

LENS undergo rigid examination before they are used in *Petri* cameras.

Story Behind Petri

Success in Specialization

ONE OF the most common combinations in the Far East is the American G.I. and his *Petri* camera. The U.S. serviceman has shown a marked preference for this popular-priced, rugged, easy-shooting 35mm—60 per cent of all cameras sold in post exchanges are *Petris*.

The striking success of the *Petri* in this marketing field, as well as in the domestic and regular export markets, can be traced to the canny, shrewd, and patient merchandising and development policies of its maker, Kuribayashi Camera Industry.

Kuribayashi has successfully bucked camera industry trends to its substantial benefit and growth. Almost alone in the industry, Kuribayashi, instead of diversifying into all types of cameras, has stuck until recently to one basic 35mm camera model, the *Petri* with f/1.9 or f/2.8 lens. Instead of fre-

quently bringing out new models, Kuribayashi has progressively improved the original *Petri*, first brought out in 1948, in a steady step-by-step process.

When Japanese cameras began to gain recognition and acceptance in the world market, other manufacturers rushed to establish sales offices in New York. Some of these offices were successful, others were not. Kuribayashi did not set up its New York affiliate, *Petri* Camera Co., until February 10, 1958, after carefully observing the mistakes and successes of its competitors in the U.S. market.

Kuribayashi is one of the two oldest camera manufacturers in Japan. Its beginnings can be traced back to the early 1910's when it brought out its first camera, the *Speedflex*, a single-lens reflex with a wooden body and using sheet film.

The company was founded by Mr.

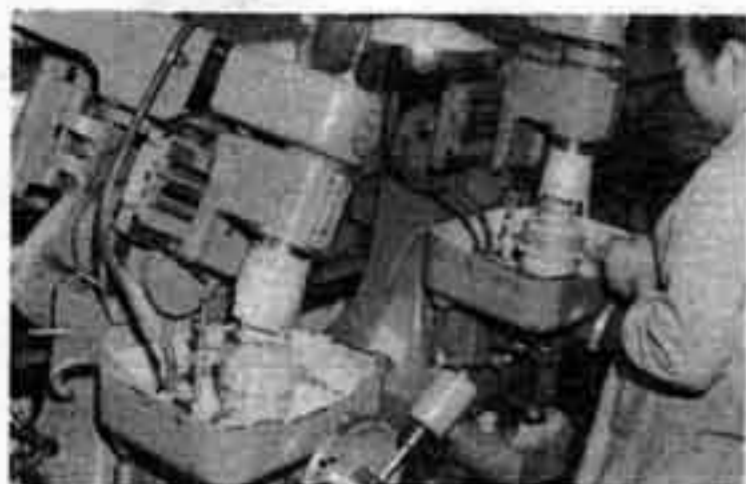
Yoji Kuribayashi, a country lad out of snowy Nagano Prefecture who had become a skilled craftsman in Tokyo with an intuitive, largely self-taught knowledge of photographic equipment. Mr. Kuribayashi engaged in the manufacture of photographic accessories such as tripods and shutter releases before he turned to making cameras.

Subsequently, the company brought out the *Eagle* and *Kokka* cameras, both similar in type to the *Speedflex*. In an international trade fair held in 1920 in Tokyo's Ueno Park, the *Speedflex* won a special merit award among the items on exhibit, an event which marks Kuribayashi's real entry into the camera trade.

By the early 1930's Kuribayashi had won a leading position in the Japanese camera industry with some eight models on the market. In 1933 it introduced its first roll film cameras, the *First-Roll*

and *Semi-First*, both folding models using 120 roll film. At the same time, Kuribayashi switched all its cameras from the old wooden to new all-metal bodies.

Kuribayashi won another trade fair prize, this time with the *First-Roll*, in



ONE of the most delicate operations is the grinding of the *Orikkor* lens.

an international exhibition in Tokyo held in 1933.

Meanwhile, the company had gone through a serious crisis. Mr. Kuribayashi died in 1931, a time when Japan was gripped by the worldwide business depression and camera sales had dropped sharply. The employees, who then numbered about 70, loyally closed ranks behind the Kuribayashi family. Mrs. Shigeyo Kuribayashi, widow of Mr. Kuribayashi, became the new president of the company.



PETRI cameras are assembled on a conveyor belt at Kuribayashi's Umejima, Tokyo plant.

