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Thrilling life of a globe-trotting motorsport photographer

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Cheryl Tay

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BY CHERYL TAY

Autos

US-based photojournalist Larry Chen was just doing his job and taking photos of the Chinese drifter, nicknamed Susu, who was protesting a decision by organisers of a drift competition held in China.

Susu caught sight of Chen snapping away and hurriedly marched over to demand for the photos.



Chen refused and Susu began to chase him for the camera.

Weighed down by equipment, Chen, 28, was soon caught and got embroiled into a fight with Susu and his friends. His camera unfortunately got smashed in the fight, which ended when police who took Larry into custody.

He was later released when police were satisfied he did not start the fight. He managed to retrieve the photos from his broken camera, but that was the end of it. Ironically, Susu eventually bought Larry a brand new professional Canon 1D Mk III camera body as a token of compensation and apology.

"That was in 2007 and the model was fresh on the market and not many people had it yet. In retrospect, that might have been a significant milestone for my career because I went back to America with that new camera full of the latest technologies which allowed me to shoot to my full potential," said Chen, who currently works as a motorsport photojournalist for Speedhunters.com, one of the largest automotive and motorsport online portal in the world.

In all of Larry's photojournalism career in motorsports, that incident stands out as the most memorable.

Travelling around the world to cover motorsport events, Larry has a job that many fans can only dream of — getting close to the drivers and to the action on track. However, it isn't all fun as people imagine.

"People don't realise how much time is being spent in front of the glowing screen (the PC monitor). For every two days of shooting, it takes about five days to process the photos and write the articles," Larry said.

It wasn't easy for him to be where he is today though, he added.

Photography has always been a hobby for him since he was in high school. He started shooting motorsports when he took part in races for fun and realised that he should focus on shooting since he wasn't a great racer.

In 2006 he started a website (Driftfotos.com) to showcase his works and paid his way out of his own pocket to attend events. Over the years, his works got noticed and he was finally picked up by Speedhunters in 2010.



"People don't realise how hard it was for me to get into this. Everything I learned from photography I taught myself and everything about the aspect of the business I taught myself too. Everything was done through trial and error; how much time, effort and resources I invested before I got my break with Speedhunters," Larry shared.

Spending a lot of time in the air and in airports, Larry is usually only home on Monday before he is off again on Wednesday as motorsport events are typically held over the weekends.

Despite the physical, gruelling challenges of lugging around heavy camera gear and not being able to seeing much of his family and friends, Larry will not have it any other way.

"It makes me feel alive. It's everything that I've always wanted to do. Shooting motorsports is my calling. When I'm standing trackside and it's pouring rain and I'm 100 percent soaked, there are cars just flying by. That's when I'm completely calm, happy and content."

"I know I just have to do one thing — produce amazing imagery for the readers. I want to give them that slice of experience of the event. There is pain from walking around the track carrying all my equipment, barely any sleep and all that travelling, but all those problems melt away instantly once I look at the viewfinder and start shooting."

Passionate about cars and motorsports, Cheryl Tay is a familiar face in prominent local, regional as well as international automotive titles. More of her at www.cheryl-tay.com.

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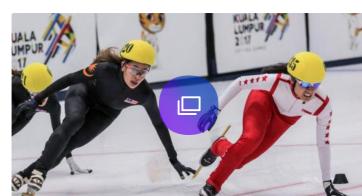


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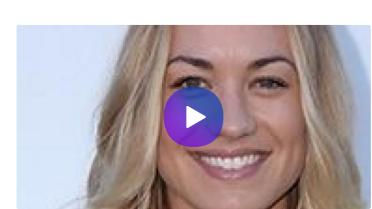


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