

THROUGH THE LENS OF RAY DEMSKI

Action and Outdoor Photography Tips



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RAY DEMSKI

If home is where the heart is, then Ray Demski's home is clearly not in Munich, Germany, where his mail goes. From the Canadian Rockies to Papua New Guinea to ocean ports across 40 countries, Demski grew up outside and seems to loathe ever living under one roof. Along the way, martial arts training gave him a love for athletics. All it took was Demski having a camera in his hands to unite his life's passions and set his artistic vision free to capture the world's most breathtaking and beautiful moments.

In the years since, Demski's photos have appeared in venues ranging from Men's Fitness and Playboy to National Geographic Adventure and ESPN. Not surprisingly, plenty of corporate clients also seek him out, including the globe-spanning likes of BMW, Red Bull, Adidas, and MTV. Demski's images are a treat for the eyes and imagination, which is why G-Technology® is proud to bring you this collection of his stunning work and sage advice.

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HOW TO GO BIG

Panoramas obviously give you nice, big landscapes, but combining action into a panorama adds a whole new dimension. Of course, it's also harder. I might shoot a panorama that's a 12-shot stitch, and that gets involved when you're also trying to capture a moving subject. Because a tripod will be too slow, I usually shoot panoramas freehand. I dry run the whole thing so I know what's going to go where. I'll shoot the background first, then hold the frame to capture the athlete in it. Or I'll shoot the athlete's frame first and then immediately shoot all of the background shots for the panorama without taking the viewfinder from my eye. Often, people will take a shot and crop the panorama out of it, but I like the panorama's flexibility. Some things just won't fit in a single frame. And come on — the landscape is half the reason you're out there. If I'm using a tighter lens and I don't have the option to change it, I could shoot a three-shot panorama and stitch it together just to get a wider angle of view.

For the best panorama results, using a longer lens usually helps. Be careful with anything under 35 mm. I've done a few at 14, 16, and 18, but it's a lot of work in post-production to correct distortion issues. Anything around the 50 to 70 mm range is really easy to stitch. And get enough overlap. You want at least 20% and more like 30% to 40% if you can. Obviously, try to keep a level horizon. Also, decide on the exposure and lock everything into manual, so all of your exposures are consistent throughout the series.



GO LIGHT & KEEP UP

Adventure photography often means that you have to keep pace with athletes. You're always on the move, and you frequently miss shots when you have too much weight to carry. When packing, I try to aim for light and simple. It depends on how fast I have to be and on the shoot. Know your locations, and know your subjects. Don't be surprised if sometimes you have to push yourself harder than your athlete!



HOW LIGHT IS LIGHT?

Of course, it depends on the job, but when I want to travel light outdoors, I'll start with a really low weight backpack, usually something like the Loka UL from f-stop. Inside, I'll try to only go with a 24-70 f/2.8, maybe a 16-35 f/4, and a 70-200, preferably an f/4 version to be even lighter. I'll have a second camera body back at camp, but it'll be just one body in the pack when we're on the go. As for lighting, I'll usually ditch it if weight really matters. When I can get away with a little more, I'll throw in a couple of speedlights. But every shoot is different, so on some commercial shoots, I might have a truckload of lighting gear. But if I'm stripping all weight possible, then all but the barest lighting is out.





FREEZING FAST ACTION WITH FLASH

Freezing motion, like water droplets, can be amazing, but how you do it will depend a lot on whether you can control your lighting. It gets a lot more complex outside, where you've got to overpower the ambient light with a lot of high-powered, high-speed flash. Once you get, say, three steps over, then you start to freeze action with the speed of your flash. You'll need a powerful flash with a very short flash duration for effective freezes. You'd be surprised how fast the water is moving. There are very few flashes on the market that will get you really crispy, perfectly frozen water drops at that speed. Naturally, it gets more complex from there. But once you're in the studio and can control the environment, then you can drop the ambient light, and it becomes solely based on your flash's durations.

