



Photography of *Motorcycle Racing*

Cornering four

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Racing photography in general is a fast-moving, action-packed sport, regardless of what is being raced. Such events often produce excellent images. Motorcycles allow for a special attraction in that not only do you get to see the cycle itself but you see clearly the interaction of the rider to the cycle. Motorcycle races also offer a vast variation in the type of events available. These two-wheel machines race on road courses, dirt oval tracks and bumpy

terrain courses. Dirt track races are often called Moto-cross or Moto-X racing and offer the most action. With high speed, jumps and close contact action a photographer is offered plenty of opportunities to take great pictures.

Short-track racing is done on an oval-banked course that is about one-quarter mile long and the photographer gets to see all the action. The best images are in the corners. These races are run by size of the motor used in the motorcycle, type

Inside corner





Two in the air

and age of riders. Short-track racing also includes four-wheel terrain cycles called “quads.” The Moto-X racing is done on a marked-out course that includes high jumps, sharp corners, narrow sections and sharp altitude changes. The road races are held on long winding road courses that have many turns and challenges on well-maintained, paved circuits.

Motorcycle racing does not require any photographic equipment that is specialized. Most photographers are going to have the needed lens in their arsenal already. For the most part a standard range telephoto lens will do the job well. For Moto-X and short-track racing consider using a zoom lens that will go to about 200mm. For road-course racing a little longer lens that reaches to 400mm works best. Since most, if not all, of these races are held in



Two in orange

the daytime hours, they do not need to be the super fast expensive models: the f/4.0 to f/5.6 lens offered with today’s digital equipment work perfectly.

Super Moto racing





The bounce

In today's digital world the cameras are well designed for this type of shooting. The multiple frames per second will allow sequential images to be taken while the action unfolds in front of the lens. Images can be sorted later to select the best action and composition from an

image series. Digital also allows you to sort on the spot, erasing unwanted pictures off your memory card to help free up memory space. One thing for sure, if you shoot lots of images when the action unfolds you are going to get things in your pictures that you never knew happened at



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Quads





No. 13 Honda

the time. The “freeze frame” idea will lock that fraction of a second forever and give you that high-impact picture we all are looking for.

One thing to keep in mind is the dust and dirt around your equipment. With the exception of the road race courses, the race tracks are very dirty places. When you have 30 motorcycles running as fast as they can they produce a tremendous amount of dust. It will cover everything quickly. A

good-sized towel is handy to have with you when you shoot to dust off the exterior surfaces of your camera. Important: avoid any lens changes while near the track. Cleaning the front optic frequently as well will maintain sharp images. Use a UV filter if at all possible. When done shooting at a short track or Moto-X race, use a low pressure air source to blow off the gear before storing it away. It is also a good idea to do this before taking the lens

Hole shot





Falling

off your camera body or removing the memory card while at the event. Small cans of compressed air are always available from local photo shops and come in handy while at the races.

Where to shoot the most action will vary with the event. With Motor-X racing the high jumps are the best where high jumpers are “hanging air” as high as twenty feet. At the start of the race, the action-packed first corner is called the hole shot. It is a huge advantage to be the first rider to make it around the hole shot. Often, one hundred cycles can converge at once in that 30 foot wide section of the race. It becomes an exciting high speed traffic jam. Many riders go off course, crash or worse, get badly hurt.

In the short-track races it’s the two corner exits that are the best locations to shoot the action as the cycles skid through the corner sideways and the racers assume some very unique positions that if it were not for their speed would have them falling all over the track. Short track races are held on an oval so you see a lot of action. They are the shortest races of the three discussed. At a good event you will have up to eight cycles or quads in a single race.

The road races are the hardest to shoot. These courses are long with the cycles coming past a single viewing point once every four to five minutes. You need to pick your locations carefully. The long sweeping corners seem to work out best.

This is where the action of the speed and lean of the riders seem to defy gravity and motion. These racers will lay a motorcycle on its side with their knee balancing on the ground and speed through a corner as fast as possible.

Regardless of the type of race you choose to photograph, the best images will always come at the beginning of any race. This is when the cycles are bunched up and trying to get into the lead. As a race develops the spacing increases and the opportunity to get multiple racing images in the same frame becomes more difficult. Although you can always get great single-cycle images, the story-telling ability of the image with two or more cycles in the frame at the same time is very effective.

Once you locate the spots on the course you think are best it’s simply a waiting game. The action will come to you. No need to push it. As the light changes you can change your location to fit the conditions. Always be aware of your surroundings and where you are in relation to the action. Things can and do go wrong with these races and there are accidents. To avoid becoming “part of the action, or accident” choose your photo shoot location carefully. A motorcycle traveling almost hundred miles per hour can become very unpredictable.

One last suggestion, make sure you take ears plugs with you: it gets very loud. 🎧

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