



POWER AFLOAT

Bone shaking, wave crushing powerboats. A magnificent spectacle of unleashed energy afloat. Graham Devenish on how to take the best photographs of these aquatic racers.



Sometimes a wider shot showing a good deal of background can be worthwhile. A race on the Seine clearly identified by the Eiffel Tower. Olympus OM 1, 50mm Zuiko 1/500 at f/8 on Tri-X.

The tense silence is abruptly shattered by a huge roar and the water boils. The Formula 1 boats are away! Colourful boats hurtle around the course and only the toughest and fastest survive.

It's the weekend the powerboat racing world focuses attention on Bristol. Of all the races in the world, held in such surroundings as Paris, Milan, Amsterdam and Arizona, Bristol is one of the most prestigious races there is. To win simply means you are the

Above: the Earl Bentz at Bristol 1979. A close in shot taken with a Komura 80-210mm zoom on Kodachrome 64, 1/125 at f/8. Below: panned at 1/60 with a 200mm lens on a Pentax SP1000.

best in the world. This year the racing took place on June 14/15 at the floating dock in the heart of the City.

Several classes race for various trophies, but, as always, the attention will be focused on the 'O Z' class, equivalent to Formula 1 racing cars. This is where the money is poured in by engine manufacturers, and it shows — in terms of speed and excitement.

This sport is readily and safely accessible to all photographers, and with a little effort and thought good results can be obtained. You don't need much in the way of basic equipment for good shots. All you need is a 35mm SLR and a telephoto lens. For more variety a zoom is a good idea, my own being

a Komura 80-210mm, coupled to my winder-driven Olympus OM1. The auto-winder is a useful accessory because you don't have to take your eye from the viewfinder when winding on, which can waste precious time. The Olympus winder is a beauty, and in my opinion the OM1 handles and balances better with it attached. I have also recently acquired an OM10 and a Sigma 400mm lens for more versatility. The only problem now is that my shoulder sinks whenever I have to carry the equipment anywhere!

If you are contemplating taking photographs with a long lens, it has to be steadied. A monopod is a good idea, being lighter and more compact than a tripod, which, unless it is really heavy, is not much good anyway.

For film I have two definite preferences. When I am shooting colour I almost always try to use Kodachrome 64. Its colours are superb and it gives me the pictures I want — but if you are happy with the film stock you are using, there is no real point in changing. On the occasions I have shot on monochrome, I have used Kodak Tri-X. When developed in D.76 it gives very good results, and is not too grainy. If the weather is fine, I like switching to Ilford FP4, a superb film which will certainly give a significant boost of quality over Tri-X.

Whether using colour or black and white films, a filter is always fitted to the front of the lens to protect it; usually a Skylight, or if there is a lot of light, when using black and white, a medium yellow filter is a good idea. The Skylight also helps to cut out excessive blue reflections from the water surrounding when using colour films, and also warms up the scene a little on a cloudy day.

Speed and how to show it

Panning is the most effective way to give an impression of speed, and after some practice is quite easy to do. You should follow the boat in the viewfinder and slowly squeeze the shutter button, without slowing down your panning movements. After exposure, the boat should still be in the centre of the viewfinder.

The technique can be easily practised beforehand by standing on a street corner and focusing on the cars as they go past. Try it without a film at first, and then load up and try it using a film, to check that you have mastered the technique.

