



Spectator Photography Guide

Silverstone

by Fireproof Creative



Fireproof Creative

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📍 "Fan" zone
 📷 Apple iPhone 4S
 📷 iPhone Camera 4.28mm f/2.4
 📷 f/2.4 4.3mm
 🕒 1/4000 ISO 50

Sometimes the best camera is the one you have on you. Look for creative opportunities and moments and be ready.

Introduction

Motorsport presents some of the most dynamic and vibrant opportunities for sports photography available to a spectator. As a hobbyist photographer you are provided with much better opportunities compared with virtually every other sporting discipline, the large venues allow you to move around and get closer to the action than you are often able to at football matches or athletics events.

Silverstone is the UK's premier racing circuit, having grown up on its doorstep I'm a little biased, but it's also my favourite. Currently, it's the only place you can see top flight racing series like F1, MotoGP and the World Endurance championship in the UK.

I've been watching cars and bikes blast around Silverstone for more than 25 years and 15 of them have been spent with some sort of camera, so I like to think I know my way around when it comes to photography (you are welcome to decide for yourself). This guide has been written to help both new photographers and photographers new to motorsport, specifically to help you get the best out of your time at Silverstone if you haven't visited before. There might even be a few nuggets of information useful to the professionals out there too (even if it's just the good pubs listed at the end).

I hope you enjoy the guide, see you there!

About the Author

Jonny Henchman is a Northampton based 35 year old graphic designer and motorsport photographer working under the name Fireproof Creative. Starting out more than 15 years ago as an enthusiastic camera toting spectator with a love of cars, he has since gained regular professional media accreditation for numerous different championship racing series including the FIA World Endurance Championship, British GT, International GT Open and the Race of Champions, in association with the Canadian motorsport picture agency, Flag World. His prize winning images have been featured in a number of international photography publications including Digital Photographer and Photo Plus magazine.

You can follow Jonny's motorsport exploits on social media via the links below

@fireproof.creative Fireproof Creative @Fireproof_Tweet

Equipment Guide

There's a classic mantra among photographers that goes something along the lines of '80% of a great image comes from behind the camera, while 20% happens inside it' while this is a nice concept, it's not strictly true, especially in the case of demanding subjects like motorsport.

It's important to say that no amount of professional gear will make you a good photographer, but it does have a huge influence on image quality, consistency and processing potential. That said, if you are conscious of the limitations of your equipment and instead play to its strengths, the only thing stopping you getting great images is your own ability.



When it comes to Silverstone specifically, having some of the following camera equipment available to you will make the task easier, you should view this as a recommended list rather than a must have:

1. A DSLR with a fast, reliable auto-focus system. This becomes invaluable when working with subjects moving at high speed. While manual focus can be a viable option, it tends to be much more hit and miss vs. modern auto-focus systems and invariably results in a reduced success ratio (practice can of course, offset this to an extent).
2. A decent burst rate of 6+ fps, while I'd always advise against 'machine gunning' the whole time, it can be really helpful when trying to capture slower shutter speed pans as you are more likely to get at least one good shot in a burst. It's also useful if your auto-focus system is not the most reliable, manually pre-focusing can be a preferable option where a burst will give you a better chance of success.
3. Fast glass will give you the best chance of dealing with weather, catch fencing (explained later) and accurate focus. Unfortunately, it also tends to be prohibitively expensive for most spectators. Ideally for Silverstone you'll want a telephoto lens of at least 300mm with a minimum aperture of at least f5.6, but f4 or f2.8 will give you much more scope for flexibility. A good wide angle is another useful addition to the gear bag to make the most of atmospheric and paddock opportunities.

4. A sturdy monopod. While many photographers prefer to shoot hand-held, a monopod will dramatically increase your hit ratio when working at telephoto distances, even if image stabilisation is available to you. Speaking from my own experience I prefer to turn off any stabilisation as I find it interferes with my ability to track a subject smoothly. A monopod is easy to carry around and takes up little space, don't be tempted to use a tripod as they are often bulky, irritating to other spectators and encourage you to stay in one place.

