

# shutterbug

## test report

# Microtek's ArtixScan 1800f

by David B. Brooks

## A Professional All-In-One, 35mm To 8x10 Film And Print Scanner

When I first became active in computer-based digital photographic image processing in 1989, scanning technology was already well established. However, a truly professional color scanner at that time which had sufficient resolution to support magazine quality reproduction and would accommodate all film formats cost as much as a new car and a down payment on a house combined. And a computer capable of running such a scanner cost as much again or more. Today, both personal computers and photo scanners have evolved in capabilities and refinement. The most dramatic progress has been the lowering of the cost of both, making professional-level scans and computer support affordable to most photographers. The best example I know of and have tested thoroughly is the Microtek ArtixScan 1800f.

### Flat-Bed And Film

The unit is configured in similar fashion to all flat-bed scanners and can handle all kinds of documents, art, and photo prints. It also has a separate film drawer below the sensor array which supports direct film scanning without glass interference using the entire scan width of the CCD sensor array. Template trays hold 12 35mm slides and two film strips, four 120 film images, and two 4x5s. There's also a glass drawer

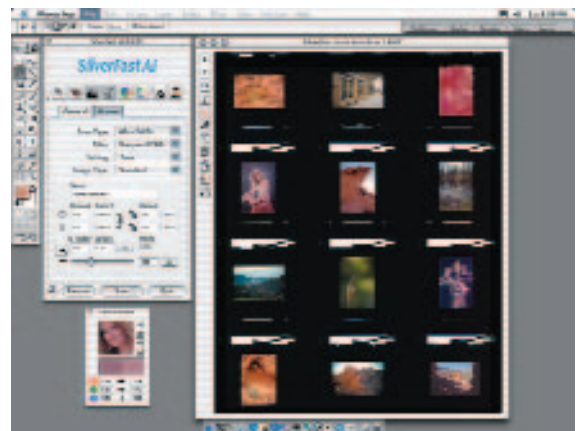
*The Microtek ArtixScan 1800f provides professional quality scanning of all photographic media by means of a patented dual-plate design which offers both conventional flat-bed reflective scanning and the glassless scanning of dedicated film scanners.*

which will support odd-size film up to 8x10" in size. The ArtixScan 1800f provides two fast and convenient interfaces including FireWire and USB 2.0.

This quite compact desktop scanner has hardware performance that is truly professional, with 48-bit input and output color depth, a 4.8 maximum optical density, and hardware resolution of 3600x1800dpi. It is backed up with Microtek's own ScanWizard Pro software driver and ICC Scanner Profiler including Kodak Q-60 print and 4x5 film targets, as well as LaserSoft's SilverFast Ai 6.0 scanner driver software, and LizardTech's Genuine Fractals for lossless file compression and print size enlargement.

### Using The Microtek ArtixScan 1800f

Obviously to test and evaluate a scanner that is capable of handling all sizes and kinds of photographic images, I had my work cut out for me. So I selected some print and film images in each format including black



*(Above) The ArtixScan 1800f scanner comes with an extensive software bundle with a choice of two drivers including the popular LaserSoft SilverFast Ai 6.0. Besides providing the best quality choices in scan adjustments the 1800f's capabilities include the efficiency of batch scanning. This allows selecting each of the film images in a template carrier; framing, sizing, and adjusting each individually; and then clicking on the scan button.*



(Left) I've scanned this 35mm Fuji Reala negative numerous times in the past always frustrated by not being able to get a clean accurate reproduction of the rich and varied hues in the scene. With the ArtixScan 1800f I was able to remove all of the color cast and cleanly capture the white trunks of the Aspens contrasted by the rich variation of colors in the fall leaves.

and white negatives, color negatives, and positive transparencies including a broad selection of different subjects in each size and category. Now that's a lot of images, but I soon found I hadn't bitten off more than I could chew. Even setting scan resolution at the optical limit of 3600dpi for 35mm and a print image size of 12x18" at 300dpi for the larger film sizes, the easy to load and use film drawer and its inserts, plus the rapid scan and data transfer, made scanning and saving a very efficient task.

