



“From the Ordinary to the Extra Ordinary”

- dare to focus.



In 2017 as a direct result of requests from camera clubs I developed a talk entitled “Beyond Auto Mode - Taking creative control of your camera”. This is now one of my most popular talks, the aim is to provide advice on how to take control of your camera to produce more creative images working with the controls on your camera. Following the success of this talk, I was encouraged to develop a series building on this and looking further at more advanced aspects.

I am a professional wildlife photographer with nearly 50 years of experience shooting and teaching photography. My aim in all I do is to help photographers to better understand their cameras in order to take their shots from the “ordinary to the extraordinary”. Thankfully we won’t ever end up with a fully automatic camera. My aim is to explore what still remains a

new, developing and amazing technology and to look at what you, the photographer, has to do to work with the tools available. This third talk in the series is titled “dare to Focus” and concentrates on just that, Autofocus.

We are currently bombarded with incredible software to correct photos in post but one area where this is not and never will be possible is autofocus. Autofocus systems for slide projectors were invented in 1932 by Norman Stauffer but they didn’t appear on main stream cameras until 1978 when Leica presented a SLR camera with a rudimentary autofocus system and others followed. It wasn’t however until 1985 with the launch of the EOS series of cameras that Canon decided to produce the first fully electronic lenses and cameras with inbuilt autofocus. Nikon did the same in 1992. Cameras with integrated autofocus are thus a fairly new development but have soon become massively important for wildlife and fast action photography in particular. This development has however been far slower than certainly we are led to expect with different manufacturers developing different approaches and constantly modifying them to win market share. The result is that the hype has, erroneously, led us to believe that all focusing problems have now been solved. On the workshops and safaris I run I find this is the area where people struggle the most. Reality can’t match the hype especially when we hear about the supposed wonders of new mirrorless autofocus systems. The poor photographer is thus left to believe it is their lack of experience or even they’re inability to invest in the very latest technology that is the problem. In a recent survey by a popular magazine 80% of readers reported that this was the most confusing part of photography.

However, as with so many aspects of photography, when the limitations are understood it’s not anywhere near as complex as it might seem. Photographs that are not sharp are still not acceptable but neither have we yet developed a true auto focus system that will do it all for you. My aim with this talk is not to confuse further by explaining the complex technical aspects but to explore the amazing technology and how you might apply this to produce consistently sharper images.

We will initially look at the supposedly simpler application of autofocus to stationery subjects, to seek to understand how the focus points and focusing engines work and how to apply them. We will look at their limitations and how to avoid these plus the creative ways we can deploy the technology to cause the viewer of an image to literally focus on the aspect of your photograph you wish them to. We will look at the development of technologies for tracking focus so important to wildlife and fast action photography together with techniques that you can learn and adopt to make this more repeatable and successful. As technology develops firstly in DSLR cameras we will look at what the manufacturers are doing to make this more powerful and success more repeatable. Interestingly despite each manufacturer adopting their own terminology the core approaches are remarkably similar. As we hear more of the wonders of mirrorless systems we will also look at the advantages and problems these pose.

The talk lasts about 2 hours including a 10 minute break in the middle.

Bob Brind-Surch