FIND A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

I always try to do something from a bit of a different angle or view, especially within certain sports where people are used to seeing the same shots all the time. Try and find a really unique perspective. Get high. Get low. Do something different. It can be really nice to have an angle finder when you're shooting low to save yourself from a sore neck after a long day of shooting. A swivel LCD can also be a nice feature so you don't need to lay down in the mud, water, or rocks to get the low angle.





CREATING SPONTANEITY

It's awesome when you can pull off an image where everyone raves about the shot's "split-second, one-in-a-million timing." Of course, a little planning can get your odds a lot better than one in a million, or even one in a thousand. With this diver and fish image, I took about four shots. It has a lot to do with really knowing what you're shooting. Growing up on a sailboat, I was in the water a couple times a day over about seven years. I swam with a lot of fish in that time. For this shot, I dove down first, putting the school of barracuda between us, then I told him to come down and swim through them as soon as I was ready. They parted perfectly as he swam through — and we had our shot. There are various important factors behind perfect timing: knowing the spot that you're shooting, knowing what you're shooting, working together with your subject in order to get those shots, and just having an idea and sticking with it.

FIGHT THE SKY

When you have a lot of sky in your image, obviously try to balance the action against what's in the frame. Keep it simple so that there aren't a lot of tree branches or whatnot arching over your subject. If I'm shooting from low down and there's a lot of sky, you'll often get more brightness in the background than on the subject, so your subject is at least partly silhouetted. To fix this, I'll use flashes to lighten them up, so that the light gets under them, as well. This helps to pop them off from the background, and it also helps with bringing down the brightness of the sky so that you get a nice clear blue.





YES, WARDROBE MATTERS

For some reason, athletes in some sports really like to wear black and grey. As a lot of photographers will tell you, black and grey, as in the case of skateboarding, can be a real pain because it blends right into the background city. You're losing a lot of your image right there, and it becomes hard to flash. I'll try to get my subject to dress appropriately, taking into mind the styling of what they're wearing in their environment, and often having them wear complementary colors. Benjamin Karl, the snowboarder in this shot, just happened to be wearing a red jacket because I asked him to bring colors. The red works really well against the cold blue of night.

Don't leave too much color composition to chance within a shot. You might want to go with really contrasting, where you can pop your athlete out and keep him or her visible against a massive landscape. Or you might want to go complementary, like in the case of the sunset where you want subjects to be a natural part of your shot. It really depends on the shot and desired effect, but keep it in mind.

KNOW YOUR GEAR

I once got a new camera, and it had a different mode where you could set the bit depth. Well, on the 14-bit color setting, it was a bit slower, and I didn't know this yet. I was shooting BMX action for the first time, and I couldn't figure out if I was just really bad or if I was really off, but somehow I couldn't catch the action. I was just a bit slower than usual, and it totally threw me off. When you're really experienced with your gear, you know how long it is between pressing the shutter to actually getting the shot. Medium format can have a much longer shutter delay than 35 mm, so I have to adjust my shooting style for medium format, and it often involves a lot more rehearsal.



The same idea holds true with your storage. Just like I need to know how a shutter is going to behave, I need to know how my storage is going to behave under all conditions. How long will a transfer take? Can it handle getting banged around on a trail or a cliff face? Is it going to serve my workflow the way I need? This is why I use G-Technology storage. The G-SPEED® Studio XL and G-RAID® Studio units in my office give me the capacity and security I need for my projects, and having fast transfer speeds ensures I'm not going to sit around waiting for long transfers to complete. When I'm in the field, action and outdoor situations give me enough randomness and adventure. I don't want that from my equipment. G-Technology G-DRIVE® ev units are as tough and light as they are fast. Throwing them into my G-DOCK ev® makes quick work of getting me from a shoot into editing.

Regardless of where I'm at in my workflow, I know that G-Technology is going to deliver the most dependability for whatever environment I'm in, and the drives will provide the performance I need to get the job done quickly—and right—for my clients.





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