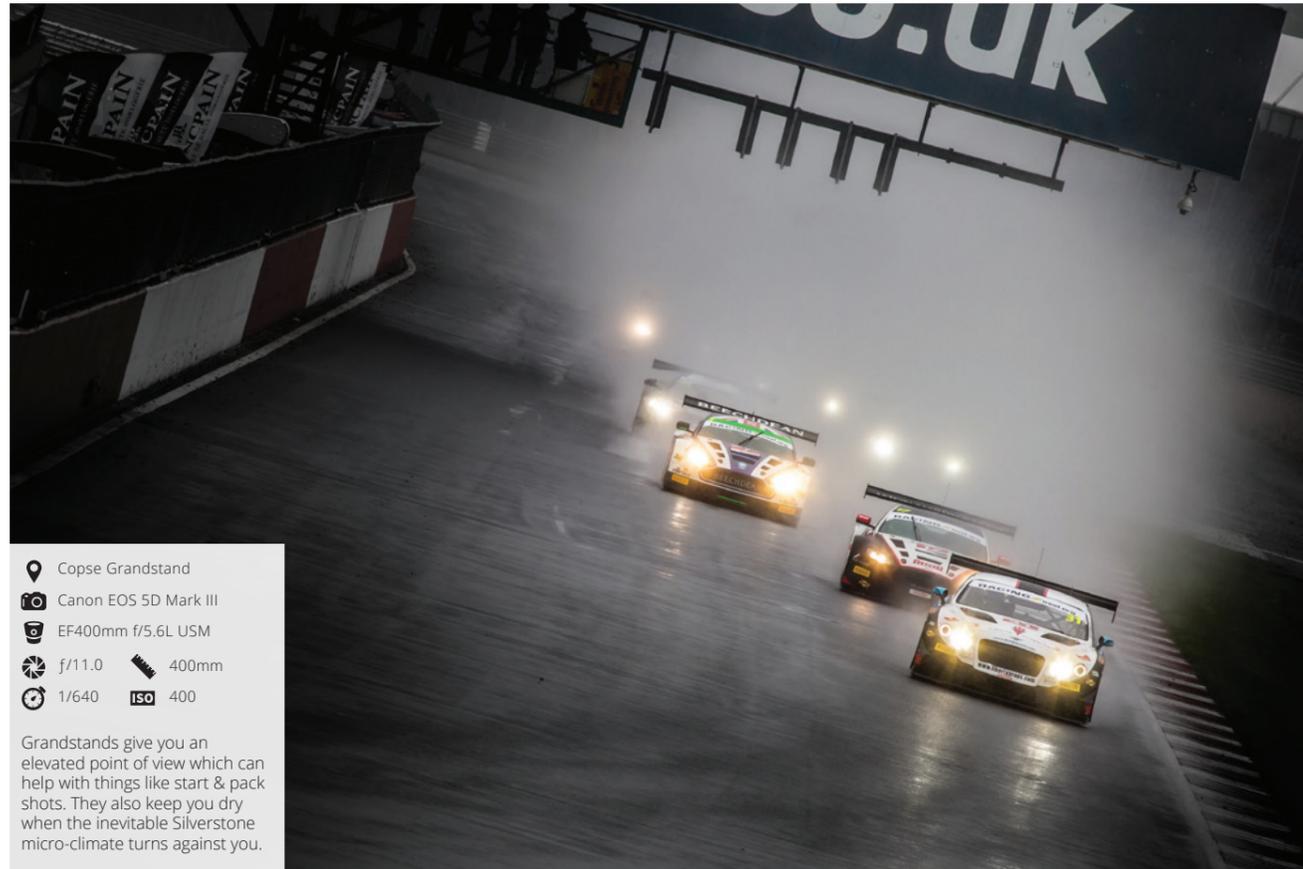


5. Filters. A circular polariser and a couple of medium strength ND filters will be useful in cutting out glare and boosting colours as well as allowing the use of wider apertures on bright days. Be aware that certain racing series like GTs, employ Perspex windscreens that will cause a rainbow effect when shot through a CPL. This can be fixed to a degree in post but it can require a fair amount of work and you may prefer to shoot without one if that's something you are worried about.

As most of you will no doubt know, the British weather is pretty unreliable to say the least. A decent set of waterproofs (both top and bottom) as well as a pair of sturdy walking boots can make for a drier, if not comfortable experience. Don't forget protection for your camera, purpose made rain covers are a necessity, with even cheap disposable ones having served me very well in the past. The rain can make for some of the most dramatic shots and tends