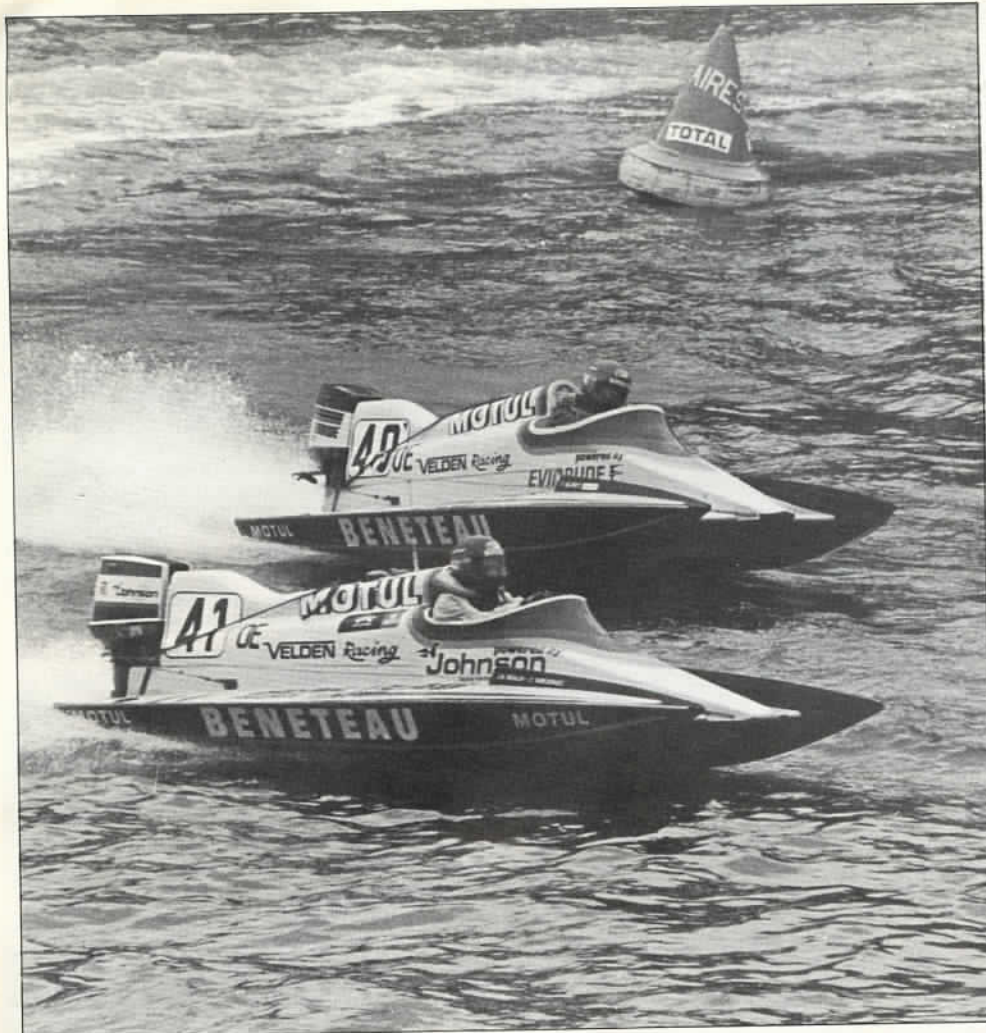
I find that a speed of around 1/60 or 1/125 is the most effective, but depending on the effect that you want you could try experimenting with 1/30 or even 1/15!

Most action happens on the corners, and when the boats turn they throw up a huge plume of spray. Get a good position and stay there for a while. After a time you will be able to spot any interesting driving techniques, and capture them on film.

As well as panning I like to show the lines of the boat, without any blurring of the background. For this, I use a fast shutter speed — 1/500 or 1/1000.

Getting in close

As the boats hurtle around the course, at anything up to 140 miles per hour, they pass within feet of the spectators. Very good shots can be obtained by filling the frame with part of a boat, using a 135mm or 200mm lens. As the boats are going so fast



With distant boats you really have to rely on a long lens. Another Paris shot, but this time with the boats brought up big by using a 400mm Sigma lens: OM 1, Tri-X 1/1000 at f/11.

it is impossible to follow them and re-focus all the time. Instead, pre-focus your lens at a predetermined point, and press the shutter just before the boat is in focus in the viewfinder, otherwise the shot has been missed, and you will have to try again when the next boat comes around.

Getting this right is a matter of pure experience and practice, so don't be afraid to use lots of film – it's worth it!

Action in and around the pits

As the pits are closed off to the general public it is not easy to get good pictures. However, with a long lens you can still capture the comings and goings, the boats being craned out of the water, and the general atmosphere from outside the area.

Look out for portraits of the drivers as they wander around before and after the racing. Don't forget to take pictures of the crowds, as they do tend to get rather excited at times.

Finally, can I say a quick word about safety. The barriers around the course are put there for your protection, so please don't go over them to get closer.

Also, don't throw anything into the water. The boats are travelling at anything up to 140 mph, and if one hits a floating can, the resulting accident could be fatal.

Remember, the most important thing is to enjoy yourself. Shoot lots of film, and do so! See you there! □

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April 1979

Stitz tripod, Jobo daylight tank, Pentax Auto 110, Bierette VSN, Toshiba 312, Chinon 6000 auto.

May 1979

Vivitar 35EM compact/Vivitar 100-200 zoom and multiplier, Jobo

colour enlarger.

June 1979

Yashica macro and zoom lenses/Cosina CS-1 compact autowind SLR/Focomat V35.

July 1979

Topcon RM300, Cosinon lenses, Ricoh FF-1

August 1979

Olympus OM10, Laptronic MD128, Ricoh KR-5, Paterson Digital thermometer.

September 1979

Nikon EM camera, Canon AV-1, Paterson Power Drive

October 1979

Rolleiflex SL35E, Enna lenses, Nikon Speedlight SB-E

November 1979 sold out

Zenith TTL, Philips Tri-One, Panagor macro converter, CalcLight meters.

December 1979 sold out

Olympus XA, Iscorama 1.5 x 36, Celestron C90 1000mm mirror lens

January 1980

Contax 139, Ilford Galerie.

February 1980 sold out

Canon lenses, Konica FS-1

March 1980 sold out

Rollei S135E, Yashica FX-3, Lubitel 2, Panagor 500m, Super-Paragon PMC Auto Zoom.

April 1980

Canon AF 35M, Nikon F3, Starblitz flashguns.

May 1980

Pentax MV-1, Tamron SP long lenses.

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