Mrs. Kuribayashi, now 63, is a shy, retiring woman whose mild demeanor does not entirely conceal a firm, indomitable character. However, she has now largely retired from direction of the company, and active management is largely in the hands of her two sons, Toshio, executive director, and Tsuneo, managing director.

The company made a vigorous comeback in the 1930's. In 1938 it came out with the *Auto-Semi-First*, one of the only two Japanese cameras at the time with adjustable focus lens.

Although the onset of World War II stopped all civilian camera production,

Kuribayashi was able to keep a hand in camera manufacture by turning out special types for military use.

When the war ended, the company faced the grim task of postwar reconstruction and the need to provide work for its 500 employees.

By 1948 it had brought out its *Caroron* cameras, folding types with film winder stop and coupled range-viewfinder. The name of the last *Caroron* camera, the *Caroron RF*, was changed to *Petri RF*. The name *Petri* was selected in a contest held among company employees. It was picked because it was short, distinctive, and easy to pronounce in any language.

The *Petri RF* sold well and rapidly became a top seller. The company also made the *Petreflex*, a twin-lens reflex.

Kuribayashi finally hit its real stride with the introduction of its 35mm cameras, the *Petri Super*, *Petri 35* with f/3.5 and f/2.8 lenses, and the *Petri Automate* with f/1.9.

The basic policy decision was then made to concentrate on a single 35mm camera with fixed lens and clean, distinctive body lines which was rugged, handled easily with a minimum of gadgets, and a dependable producer of clear, sharp pictures.

The strong selling points of the *Petri* are its unusually large, bright finder,

sharp amber-coated *Orikkor* lens, and moderate price (\$79.50 in the U.S. for the *Petri* f/1.9, and \$59.50 for the f/2.8).

Kuribayashi has recently introduced a new feature in the *Petri*, a combination of green-glass viewfinder window, automatic parallax compensation, and 8mm diameter eyepiece termed "Green-O-Matic" by the company. This feature is designed to eliminate eye fatigue and permit easy sighting and focusing.

Kuribayashi has also come out with an auxiliary lens of a wide-angle and a telephoto attachment lens, either of which fit over the *Petri's* fixed lens to

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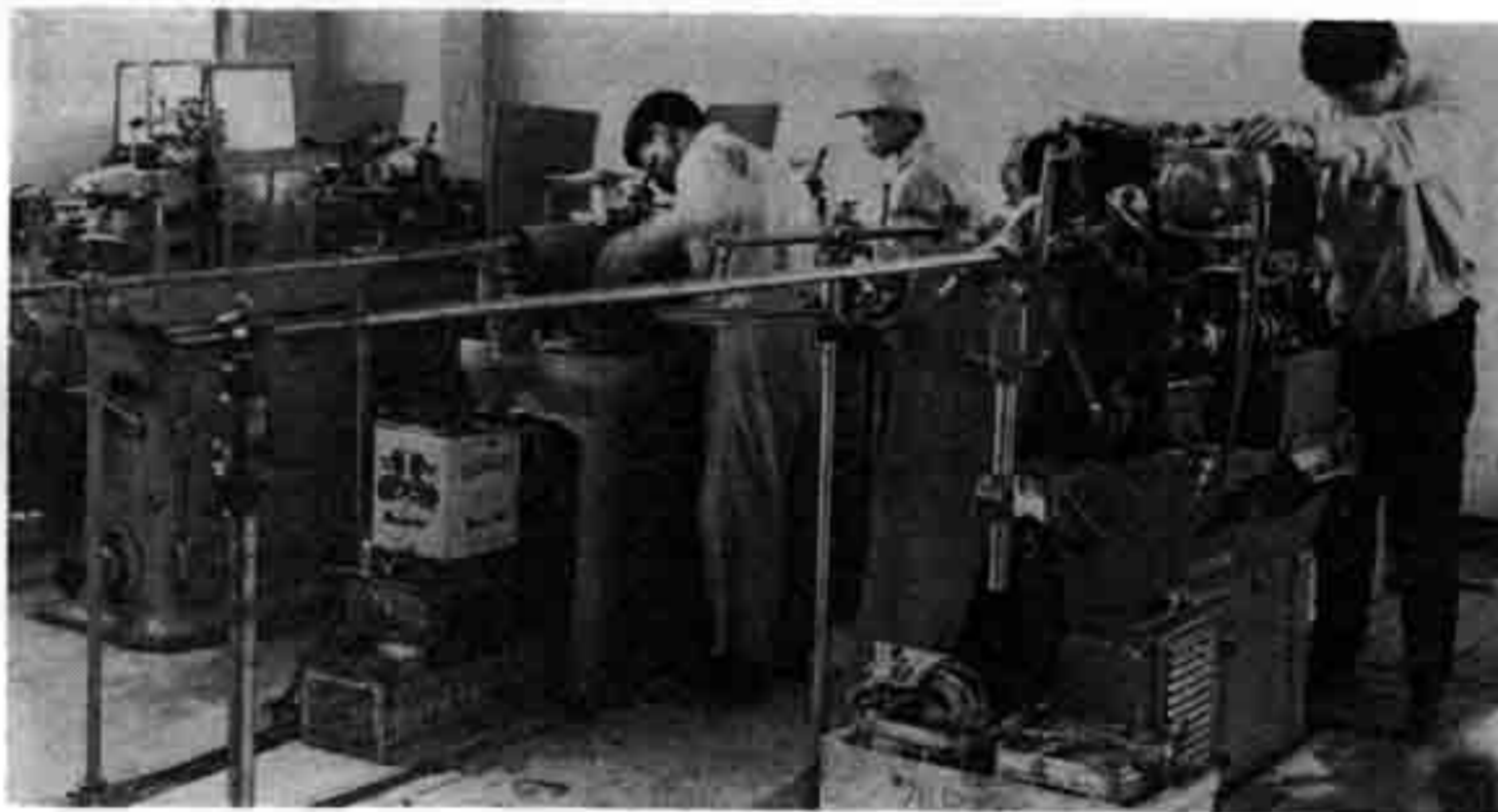
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MR. TOSHIO Kuribayashi, executive director of Kuribayashi Camera, is the oldest son of the company's founder.

