



LEICA M8
\$5,500; shown with
50mm Summarit-M
lens, \$1,200

Insta-Classic

An iconic camera becomes (almost) affordable BY STEVE CASIMIRO

■ RARELY IS PERFECTION ACHIEVED. But Leica cameras . . . well, put it this way: Henri Cartier-Bresson, the godfather of modern photojournalism, was obsessed with his. So was Alfred Eisenstaedt, who used his beloved Leica to shoot that sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square on V-J Day, 1945. Indeed, for the past 50 years, the venerated M series—known for its super-compact chassis, top-shelf optics, and supremely silent shutter—has accompanied some of the biggest names in the photo business. (Sebastião Salgado, Ralph Gibson, countless National Geographic photographers).

Imagine the excitement, then, when the first digital iteration of the series, the M8, debuted in 2006. Camera connoisseurs went wild over its intuitive controls and übercrisp images produced by a 10.3-megapixel sensor, but most of us just gasped at the price (\$5,500, body only; leica-camera.com). Leica must have heard our rumblings of disapproval: In January a fledgling line of “budget” lenses called the Summarit-M hit stores, shaving about a grand off the camera kit. The new 35mm, for example, costs \$1,500, compared with \$2,600 for its cheapest predecessor. All four Summarits—35mm, 50mm, 75mm, and 90mm—are still handcrafted in Germany, but they are slightly slower, with the fastest f-stop at 2.5. I’d prefer the original with 2.0, but that’s a price worth paying to get your hands on greatness.

PHOTOGRAPHS, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JOSHUA SCOTT; COURTESY OF AUDIO-TECHNICA; COURTESY OF SONY; COURTESY OF SENNHEISER. ILLUSTRATION BY AARON ASHLEY

THE RATINGS

Tuned In

Out with earbuds, in with comfort: three plush headphones with big, bold sound

HUSH HUSH

The Audio-Technica ATH-ANC7 earphones cut background distractions like the best noise-canceling muffs but have far more accurate sound, with greater range, better separation, and a bass that thumps without smudging (\$220; audiotechnica.com).

SOUND QUALITY	■	■	■	■	■
PORTABILITY	■	■	■	■	■
COMFORT	■	■	■	■	■



CABLE FREE

Logistically speaking, the Sony DR-BT50 earphones make an ideal Bluetooth headset: They synchronize and play tunes without a hitch. But, as is the case with most wireless choices, the sound can be muddy and compressed (\$230; sonystyle.com).

SOUND QUALITY	■	■	■	■	■
PORTABILITY	■	■	■	■	■
COMFORT	■	■	■	■	■



FIRST CLASS

The Sennheiser HD485 earphones are a terrific introduction to high-quality sound without the high-end price. Though on the large side, the cups are soft and wearable for hours, delivering smooth, honeyed highs and a broad soundstage (\$100; sennheiserusa.com).

SOUND QUALITY	■	■	■	■	■
PORTABILITY	■	■	■	■	■
COMFORT	■	■	■	■	■



THE BUZZ

My favorite far-flung-trip companion is the mini McNett Frontier Pro water filter, which eliminates 99.9 percent of nasties (\$20; mcnett.com). // Heard of Hello? The independent cell service just made convenience more portable with its Mysto phone, which combines GPS with the usuals (email/IM/text, camera, etc.) on the high-speed 3G data network (\$150; helio.com). // At last, a great pack with green cred: the Mountainsmith Cross-Country, made from 100 percent recycled polyester (\$180; mountainsmith.com).



GEAR GURU

Steve Casimiro, West Coast Editor