Behind the Lens with Dan Carr

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Born in the UK, Carr took a gap year in Whistler, British Columbia after high-school which planted the seed for a mountain obsession. While his passion for mountain life took a backseat as he finished his degree in England, it resurfaced with a vengeance after graduation and he returned to Whistler for the 2010 season. Fast forward to 2009 Pro Photographer Showdown, Carr has already proven his expertise behind the lens in his short career. We've seen his work in countless publications, on the covers of numerous DVDs and in a number of films as well as innumerable commercial campaigns for an ever widening list of clients.

During the winter you will find him hanging out in British Columbia, Canada shooting alongside the worlds top snowsports athletes and the conquerors in the never ending quest for the perfect images from his kettle, exitexy camera.

For more info, check out his website www.dancarrphotography.com

So Dan, is the ski season pretty much over for you?

Winter ski season is over...but that will leave the spring/summer ski seasons! I have a sunset jump shoot at Whistler Olympic Park coming up with Warren Miller athlete Kim Hall-Wallace and Pro Freeskier Jon Olsen.

After that I will shoot at the glacier summer camps here in Whistler for a while and then I'm trying to line up a trip to South America. With a bit of luck, winter will finally be over in September.

What happens then?

I go surfing!

That's sick! What other action sports are you into? Do you shoot any surfing?

No I haven't shot any surfing before. I love to be in the ocean, and I'm sure I'd enjoy it but I haven't had the chance to give it a try yet. The waterproof housings for my camera are about $4000 so it's not something you can just give a try for a day. I'm sure I'll get into it at some point but I'm not really interest me so much, that's too much like work! Like in the winter I enjoy shooting mountain biking too.

Basically I enjoy shooting all the things I actually like to do myself. I think that's really important. If you don't love and understand what you are shooting then you will quickly lose motivation.

How did were you when you got into action sports and photography?

My dad got me into skiing when I was about 4 or 5 and I've been at it ever since. I didn't really get into photography until I left university when I was 23.

What were you studying in university? What got you into photography at that point?

I have a degree in Aerospace Engineering. I guess I got into photography as I could do something that was a little more fun than that!

That's not quite true actually. I got into photography because I fell in love with living in Whistler. I came here after I graduated from university and I couldn't find a job. Being a ski photographer seemed like a good idea I was working on a ski tech in a store and I knew I couldn't do that for very long.

What did you do to make it happen? Becoming a pro photographer is definitely not something that happens overnight.

Yeah it's a long story. To begin with I really just concentrated on making a good portfolio. I didn't worry about working for a specific magazine or anything like that. I'd just shoot whatever I thought looked cool. I'd go out and shoot the big pow I knew there was to be point in ripping those after questions until I had a good portfolio that I could build a reputation with. I'd also shoot a lot of my friends doing their thing and then I'd edit the photos and put them on my Facebook and built a website. After that things gradually fell into place and another year down the road I entered the Pro Photographers Showdown in Whistler. I was surprised to be picked for the final, but it really helped get my name out there.

Tell me about that experience and how it changed your career.

It didn't really change the direction I was heading, but it probably jumped me forwards a couple of years. After that a lot of people knew who I was and I had a good online portfolio to back that up with.

Sitting in the crowd at the Showdown 2 years ago had been one of the things that really made me want to pick up a camera and get photographing, so it was cool to me to in the stage that time, alongside some other photographers who I really admired.

What were your thoughts on this year's showdown?

Well it must be popular because I couldn't get a ticket to see it! I heard Brian killed it though

In your opinion, what is the difference between an amateur and professional photographer?

A pro is someone that will always come away with a shot, no matter what the conditions or what problems arise along the way.

I read a good book recently called 'Vision Mongers by a travel photographer named David duChemin. In the book he talks about the difference between a photographer and a 'visual artist'. The book is a bit pretentious for my liking (a French word a plus, in fine. An amateur is someone who does their craft for the love of it and in there is nothing wrong with that at all. I'm sure there are many amateurs out there who are better than me, but I probably be making more money pushing my degree to use. His point was that professional has come to simply mean someone that does their craft for money.