This to me is one hallmark of a professional scanner—being able to scan two dozen 35mm film frames in a short morning session. If I had taken advantage of the scanner and software and used batch scanning, I could have also reduced considerably the amount of time needed to get the job done.

The 1800f took a bit longer than usual to install because the bundle of software includes two drivers and the ICC profiler software, as well as Genuine Fractals, if you choose to put it on your system. Once the software was all installed and the scanner was ready, my first task was to use the Microtek ICC profiler to calibrate the scanner and set up options in the drivers to activate color management.

I should say here that although the native Microtek ScanWizard Pro is a particularly effective scanning interface and set of tools compared to any other scanner manufacturer's drivers, for photographic scanning I chose to use LaserSoft's SilverFast Ai 6.0 for most of my testing. To me it produces the most precisely adjusted color

and image qualities and very productive workflow capabilities. In addition, SilverFast 6.0's SRD dust and scratch removal utility substantially reduces the amount of post-scan cleanup and retouching, considering some of my film images have had a hard and active life.

### Productive Scanning

After a couple of weeks of doing little else but working the Microtek ArtixScan

*Traveling on back roads early one spring in eastern Oregon I came across a ghostly abandoned farmhouse illuminated by a clouded sky colored in pastel tints of contrasting color. My 6x9cm Horseman field camera was loaded with a color negative film I was testing, so I took a chance and recorded as many exposures as possible before the light changed. Prior to using the ArtixScan 1800f I was never able to reproduce both the tints of colors in the sky and the shades of hues in the foreground.*



## Technical Specifications

**Hardware Resolution:** 3600x1800dpi

**Max. Interpolated Resolution:**

14,400x14,400dpi

**Scan Area:** 8x14" reflective, 8x10" film/transparencies

**Color Depth:** 48-bit input; 24 and 48-bit output

**Dynamic Range:** 4.8 maximum optical density

**Interface:** FireWire and the new Hi-Speed USB (2.0)

**Computer Support:** Windows, Macintosh

**Dimensions:** 24x15.25x6.25"

**Weight:** 28.19 lbs

**Software Package:** Microtek ScanWizard Pro (PC/Mac); LaserSoft SilverFast Ai 6.0 with dust and scratch removal; Microtek ICC Scanner Profiler (MSP) (PC/Mac) \*1; LizardTech Genuine Fractals Print Pro (PC/Mac); Adobe Acrobat Reader (PC/Mac); Adobe PhotoShop Elements \*1 Consists of a 4x5" Kodak Q-60 reflective color target, a 4x5" Kodak Q-60 transparency color target, and a calibration software for maintaining consistent color quality in any work environment.

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*Color transparency daylight films are designed to respond to just one color temperature of light, but scenes we photograph can be illuminated very differently. A landscape in fog or at very high altitudes can yield a blue color cast. Using the ArtixScan 1800f I found that I could remove the excess blue easily.*



1800f as hard as I could, I had enough scans to fill a substantial stack of CDs. That amount of work would not have been nearly as satisfying as an experience, nor as rewarding in the quality of the images, were it not for the great marriage of hardware and software this professional Microtek scanner provides. Many of the images I chose to scan from my library I have scanned before, some with several different scanners, and in every case, even with the most challenging, problem images, I was able to improve on the previous scans, frequently with dramatically superior results.

For example, when I was living in the Northwest I occasionally photographed a model in environments like the rain forest. Because there was often little light due to overcast skies and under a canopy of tall trees, I used high-speed films like AgfaColor XRS 1000. These negatives have been a nightmare to color correct to obtain fidelity in both the model's skin tones and the many natural colors of the forest. But with the 1800f I was able to obtain clean, sharp detail in shadows and highlights, and remove all of the distorting color casts with SilverFast over a surprising range of negative densities that were recorded on the film. Now for the first time I have large digital prints of some personally prized photographs that are completely satisfying. Those scans were not an exception. Many if not most of the other scans I made exhibited results strikingly improved and entirely satisfactory from images which had been problems to scan that had yielded compromised results before, like early Fuji Reala 35mm color negatives taken in the fall of Aspen groves in the Colorado Rockies, in addition to numerous other film images of all sizes and types including a number of daylight studio portraits on chrome film.



