

High Performance Cameras for Ordinary People Or I Just Paid \$ 1,000 for this Camera – Now What?

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Be Brave

In music the first advice I give budding musicians is to play with authority. Act and sound like you know what you are doing and before long you will.

In photography, part of that bravery is turning the camera off that little green mark on your camera, the “greenie.” That is the “Photography for Dummies” setting. Camera manufacturers have settled on using green as the symbol for “If you don’t know what you are doing, set it here.” All you are really doing is turning the camera into a point and shoot camera. If you spent \$1000 for your camera, you are wasting \$900 of it if you don’t know what the other controls do.

We will be getting to those controls and learning all about shutter speeds, f-stops, ISO, white balance and the like, later. But if you don’t know why you need to know, or you just plain don’t care, why bother yourself with all those little complex sounding numbers? Well....The reason is because before long you will need to know, and thus be motivated to learn more.

I was on a trip recently with another photographer. He spent an inordinate amount of time lining up shots, arranging people, and carefully adjusting his camera for the perfect exposure. I have not seen his pictures, but I don’t need to. I know they were all carefully composed, correctly exposed, with everything on the nose; and probably boring.

The experience reminded me to be more spontaneous, to shoot quickly, try different angles, and come back with pictures that make people say, ”WOW.” This means doing things other people don’t think of or are afraid to do. Things like shooting into the sun, looking straight up or straight down, or getting very close, or very far away. I want to see things in way that they have never been seen before, and then show them to other people in a new way.

If you do this, you will have a lot of lousy pictures, because much of the time the less obvious things don’t work. But with a working understanding of how photography works, and a willingness to take chances and push the medium to the limits, the results are often spectacular.

A good example is this photo of Yellowstone Lake looking directly into the morning sun. The photo was made in January and the temperature was near zero. The camera was left on program, allowing the bright sun to give an exposure of 1/1000 sec at f22 on ISO 100 film causing the photo to be much darker than it appeared naturally.