His point was that perhaps people shouldn't be push hotted into amateur and professional because there are also a lot of people who fall in between the two. I guess I'm one of those people. I'm not a pro in the sense that I'm not already signed with 3 because but I see action a pro is someone that will always come away with a shot, no matter what problems arise along the way. I'm not there yet, but I'm working towards that goal.

It just goes to show you that it's not black and white

Not at all. If anyone is thinking about becoming a photographer I highly recommend the book by the way.

What advice do you have for someone wanting to take photos for a living, in terms of both the photography and business side of things?

You need to quickly realize that you will spend far more time on the business side of things than actually taking the photos. I always tell people to take a business class instead of a photography class.

For example, my second co-working classes are going to turn me into Verbiage, but there is a lot to be learned on the business side of things. Check out my blog for more details.

Talking about websites, how important do you think keeping yours updated with blog posts, reviews and how to's is?

I don't think it's necessary to be successful, but it doesn't hurt. It builds your "web presence" and that's never a bad thing in an industry that is really communication.

Plus I kind of enjoy it! I have a huge box of camera equipment being delivered tomorrow for testing by B&H photo so I get to try new things and make sure I have the best equipment to do the job.

What are your thoughts on where photography technology is going? Do you think it's going to change the way the industry is run in the future?

I don't think it's the photography technology that will cause the change. It's things like the iPad that will change it, as people will be able to view photos in a different way. I'm not sure how that will affect the industry.

The only photography technology that is causing much of a change is the videos/stills convertion. So far it has been film makers adapting DSLRs for shooting video and not photographers shooting video instead of stills. There are a few photographers doing this, but I think that's more only few people have made the switch. Being able to shoot video is nice, but to do it well is still very hard.

As it becomes easier over time, do you think photographers will need to learn to do both well or will it always be the case that they will specialize?

There's going to be. Perfect models will eventually match do both, but for what I shoot, I don't think it will happen. Simply because some of the things I shoot are not instantly repeatable and I won't shoot video and stills at the same time. I'll shoot video for a day, then I'll shoot stills for a day. I can't do both at the video. For me there will always be someone next to me shooting the videos and I will concentrate on the stills.

Enough about technology and speculating about the future, let's talk about your season. Can you give us a quick recap?

Edmonton urban trip with Poorboyz. -30 Celsius, urban destruction, police helicopters, LJ Strenio, Matt walker, Mike Hornbuckle and Ryan Dickson.

4 Games. 50 foldz show lots of driving back and forth between Aspen and Denver.

Japan: Dane Tudor, Sammy Carlson and Henrikuh. Pow, sushi, pow, sushi, Schmuck and more pow.

Whistler stacking missions. Chunky Ryan doing intense things backwards, Dane doing intense things forwards and Henrikh styling through the pow.

Alaska. Summit, Pep, Tudor, JP, Julien Regnier. Ridiculous lines, avalanches, metal rooms, mono metal rooms, intense climbs and helicopters.

What was your favorite trip of the year?

Ark without a doubt. The snow of that place is something you can't really describe. In Forbes, the terrain is like Whistler, but the snow is so much lighter. Kashmir like skiing with fun rocks/pillows all down them.

Do you plan on going back next year?

I really hope so.

Looking back on your career as a photographer, is there one trip/photo/experience that has had a big impact on your career?

I think its hard to narrow it down to one thing. Every photo and every trip combines together to make one six year long experience.

If you had to shoot one type of skiing for the rest of your life, what would it be?

I'm pretty happy with what I shoot now. I love the mix of shooting in the backcountry, which is great to get a shot and so many more things have to come together. Snow conditions, rider sticking the line, light, and the challenge of physically getting to the locations. With park and urban most of that other stuff is easy and they can repeat it until they get the shot. I'm not saying the photos are easy, but things like weather and snow conditions don't matter so much.

What about athletes? Do you enjoy shooting with a certain group of riders?