*One of the earliest sessions photographing my now long-time friend and favorite model, Bonwitt St. Claire, was in my daylight studio. I just happened to load a Mamiya 645 with Agfachrome CT-18 for the shoot, and in the intervening years it has yellowed dramatically from age. I had tried scanning the images from this session with very limited success until working with the ArtixScan 1800f.*

## Evaluation And Recommendation

To me, the proof of the pudding is in the best print that can be made from a scan file. So, all of the numerous finished scans were printed on a minimum of letter-size photo paper, with a good portion also printed on 13x19" fine-art matte paper. The print image size of the 3600dpi 35mm film scans was 11x16" at 300dpi while the larger film format image scans were set at 12x18" at 300dpi. All of the test prints exhibited as good or better image quality than I have experienced to this date, with of course some advantage given to the larger film sizes. In fact, compared to the 2700/2800dpi generation of dedicated 35mm film scanners, I find the Microtek ArtixScan 1800f actually produces scans of a 35mm film that make better prints of most subjects, and with smoother tonalities and often less apparent grain.

In addition, with the color depth of 48 bits and a 4.8 dynamic range, I was able to obtain more useable information in scans from some 35mm slides, particularly Kodachrome and similar high contrast, short exposure latitude slide films. With larger film sizes and more image information available to capture, the results are correspondingly advantageous. For example, I scanned a 6x4.5cm shot done with a Mamiya and a 400mm lens of a distant forest. I had always assumed it was a little soft due to slight camera movement. However, after scanning the image with the 1800f I found my assumption was wrong, and I was able to obtain a scan file that reproduced a 13x19" print with quite fine detail.

I hardly need mention 4x5 film scans, other than to say I acquired a new appreciation of some very fine optics I



*In the spring in the mountain foothills of Oregon wild iris are sometimes frequent in the grassy meadows. This photo captured with a Pentax 67 on color negative film proved almost impossible to scan and obtain the natural colors. In the past when the excess blue was removed, either the green of the grass or the lavender of the iris would be seriously skewed. The combination of the ArtixScan 1800f and SilverFast with NegaFix supported an adjustment which finally did justice to both the grass and the iris.*

was favored with using over the years like a 300mm Rodenstock f/9 APO Ronar. Besides scans with exquisitely fine definition of detail, I was also able to adjust tonality to get an ideal range of tones in the resultant prints.

In all, I found the ArtixScan 1800f easy and efficient to use. It has very substantial, well-designed film carriers combined with very effective software. The short scan times, and even more rapid transfer of the image data to the computer, means getting a lot of very good scan work done with a minimum expenditure of time. So both in terms of the quality and quantity of output it

meets the essential criteria for professional applications, as well as being an appreciable boon to any serious photo enthusiast.

With a retail price under \$1500, the Microtek ArtixScan 1800f provides a truly effective all-in-one scanner for photographers who shoot some or most of all of the film formats used today, including panoramic cameras and even an 8x10 view camera. That all this functionality and quality costs no more than some dedicated 35mm scanner models makes the 1800f a whole lot of functionality for the money.

For more information visit the Microtek website at [www.microtekusa.com](http://www.microtekusa.com).



*In the immediate past I have found scanning black and white film can be a difficult challenge and even wrote a recent article detailing a manual work-around to achieve the best results. So, when I tried using the ArtixScan 1800f and SilverFast NegaFix with some of my favorite 4x5 black and white negatives I was surprised to obtain all of the image quality which had previously eluded me. This led me to scanning a very large number of 4x5 negatives from my library, and the results were consistent with my first favorable impressions. I discovered detail sharpness and tonal detail I never knew were recorded in some of the images. These scan results make me wish I had a wide format ink jet printer so I could make some really big prints!*

# MICROTEK

Microtek

16941 Keegan Avenue

Carson, CA 90746.

ph: 310-687-5800

FAX: 310-687-5950

[www.microtekusa.com](http://www.microtekusa.com)