convert it into a regular wide-angle or telephoto lens, and a turret-type auxiliary viewfinder for use with either of the attachment lenses.

In a new departure for Kuribayashi, the company introduced at the recently concluded Master Photo Dealers and Finishers Association show in Philadelphia its new *Petri Penta*, a single-lens reflex with a $f/2$ lens which is due to go into production soon. Although the



YOUNG machinists work on precision parts for the new *Petri* camera.

Petri Penta has all the features of modern single reflex cameras, it has been simplified and streamlined in design and construction to retail in the U.S. market for \$149.50, about half the price of other comparable cameras. The new camera was exhibited in the Kuribayashi booth at the Philadelphia show with excellent trade response.

The *Petri Penta* represents the first departure in several years from the company's one-camera-only policy. Kuribayashi's management is understandably keeping mum about any further plans for diversification, but the camera trade in Japan is sure that any

new types will be added only after long and careful consideration.

The company has just completed an addition to its plant in the industrial east side of Tokyo, a site where it has been located since 1933. Completion of the addition represents the second phase of Kuribayashi's expansion program, and the third phase is due to start shortly.

Kuribayashi is operating close to its monthly production capacity of 14,400 cameras. Sixty per cent are exported, with balance going into the domestic market. The U.S. armed forces in the Pacific area remain one of the company's best customers. About 20 per cent of all exports go to post exchanges and areas in which American forces are stationed.

About 1,000 persons, 30 per cent of them young women, are now employed by the company.

Emphasis in manufacturing operations is placed on a high degree of mechanization, lessening the burden on skilled workers. The company makes all parts for its cameras, including its line of *Orikkor* lenses, and is one of the few manufacturers which turns out its own shutters, the *Carperu*.

Despite its somewhat conservative approach, Kuribayashi's merchandising policies are alert and progressive. It

was, for example, the first camera manufacturer in Japan to use television for advertising, and it lays great stress on modern market research. On the other hand, a basic principle in its advertising is that it stays with the same theme for a one-year period.

Again, although Kuribayashi is one of the oldest camera makers in Japan, surveys show that its *Petri* cameras find their biggest sales among young people. The 18 to 23 age bracket is the heaviest buyer of *Petri* cameras in Japan. Abroad, however, distribution of *Petri* customers seems to be more evenly spread among the various age groups.