I have a few people who I know I work well with. When you find a rider who's on the same wavelength you can produce some really good stuff. Tudor, Sammy Carlson, Pep, Ryan Dickson, Dane Jones and Kim Hall-Wallace are the ones who I work with most. Chunky Ryan, Dane Tudor, Leigh Pinnell, Jesse Wuttke and Max Hit are some of my favorite guys to ride with. With those guys, I don't think there is a shoot I have done where we haven't got something published to show.

What about working with other photographers? Have you done a lot of shoots where there have been other people shooting too? Generally how smoothly do they go?

The only time that might happen is a big jump at a park shoot or a competition. It's not ideal, but sometimes it can't be helped. Overall all the ski photographers out there know each other well enough so it's pretty easy going...most of the time.

You mentioned you shoot a lot in the spring and summer and also surf, is winter still your favorite season?

Absolutely. I love everything about it, the cold and the constant anticipation for the next dump of fresh snow.

What's it like shooting snowboarders? Do you notice a big difference in the way things are done?

I don't shoot a lot of snowboarding so I'm not really sure I can compare. I doubt there is much difference for the snowboarders I have shot pow and up to the same caliber as the skiers I work with so it's hard to say.

Over the last few years we've seen a huge increase in the number of ski movies. Has this made things tough this year? What are your thoughts on the number of up-and-comers trying to make a name for themselves?

I think next year we are going to see some crazy decline in the backcountry, well in fact I know we are as I have seen some of it! I'll be on site that end of spring from people who are good all-round riders and not just someone who can hit a jump. I think that's where the industry is going to go. Not that there isn't room for the really good guys, I would say the same thing as so many of them are heavily pro-oriented, at least a lot more than the Tudor and Pep's of the world. Those guys are the best in the world at what they do and they have been doing it for so long talent to the opinions, but if they want to step up a level and try and compete with the big guys, then they need to get more lines and more powder.

I think the 2012 season was a crazy one anyway that moved up the ranks in the last few years one Jeff Thomas and his Heavy Knee Team of rookie fires got swallowed up by Poorboyz, but until that happened they were consistently upping the number of movie sales (and they ranked up there in the top 3 in so companies). Their movie always had a few of the best riders in the world in it and I'm sure they will be back for the next year. It would be good to see another one of the younger companies follow along that sort of path.

What are your thoughts on all the amateur photographers trying to make it big?

Well it's not often that you see yr hear of a new face on the scene suds, whilst in a shame as there's always room for some friendly competition. Part of the problem is the money I think because magazines are paying less and less for photos, so there's less money to be made. Also, I think that the fact that there are so many people who are good at taking of how that YOU you can make a living doing this. Obviously it takes time to build up to the commercial level that I'm at now, but I think it comes to begin with but unfortunately the mags are getting smaller and using less photos.

It's not going to be easy to break into it.

Are there any magazines that you are stoked on? In terms of overall impression, writing, photos, etc.

SBC! I have always liked the writing in Powder too.

Where do you think the future of print magazines is heading?

I think its going to split in two. Personally I think there will always be people (at least for the next 5-10 years) that want printed paper magazines, you know, something you can quickly buy on a whim at the grocery store or at the airport. I think that's where the big mags will be heading, they will be more mainstream and less niche and they will use things like the iPad. The problem is going to be that to begin with, developments costs for magazines like that will be huge and I'm not sure how many companies will be willing to take the risk. I think the content of mags will needs to be an element on interactivity and multimedia.

Magazines like the New York Times, Wired and National Geographic won't have a problem, as they will have the budget to develop these within the next year I think, but that will only serve to widen the gap between them and the smaller magazines. I think that's where the future of the niche mags will be. Mags like Powder, Snow Pro, SBC and skiing magazines have the budget for anything like that, but I doubt it. For them the printed mags will still be a big part of their business for a long time to come. However can get a jump on everyone else is value for themselves.

Any closing thoughts?

Check out my blog at www.dancarrphotography.com and don't hesitate to ask any questions you have!

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