

How to Photograph Your Classic Car

I can't tell you how many times I've seen photos of an absolutely stunning car with a trash can parked beside it, or a telephone pole "growing" out of its roof. Then there's the whole reflection thing - seeing your neighbor's minivan (every excruciating detail) reflected in your mile-deep paint, nicely centered on your quarter panel. What all this does is create a "Photoshop Nightmare" for the poor souls in our creative department. It can literally take hours in front of a computer to "remove" all of those aforementioned offenders. And really, all of this unpleasantness can be avoided with a little planning and some basic photography skills. Of course, getting results like the pros doesn't happen overnight, or by simply reading a few how-to articles. That can take years, depending on how much attention you devote to sharpening your "shooter skills." So, knowing that most of you: 1. Love your classic car and want it to look beautiful on the pages of the magazine and 2. Don't have the time/interest/extra cash to invest in photography lessons, I've created an automotive photography primer here - just the basics - to help you avoid the common mistakes most folks make trying to capture their car's glory on film - er, pixels.

The Car is the Star.

First off, getting the background right is probably 75% of the task at hand. No matter where you live, there has to be somewhere even remotely scenic. Even if it's a big empty field in the middle of nowhere. Unless you're a creative genius and can make a car look great in a crowded urban setting, avoid civilization altogether. Remember, the car is the star. You want a simple, complementary background - not something that competes with your ride for attention. Shoot the car on asphalt or some other surface that a car would normally drive on. Grass is a big no-no. The green color always reflects into the car's paint and 9 times out of 10, will look terrible.

Light is right.

Next, the ambient light should be just right. Make sure the sun is behind you - so you're not shooting into it (which can



Angling your camera can add drama and action to your exterior photos.

totally ruin a picture.) Avoid shooting at mid-day - the sun is pretty much directly above and will create a very harsh light. You'll lose your car's details and the sun's glare will bounce off the glass and bright work. I'd recommend taking your photos earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon. When the summertime comes and the days are long, shooting with a setting sun behind you can create some wonderful golden glows on your car's finish. Just don't leave it too late - you'll lose the sun and the shot altogether.

Since "lower" light typically induces slower shutter speeds, get yourself a cheap tripod (typically under \$30 at your local store.) The tripod will stabilize the camera and allow for longer exposures. If your camera is equipped with a remote shutter release, use it. Human hands cannot hold a camera steadier than a tripod. I've been caught without a tripod before, and have ended up using my car's hood, a tree stump and even a fence post. Anything to give your camera a solid, stable base. The resulting crisp, clear images are well worth the extra effort!

Tip: with the sun behind you, watch that your own shadow isn't in the shot. Avoid this by using the tripod and setting the timer on your camera. Position the tripod/camera low enough to the ground to avoid casting a long shadow into the photo frame.

When photographing your car's engine and interior, always shoot in the shade. Direct sunlight will create ugly shadows and glare. Again, the tripod will help with the lower lighting situation.

Give us some drama.

When determining which angle to shoot your car from, think about the end result - how you'd like to see your car looking on the printed pages of the magazine. Most folks photograph their car from "standing

height," meaning they walk up to the car, point and shoot. Sure, you can achieve a nice shot this way, but it's way more interesting to see a car shot from an unusual angle. I've come up with some nice dramatic shots by simply setting my camera on the ground, angled slightly upwards by slipping my wallet under the lens.

No reflecting!

Before you fire that shutter release, stand back and make sure you've angled yourself, your tripod/camera, your own vehicle, and any bystanders out of the shot. All of these things can and will appear in the side of your car. Dark colored cars are way more prone to these pitfalls than lighter ones.

Lastly, with today's high tech cameras and their larger preview screens, you can get a pretty good idea right away if your photo is satisfactory. Flash memory cards hold a TON of images, so take plenty of shots, both horizontal and vertical. Remember, a nice vertical shot can make a beautiful magazine cover!

Happy shootin'!



Shoot your engine and interior shots in a shady area, free from direct sunlight. Use a tripod.