Equipment Guide

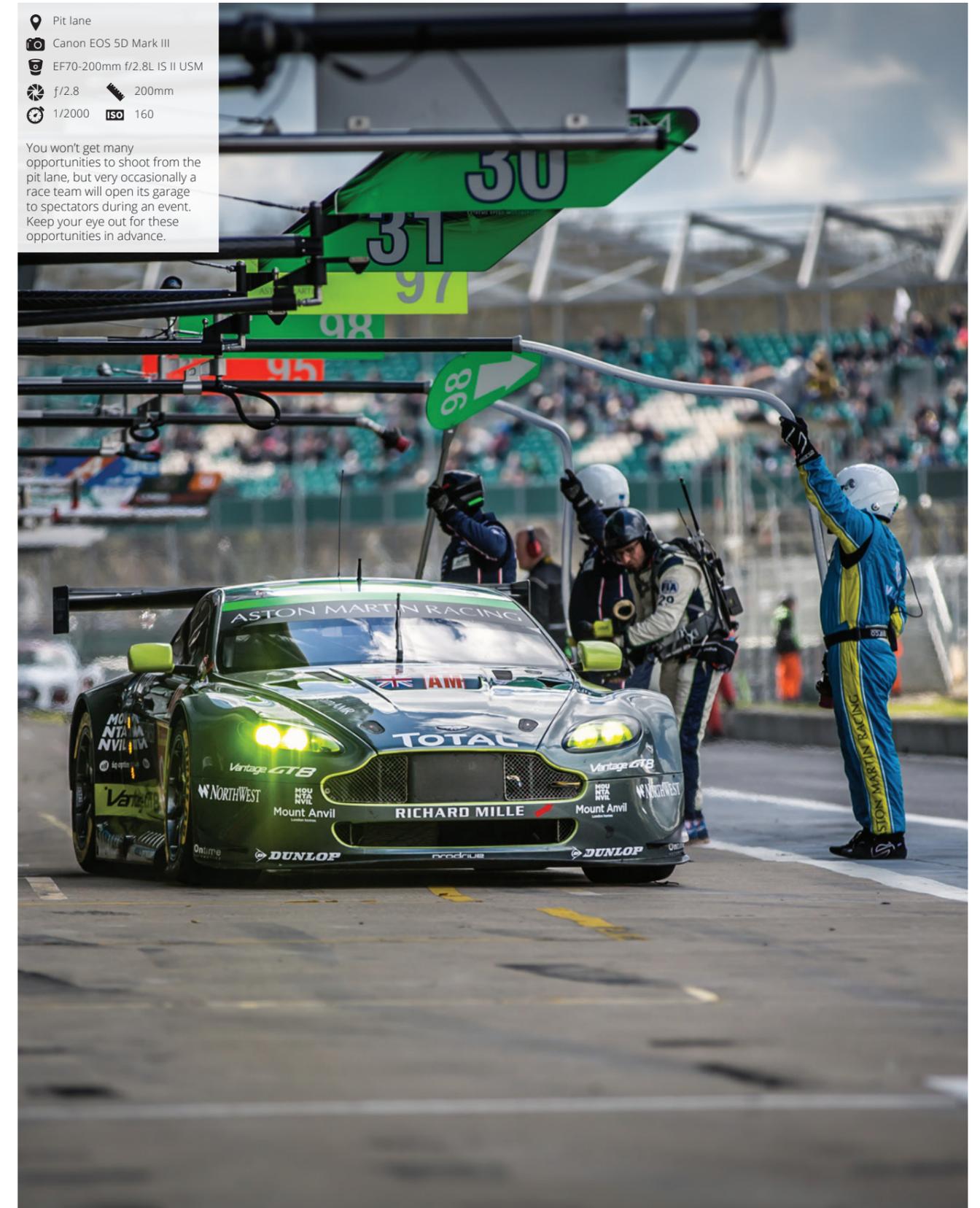
to be worth suffering for. Be aware that Silverstone is flat and quite open, so standing on a raised bank in a thunderstorm is best avoided.



Cope Grandstand
 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
 EF400mm f/5.6L USM
 f/11.0 400mm
 1/640 ISO 400
 Grandstands give you an elevated point of view which can help with things like start & pack shots. They also keep you dry when the inevitable Silverstone micro-climate turns against you.

One other piece of equipment that can be both a blessing and a curse is the infamous camping step. While you may not want to be 'that person' a little extra height can open up quite a few opportunities that would be otherwise unavailable. Some of the televised events encourage the circuit to place advertising hoardings in front of the Armco around various sections of the track, these tend to be the perfect height to block the average spectator's view.

A step in these situations can provide just enough elevation to give you your own private viewing spot, my friends affectionately call mine 'the smallest grandstand in the world'. The trade-off of course is that you have to lug it around with you and the health risk if balance and coordination are not your thing. Do be aware though that depending on how much the security teams on the gate wish to assert their own importance, you may or may not be restricted from bringing these steps into the venue - a Cheap £7 plastic step works well and won't leave you too downhearted if you have to leave it behind.



Pit lane
 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
 EF70-200mm f/2.8L IS II USM
 f/2.8 200mm
 1/2000 ISO 160
 You won't get many opportunities to shoot from the pit lane, but very occasionally a race team will open its garage to spectators during an event. Keep your eye out for these opportunities in advance.

Silverstone Circuit

📍 Helicopter
📷 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
🔍 EF 17-40 f/4L USM
🌞 f/7.1 📏 36mm
⌚ 1/1000 ISO 400

The helicopter pleasure flights available during some events at Silverstone give you a chance to capture a unique point of view.



