
Grand Prix Photography

Challenges in capturing fast cars at night

Singapore Night Grand Prix Formula One Photography.



The sound of the roaring engines with the speed of the cars racing at 240 km/hour at night and view blocked by fences. Formula one Grand Prix photography was very challenging. I spent two nights photographing the event from different locations. I found the event exciting and would like to share with you my experience to help you with your next F1 photography.



SINGAPORE NIGHT GRAND PRIX FROM THE CRICKET CLUBS



I was privileged to be invited as a guest to the Singapore Cricket Club to witness the spectacular night Grand Prix from the comfort of the viewing deck while food and drinks were served. As the sun was setting, the lights powered up, the Padang was transformed into the Grand Stand to host the world's only Formula One night race. It was an unforgettable evening along with other 240,000 spectators watching the race.

CHALLENGES IN TAKING THE FORMULA ONE NIGHT RACE



Fences were everywhere at the F1. Unless you were the official photographer, you would not be allowed to enter the racing arena. Look at the three official photographers confined in the “Cage” for safety reason within the restricted area. I personally don’t like to see the fence blocking the view like the Porsche on the left. If you could not avoid the fences, how then would you make them disappears from the photograph ?

use f/4.0 (not any other larger aperture number).

Stand as near to the fence as possible and focus on the vehicle further away. If you have a zoom lens, zoom it to the maximum. This is also to blur the fence or to make the fence disappears.

Most people used 70-200mm or 100-400mm zoom. However, not everyone set up the position and the aperture correctly. Once you set up correctly by standing close to the fence and opening the aperture to maximum, you will be ready for action.



To blur the fence, you need shallow depth of field by using the largest aperture, such as f/2.8 or f/2.0. If you have an f/4.0 lens, then

MAKING THE FENCE DISAPPEAR BY STAYING CLOSE TO THE FENCE AND USING LONG LENS WITH F/2.8 OR F/2.0 APERTURE.

This images of the Mercedes was taken at the Turn 10, sandwiched between the Singapore Cricket Club and Victoria Concert Hall. Most cars slowed down from the 240 km/h when passing the Grand Stand to 135 km/h when approaching the corner. Many drivers described Turn 10 as the worst corner. I liked the corner and how the car came to position as it turned in from the Padang at top speed.

I used a long tele-lens on Gitzo tripod and stood as near to the fence as possible once I found a good spot. My ISO was from 800 to 1600, my shutter speed 1/200 to 1/800 second. White balance was Automatic. Focusing on manual mode (MF).



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EXPOSURE & FOCUSING SKILLS

I wished I could use my maximum shutter speed of 1/4000 or 1/8000 second to freeze the actions but I could not due to the lack of light in the evening. I have to moderate my speed just to get enough sharpness. I found shutter speed range of 1/200 to 1/800 second was ideal. If I use a very high ISO, I would encounter noise problem in my image, which was not a good option. I used ISO of 800 to 1600 for most of the images. I kept the aperture pretty much wide open. Kingfisher was at ISO 1600 at 1/400 at Turn 10. The Ferrari was at ISO 1250 at 1/640 at Turn 5.

Since the lighting was consistent, I used the manual metering mode on multi-pattern metering rather than speed priority. For white balance, I left it to AUTO and took my images on RAW. Images were processed in Adobe Lightroom and were converted from RAW to Jpeg or TIFF.

I found the best way to focus was to use manual focusing mode by focusing on the track mark on the road. I fired 5 frames per second as soon as the car come near the mark. I kept my eyes on the road marks rather on the car through the view finder while I used the tripod to support my lens and camera.

For panning shots, you need to take many more shots by panning the camera. I used between 1/100 sec to 1/200 sec on manual focus. Avoid using the Live View mode as it will slow down the camera reaction.

I do hope you find this write up helpful till we meet again next year on the next Singapore Grand Prix 2011.



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