

Words & images: Ron Macdonald

The time has now come to shoot off a frame or two, but rather than just snap away and hope you get something decent to send in for the calendar, put a little thought in to it and the result will be vastly superior.

This is by no means an extensive list of photographic principles – more a basic guide to set you off in the right direction.

The *auto* setting on your camera might be fine for snapshots, but if you really want to produce some great images, try out the other options your camera offers and you will be on your way to creating some nice images.

Composing

One of the first things to consider is your background. Try to find something that's not only pleasing to the eye but will complement your car. Search the background well as often it only takes one small thing to ruin your shot. Look out for power poles and power lines, rubbish bins, discarded paper or soft drink cans, advertising signs etc.

Another thing to contemplate is the old **1/3 rule**. It is said to be aesthetically pleasing you should not have the horizon running through the centre of the frame ... it's better to have either 1/3 sky and 2/3 foreground or 1/3 foreground and 2/3 sky.

Finally, think about the position of the car within the frame: don't place it slap bang in the middle; try to have it offset (left or right) even if only slightly.

Perspective

Don't just automatically stand there and take the photo. Have a look at your subject from a few different perspectives to see which looks best. This is very relevant to the MX-5. In the standing position you tend to look down on the car; often you will get a far better result from the kneeling position or sometimes even lying down.

The perspective of the car also needs to be considered. In general terms you get a far more pleasing result if the car is slightly at an angle to the camera; ie, the camera can "see" the front (or back) as well as the side.

Lighting

This is one of the most important factors, as photography is all about capturing light.

In general terms you should have the light source coming from over your shoulder. Consideration should also be given to the time of day to shoot. During the early morning or late

Composing



Perspective



Lighting



.....

evening the sun is low in the sky and, due to passing through the atmosphere at a lower angle, the light tends to be softer and “warmer” (lean more towards the red end of the spectrum). During the middle of the day the light is harsher and will be cooler (lean towards the blue end of the spectrum). If your photo does not include the sky good results can be obtained on over cast days as the light is filtered through the cloud cover making it both softer and less likely to “flare” or over exposure on the shiny areas of the car.

Another thing to watch out for is “noise”. This is the digital equivalent of “grainy” in film and is often caused by poor exposure. If your photo is dark, there is a good chance it will be “noisy”, especially if you lighten the photo in a photo editing program. Many of these editing programs do have a noise filter, however the net result of that is a very soft focus and an unnatural look to the image. You’re better off getting the exposure correct in the first place.

Another cause of noise is the ISO setting on your camera. This is equivalent to the old ASA for film cameras and refers to the “speed” or sensitivity of the film (or sensor). Using a high ISO has the advantage of being able to take photos in very low light (without a flash), however noisy images are one of the trade-offs of doing so. Personally, where possible I always have my camera set to an ISO of 100; this, together with correct exposure, will ensure a noiseless image.

Reflections

This can be a major problem for a nice shiny car, especially if it is a dark colour. On cloudy days the larger panels of the car, reflecting the clouds above, can look like they’ve been taken to with a baseball bat! Often this can be overcome simply by changing either the aspect of the car in relation to the sun or the camera in relation to the car. Other things to watch out for are rubbish bins, signs etc that might be reflecting in the car ... not to mention people standing in close proximity – *or even you and your camera!*

Reflections



Focus

OK, I know that sounds a little dumb ... of course the photo should be in focus, however you have to remember the Club’s 2015 calendar is going to be A4 size. So what you might get away with in a small photo might look like trash at A4 size. The larger the end photo is going to be, the more you have to ensure the focus is clear and crisp. Auto focus can be a pain in the arm pit here – it may decide to focus on the door handle (or the tree next to the car) which looks great in a 6 x 4 print but at A4 ...? *Hmmm*. I suggest you use manual focus and choose the focus point yourself. Depth of field will of course have a bearing on how much of the frame is in focus as discussed in the next section.

Focus



... continued

Depth of field

Depth of Field is the term used to describe how much of your photo is in focus. I am sure you have all seen portraits where the person is in focus and the background is all fuzzy – that is achieved by use of the “A” setting on your camera’s command dial. “A” stands for aperture or size of the hole in your lens; this is usually given as an *F stop* (eg, F 22). Aperture can be a little confusing; just remember that the smaller the number, the bigger the hole in the lens.

Hopefully the depth of field examples are not too small in this printed article to see the differences in the photos provided. I can assure you at A4 size it will be abundantly clear. All four photos shown here were taken from the same place and with the same focus point, however:

- » at *F 1.8* only the headlight and front guard are in sharp focus
- » by *F 3.5* the focus has extended back to include the front door
- » at *F 5.6* only the rear of the car is out of focus and
- » by *F 11* the entire car is in focus.

In general terms the smaller the number, the bigger the hole and the lower the depth of field.

This can be used to great effect to make the background “fuzzy” and make the car stand out more. Or, if you want to get the entire frame in focus, you would be looking at *F 11* - *F 22* depending on how far back your background goes.



Now go out and find a nice backdrop, get that command dial off the green *Auto* setting and create some memorable images for yourself, for *mxtra* or for the Club’s 2015 calendar ...

Oh, and don’t forget to email them to Murray! ●

PS: If you would prefer to see the images from this article on-screen, please visit <http://gracies-place.net/MXTRA.php>

Aperture



Depth of Field



In previous editions of *mxtra*, Ron covered:

- » pixels, sensors & lenses (May 2014)
- » which camera? (June 2014)

These can be found on the *Technical* section of the Club’s website.