Technique Guide: Coping with catch fencing

The first time you visit Silverstone as a camera touting spectator, you are likely to be a bit disappointed with what greets you. Due to safety regulations imposed by the FIA for most purpose-built Formula One venues, run off areas are large and heavy duty catch fencing is employed around the majority of the circuit. This results in spectator areas being a significant distance from the track, often with a mesh obstruction between you and the subject. If you are a regular visitor to the UK's other motorsport venues this may well fill you with despair. Fear not, there is still hope, there are numerous opportunities for photography around Silverstone and perhaps more creative options available because you need to work a bit harder.



Cope Corner (Exit)
 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
 EF400mm f/5.6L USM +1.4x
 f/8.0 560mm
 1/125 ISO 100
 Shooting through the fence can provide much better angles for photography.

The first thing you need to know is how to deal with the pesky mesh that stops bits of carbon fibre and wheels from prematurely ending your life. Remember that's what it's for when you curse its presence, taking any liberties to physically avoid it can be seriously dangerous and is not at all recommended.

There are a few tips and tricks to pull this off, they are listed in order of the effort and commitment required on your part, from the least to the most:

1. Shoot over the top

There are a few places where you can clear the top of the fences, the obvious way is to get in a grandstand. Ideally you want to be at the front so the distance to the subject is minimised (and you're less likely to ruin someone's day by smacking an innocent spectator on the back of the head with your lens).



Woodcote Grandstand
 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
 EF400mm f/5.6L USM
 f/14.0 400mm
 1/25 ISO 100
 Grandstands can offer an unobstructed view, but don't rely on them for the best angles

The following stands offer unobstructed views of the circuit:

- Large sections of the International pit straight
- Farm outfield, there is a corporate stand on the inside of Farm as well, this is usually locked or reserved for sponsor usage at bigger events.
- Village, although the direction of cars/bikes here is generally away from you unless you are positioned very far left to view Aintree & the entry to Wellington straight
- Large sections of Woodcote and National Pit Straight
- Maggots and Becketts

Technique Guide: Coping with catch fencing

- Hangar Straight on the infield, there is a small stand here but be aware this is generally unavailable at events where centre access is restricted.
- Club covered and uncovered stands

The caveat of shooting from a stand is you have to shoot down on to the subject which often results in a reasonably dull image framed against the grey of the tarmac. Be aware that grandstand access is usually restricted for large events on qualifying and race day & only a select few will be open to the public for smaller events. Check this on Silverstone's website for each event to get an idea of what your options are likely to be.



There are a few general spectator areas where you can see over the fence, these are as follows:

- The south banks of the bridge crossing Wellington Straight.
- Sections of Luffield terrace, with the better options at the opposite end to the national straight.
- The exit of Copse Corner on the outside of the circuit, at the very top of the terraces (you'll need a step or have to balance on the hand rails here).

- The inside north bank of the bridge on Hangar straight, not always accessible
- The bank on the inside of the circuit at Vale, not always accessible
- An area of waist high fencing between the open grandstand at club and the disabled viewing stand at Vale (this is a favourite camping spot for photographers, often pitched up for hours preciously guarding their space – its fence free but in all honesty, quite a dull angle)
- You can also shoot over the start/finish line from the viewing terrace at the south end of the Wing Complex. There is also a view at the north end too, but the angles are tight and they come at you blind.



TIP: The World's Smallest Grandstands

A small decorators step ladder or folding camping step can pay dividends at some of the above locations and can provide a great view of the track, always be respectful of other spectators if you decided to try this and do your best to avoid getting in their way.

Technique Guide: Coping with catch fencing

2. Look for a Gap

There are a number of points around the circuit with shooting holes in the catch fence (sections around the Loop, Becketts & Club Corner to name only a few), these are purpose built windows for press photographers. Sometimes these are locked but opportunities do arise, if you are lucky enough to find an open one, make sure you don't block the accredited media if they wish to use it, remember they have a job to do and these windows are not really intended for use by spectators. Pros tend to move around a lot (as you should) so chances are if you step back they will move on quite quickly, always be respectful.



When no purpose-built holes are open or not positioned where you want to shoot, look for gaps where fence panels join or at access gates for support vehicles. There are odd places where the fence has deteriorated or been cut but you will need to look out for these as they are regularly repaired.

3. Imagine its invisible

It's quite possible to shoot through the fence and not have it interfere with your image. This method works by using depth of field (DOF) to blur out the fence between you and the subject to the point where it becomes invisible. It works best when you position a telephoto

lens (the longer the better really, 300mm minimum for best results) close to the catch fence with the subject a relatively large distance beyond it (15 meters or so minimum). This ensures the fence and the subject are on substantially different focal plains. If the track is too close to the fence the DOF difference will not be enough to completely blur it out.



