, locking them when the image is roughly in focus. Fine focus uses a worm screw that turns from a knob at the rear.

I can use my Sinar lens boards. Richard squared out the front frame to hold the square Sinar metal board. Otherwise he has lens boards, and I'm sure will have adapter boards for Linhof-sized boards and others.

The camera folds to 13" x 13" x 5" including knobs, which is about the same as Deardorf, Zone VI or Wisner 8x10 models. It easily and safely fits on my Bogen 3047 tripod head atop my Zone VI Lightweight tripod.

Bellows attach via slide clips in the front, and are glued in the rear. Richard tells me that detachable bellows can be made. Richard will make separate back/box/bellows combination for 5x7 and for 4x5 formats to swap in the field, as he does with his ULF. He has yet to make them for the 8x10, and pricing is not yet available. And I'll bet Richard could make an 11x14 back for these rails.

My first evening with the camera, I played "camera cuddle" sitting in my easy chair with the camera in my lap. I practiced opening and closing it, racking the tubing to rough focus with

my 305mm G-Claron, and working the movements. All are smooth, with knobs easily found. Richard has small green dots on the carbon fiber front and rear uprights to serve as vertical detents. The box and ground glass back have bubble levels. The ground glass is unbreakable Plexiglas. There is an aluminum bail to aid inserting and removing holders.

The camera has extensive rear base tilt, rear asymmetric swing, a little rear shift, front base and axis tilt, front swing, and front shift. Bellows extend to 32". The bellows are square for the first six inches out of the rear box before tapering. Richard took Clyde Butcher's recommendation to do that, which helps prevent vignetting with super-short lenses.



Users with short lenses (which I don't own), can reverse the front standard, and if needed, reverse the front carbon tubing assembly to get to a bare minimum focusing distance. This is slightly cumbersome to do in the field, taking a minute or two and three hands.

Handling the camera is easy and straightforward. Setup is fast. This camera, like any, requires practice to make its use smooth and automatic. I'm not there yet, but I'm better off having "cuddled" it for an evening. The carbon tubing is strong and stiff. While I did not stand on the rail bed, as Richard did with his ULF in his video, I would not be surprised if it held even my greater mass. The camera shows good rigidity, and I would not hesitate to use lenses far heavier than mine. I would not close it up with a lens board and lens on it. That said, closing is quick and easy.

This is an American-made camera with an innovative, flexible design. Those who use multiple formats will benefit from the interchangeable backs. All will benefit from its lighter weight. Richard Ritter stands behind his work, and is ready to custom-make elements of the camera to meet special needs.

The list price is \$2,942. Delivery time is about three months. Richard Ritter, found at www.lg4mat.net, is best reached by phone on weekdays: 802-365-7807.

The curious might do well to plunk \$15 for the *Richard Ritter Ultra-Large-Format Camera Owner's Manual DVD*, which shows the camera's big brother and explains the materials and engineering. It is available from me at www.circleofthesunproductions.com. That blatant commercial serves as a final reminder of my bias towards Richard. But that said, I think the camera is a winner, and I look forward to many years of use. Richard, I want my smaller backs!



Richard Ritter 8x10 Camera Specifications	
(as measured)	
Weight (without lens)	6 pounds 4 ounces
Rail system	1/2" carbon fiber tubing/aircraft aluminum bed
Box/back/ground glass	Cherry box and back, Plexiglas ground glass
Hardware	Black, black anodized. Various materials.
Bellows	Synthetic, black, 32" maximum extension
Focusing	Rough focus with rails, 12" worm gear for fine focusing
Rear Movements	Rear base tilt: -40 degrees, +90 (folded)
	Rear Swing: Asymmetric, +20/-20 degrees
	Rear Shift: 1" to right or left from centered
Front Movements	Rise and fall: +4", -4" from centered
	Front Shift: 3" to right or left from centered
	Front Swing: 90 degrees left or right (unlimited)
	Front Axis Tilt: 90 degrees forward or backward
	Front Base Tilt: 40 degrees forward, 90 degrees back (folded)
Lensboard	5 1/2" x 5 1/2" square, can fit Sinar boards with minor modification. Adapter boards available
Tripod Mounting size	3/8" with 1/4" insert
Vertical conversion	Back rotates, clipped to box
Special features	Field-interchangeable 5x7 and 4x5 backs