Use the following tips to get the best out of this technique:

- Get the end of your lens as close to the fence as possible, remain safe behind the rail. If you do stray into unauthorised areas and a marshal gives you an earful you need to remember they are looking out for your safety and should, once again, be treated with respect.
- Use the widest aperture you can i.e. f/2.8, f/4 or f/5.6 (get yourself a quality 3-4 stop ND filter to allow you to use larger apertures on bright days while keeping the shutter speeds down to enable you to capture some movement).

Technique Guide: Coping with catch fencing

- Avoid thick mesh and supports, this technique works best on uniform areas of thin wire and/or large apertures (gaps). Much of the catch fencing at Silverstone will accommodate this technique.
- If you're lucky enough (or unlucky enough) to visit Silverstone in bright sunshine, avoid sections of fence with a lot of reflections. Look for sections in the shade or alternatively, position yourself somewhere on the circuit where the sun won't interfere as much – some sections of mesh have been spray painted black, this does help cut some of the reflections but they are few and far between at Silverstone.
- If your section of fence has large openings or improvised holes, align your lens with said opening for high shutter speeds or when panning, time your shutter release to coincide with the gap.
- Always shoot perpendicular to the fence. If you release the shutter at anything other than at right angles you are going to be shooting through more metal than necessary. This will increase the likelihood of producing a grey sheen on your images.



TIP: Post processing is a must

Shooting through the fence can reduce the contrast of your images slightly and interfere with auto focus (AF) performance depending on the light conditions. It can take some practice to get reliable results but many of the issues are slight, and can often be reduced with practice and/or corrected using a bit of post processing. If your lens has a focus limiter this will significantly help your AF performance by ensuring it ignores anything too close.



4. Use it as a feature

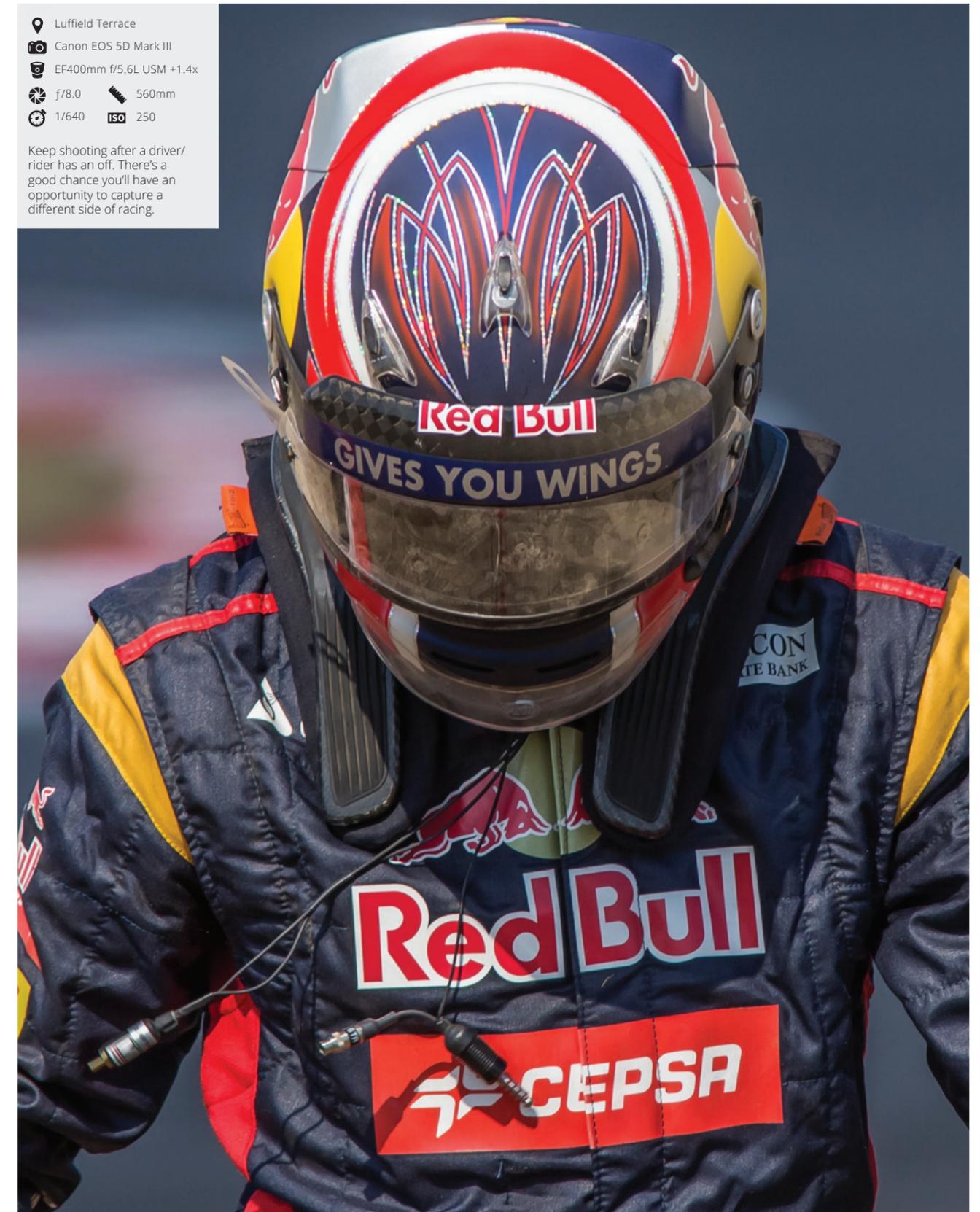
Perhaps the most difficult to achieve with successful results, is to incorporate the fence into your images intentionally. This can require a significant amount of vision on your part and an equal amount of patience, using an obstruction to add variety to your images is difficult, but can result in a genuinely unique photograph. Typically, it is achieved using very low shutter speeds and panning [explained later] so the obstructions become blurred and adds a layer of structure to, and/or shapes, your image. A perfectly sharp shot isn't necessarily the goal here, instead a more creative approach to capture the emotion and atmosphere of the event tends to be the aim (at least that's what most photographers will tell you). Without wishing to sound overly pretentious, think of yourself as a creative artist rather than a photo journalist, use your surroundings/restrictions to your advantage and experiment. It doesn't have to be fences either, crowds, grandstands, marshals even other cars can provide an opportunity to use this technique, It won't always work, in fact often it will fail badly, but get a good result and you could end up with an all-time favourite that has the added bonus of being unique.

Technique Guide: Coping with catch fencing

TIP: Avoid the crowds!

Although shooting through the fence has been listed high in the list in terms of commitment, it provides you with perhaps the most opportunity for creativity and rarer still, originality. Stands and photo holes are often packed with photographers getting near identical images, if you want to differentiate your pictures from everyone else, the easiest way to do it is obviously to shoot from a position where no one else is standing. This requires a bit more commitment and experimentation on your part but the results can be more than worth it.

There are a number of sections around Silverstone where most of the pros won't shoot because there is no track-side access and no photo holes, shooting through the fence can give you some exclusivity in this regard. Wherever you stand you are likely to find you are not alone for long as photographers seem to be magnetically attracted to one another, thinking 'if they are shooting there, then there must be something to see', break this cycle and avoid other photographers to help bring some extra variety to your images and keep moving around.



Technique Guide: Capturing Motion

Motorsport photography can usually be grouped into two arbitrary categories, documentary and creative.

Documentary style usually involves a pin sharp, crisp shot with the whole subject in focus using a high shutter speed and a fast f/stop (for shallow DoF). While this is great for corporate advertising and certain types of editorial content, it often fails to impart the feeling of speed (much more so when used with cars in comparison to bikes). Because of the high shutter speeds that are typically used, everything will be stopped dead, giving the impression that the subject was stationary when the image was captured. You really need to pay attention to the background with this type of photography as all the ugly sections of fences and numerous blue porta-loos are going to be pretty obvious distractions in your images if you don't.

Conversely, at the other end of the scale is the artistic 'pan' shot. This relies on using a low shutter speed i.e. the shutter stays open longer, and tracking the subject precisely so it remains sharp while the background blurs into streaks.

Remember whichever style you opt for, the very best photographers focus on trying to capture and communicate the thrill and atmosphere of motorsport through their images, they don't just take pictures of racing cars... Deep!



Panning considerations

While this technique is simple in principle it can be exceptionally difficult to master and requires a significant amount of practice to get consistent reliable results. The overall difficulty is influenced by a number of factors listed here

1. Camera Shake

The longer your shutter stays open the more susceptible your image is to any unintentional movements you make. Unless you have incredibly steady hands there is a high likelihood of you moving your camera out of sync with the subject, this is amplified significantly at longer focal lengths. This tends to result in blurry photos that don't add anything to the overall success of the image. This is where a monopod can help you out some.



Technique Guide: Capturing Motion

2. Subject Movement

To be clear I'm not talking about the typical movement you expect from a racing machine, that's a given, but the kind of movement you don't necessarily think would have an effect on an image. Bumps, acceleration, breaking, gear changes, steering, cornering and vibration are all variables that influence a vehicles posture on track and these can affect the sharpness of your images. An obvious example of this is demonstrated when shooting motorcycles, you can pan perfectly with the machine itself but the rider is always shifting their weight around and changing position. This can quite frequently result in a sharp bike but a blurry rider while attempting a 'pan'. The same is true of single seater racing cars i.e. F1, while the car could feasibly remain pin sharp, you still have to factor in the driver's head bobbing around due to g-force or driving style. Depending on what kind of shot you want, a blurred crash helmet could be the difference between success and failure.

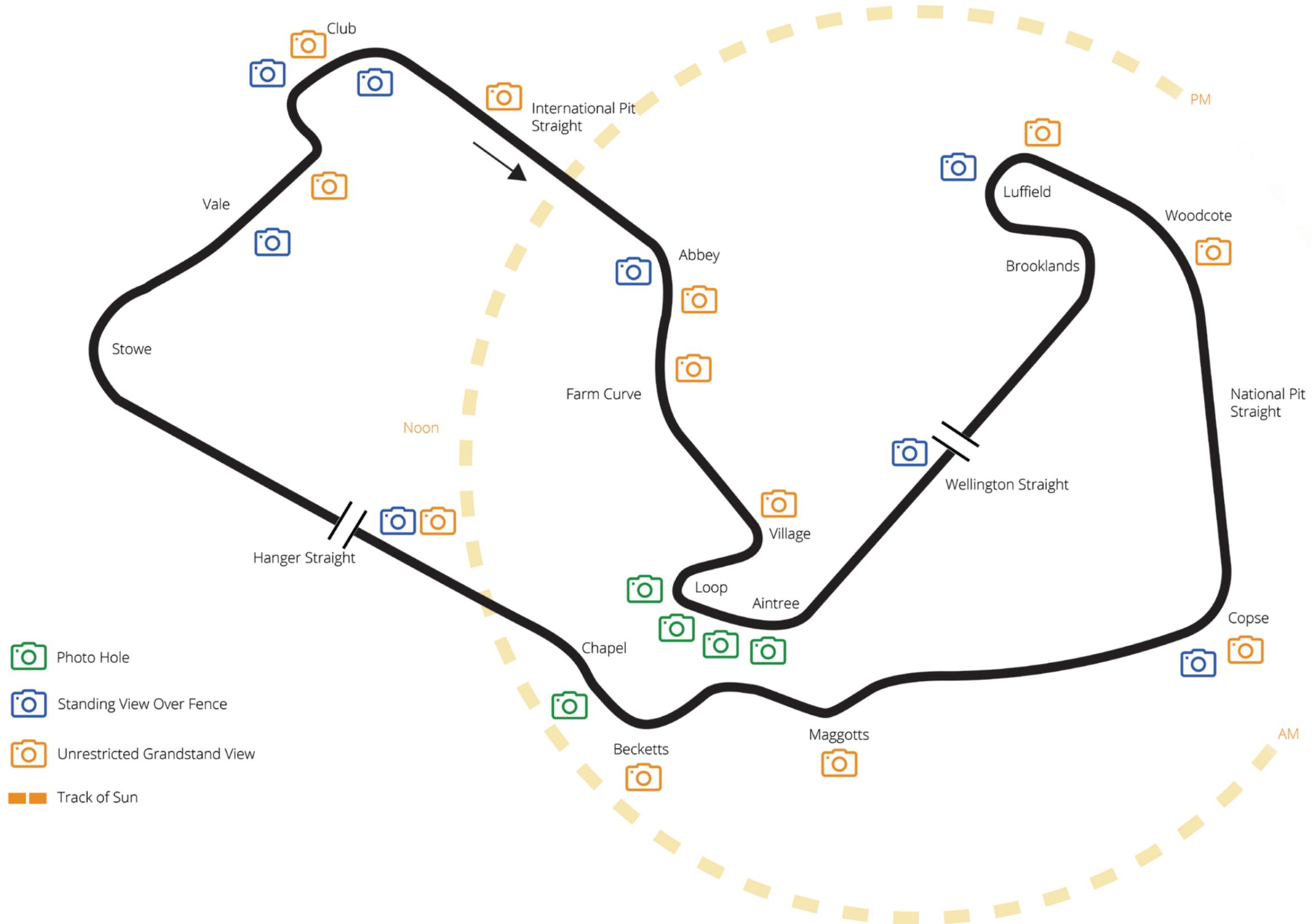


3. Focus

Working with low shutter speeds can also give your camera's focusing system a workout. A traditional side on pan shot should be relatively simple for most autofocus systems to deal with but when you try the same approach at $\frac{3}{4}$ angles the camera and the photographer need to be more flexible. Engage continuous or Servo mode and make sure you keep your focus point nailed on to a specific part of the subject – usually the driver or riders helmet, or in the case of closed vehicles the front quarter nearest you.



Track Guide



- Photo Hole
- Standing View Over Fence
- Unrestricted Grandstand View
- Track of Sun

Location Examples



📍 International Paddock
📷 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
📷 EF70-200mm f/2.8L IS II USM
📷 f/2.8 📷 145mm
🕒 1/400 ISO 320

Detail shots can give some variety to your images. The greatest pictures of cars on track still lose their appeal if your set has nothing else to offer.

Location Examples



📍 Vale (Outside)
📷 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
📷 EF70-200mm f/2.8L IS II USM
📷 f/16.0 200mm
🕒 0.4s ISO 50

Aggressive long shutter shots can be difficult to achieve but they give you the opportunity to use crowds and the background to really come up with something creative.

Location Examples



-  Chapel (Outside)
-  Canon EOS 5D Mark III
-  EF400mm f/5.6L USM +1.4x
-  f/8.0  560mm
-  1/640  ISO 200

When shooting bikes, you can generally get away with faster shutter speeds than with cars as the rider's position on the bike tends to impart a sense of speed in images.

Location Examples



📍 Club Exit (Outside)
📷 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
📷 EF400mm f/5.6L USM +1.4x
📷 f/8.0 📷 560mm
🕒 1/500 ISO 400

Popular events like the F1 & Moto GP tend to be busy, so plan your day in advance and make the most of practice sessions earlier in the event for more space.

Location Examples



- 📍 Luffield Entrance (Outside)
- 📷 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
- 📷 EF400mm f/5.6L USM +1.4x
- 📷 f/8.0 📷 560mm
- 🕒 1/500 ISO 250

The rain is miserable to shoot in, but at Silverstone it's almost guaranteed at some point. So make the most of it and capture some of the spray and headlight reflections.

Location Examples

📍 Brooklands (Outside)
📷 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
📷 EF70-200mm f/2.8L IS II USM
📷 f/2.8 📷 140mm
🕒 1/100 ISO 100

Shooting with a wide aperture helps you blur out the fence using DoF, it's easier with a long telephoto but you can do it with shorter lenses if the lighting conditions are right.



Location Examples



- 📍 Luffield (Exit)
- 📷 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
- 📷 EF400mm f/5.6L USM +1.4x
- 📷 f/8.0 📷 560mm
- 📷 1/500 ISO 200

If your subject is coming at you head on you can use faster shutter speeds when the wheel rims aren't visible - otherwise they give the game away, resulting in the 'parked' effect..

Location Examples



- 📍 Loop Entrance (Inside)
- 📷 Canon EOS 5D Mark III
- 📷 EF400mm f/5.6L USM
- 📷 f/8.0 📏 400mm
- 📷 1/60 ISO 100

3/4 pans can be difficult to pull off. Generally you want the front quarter nearest you to be the focal point, anything else tends to look accidental which spoils the impact of the image.



Local Amenities

Camera Supplies

Skears Photographic

Complete photographic store with most essentials

Tel: 01604 628738

203 Wellingborough Rd,
Northampton
NN1 4ED

Opening Times: Monday to Saturday 9:00 am - 5:30 pm - Closed Sunday

Jessops

Complete photographic store with most essentials

Tel: 01908 394470

96, The Centre:mk,
Silbury Blvd,
Milton Keynes
MK9 3BE

Opening Times: Monday to Wednesday 9:30 am - 6:00 pm -
Thursday to Friday 9:30 am - 7:00 pm
Saturday 9:00 am - 6:00 pm
Closed Sunday

NSS PC Workshop

Replacement cables and memory cards

Tel: 01327 358 008

72 Watling Street East
Towcester
NN12 6AF

Opening Times: Monday to Friday 9:00 am - 6:00 pm - Saturday 10:00 am - 1:30 pm
Closed Sunday

Food & Supplies

Supermarkets

There are a number of supermarkets 10 minutes drive from Silverstone in Towcester. You will find a Tesco, Aldi, Waitrose and a small Co-Op all with good parking.

Brackley also has quite a large Tesco's a little bit further away.

Food

Towcester has a number of restaurants and eateries in close proximity to Silverstone if you get tired of the generic burger vans. Fish & Chips, Chinese, Indian, Kebabs, Italian, Gourmet Burgers, McDonald's, Domino's Pizza and numerous pubs are all to be found here.

Brackley too has a number of restaurants, Fish & Chips, Chinese, Indian, Kebabs, Italian, Gourmet Burgers, and numerous pubs.

Good Pubs

The Butchers Arms - Greens Norton

01327 358848
10 High St, Greens Norton, Towcester
NN12 8BA

The White Horse - Silverstone

01327 855896
1 Stocks Hill, Silverstone, Towcester
NN12 8UW

The Crown - Weston

01295 760310
2 Helmdon Rd, Weston, Towcester
NN12 8PX

The Mill - Towcester

01327 437060
Chantry Ln, Towcester
NN12 6YY

The New Inn - Abthorpe

01327 857306
Silver St, Abthorpe Towcester
NN12 8QR

The Star Inn - Sulgrave

01295 760389
Manor Road, Sulgrave, Banbury
OX17 2SA

The Saracens Head - Towcester

01327 350414
219 Watling St, Towcester
NN12 6BX

The Fox & Hounds - Whittlebury

01327 858048
44 High St, Whittlebury, Towcester
NN12 8XJ



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