

Feature Photo...

Royal Portrait

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Camera: Canon EOS 1n
Lens: Canon 300/4L USM
Flash: None used
Support: See text
Film: Kodak E100VS
Exposure: 1/10 at f/16
Filter(s): None used

The large male American Bullfrog was comfortably perched among the lily pads, sunning himself under the late summer sky. Seemingly oblivious to my presence, he remained motionless upon my approach. King of his domain, his unerring confidence made it clear that no human was going to make him retreat and give up his throne in the sun.

I was the one who beat a hasty retreat, back to my car to retrieve my camera equipment. Upon opening the trunk, I grabbed my EOS 1n from out of the bag and mounted my 300mm telephoto and a 25mm extension tube. Not wanting to miss the opportunity to photograph this stately amphibian, I reached for my Bogen 3221 tripod that normally ends up in the deep recesses of the trunk after a drive through the stop-and-go Long Island traffic. Search as I may, it was not to be found. A sick feeling began to come over me as I realized that I had forgotten to put it in the trunk that morning.

Anger turned to panic and panic turned into depression. How was I going to do this without my trusty Bogen tripod? As a last ditch resort, I reluctantly reached for the really cheap tripod (RCT) I keep in the trunk, the one I reserve for holding a speedlight or reflector panel. A \$29 special I bought at one of those mass-merchandising centers, it had served well for light-duty purposes but I had never attempted placing a heavy camera and lens on it. I wondered if the skimpy plastic mounting plate would give way and cause my valued equipment to plunge into the pond under the dauntless frog. With a quick roll of the "mental dice," the flimsy plate was secured to the collar of my 300/4L and I was on my way back to the pond.

The big bullfrog's domain is actually a man-made pond on the grounds of a manufacturing facility. A quiet setting for employees to enjoy during their breaks, a concrete apron surrounds the pond on two sides. I slowly made my approach and saw that His Highness was still in the same spot and all of his subjects were maintaining a respectful distance. As I crept up to the apron, I opened the legs of the RCT and positioned my equipment.

It became readily apparent that using this tripod was going to be, at best, just marginally better than using no tripod at all. As I lifted my hands away from the camera, it oscillated for several seconds on the skinny plastic center post. While the bullfrog remained oblivious, I began to focus on what technique I should employ to achieve the sharpest possible image. Since the bullfrog was at the minimum focusing distance of the lens/tube combo, I knew I would have to stop down considerably to get the desired depth of field. Using the DOF preview button, I ascertained that f/16 would be ideal, but shutter speed had dropped to one-tenth of a second. Not wanting to push my luck with His Majesty's patience any further, I activated custom function 12 on my 1n and engaged mirror lock-up. I also set the self-timer to fire the shutter after a 10-second delay. With the camera in aperture priority mode, I set the exposure to f/8, pressed the shutter button and slowly removed my hands from the camera. As the camera settled down and eventually became motionless on the RCT, the shutter fired and the motor drive advanced the film, causing the camera to once

again begin its dance. I took the next series of shots at f/11 and the final series at f/16.

A few days later, I spilled the slides onto the light table with great anticipation. A smile came across my face as I realized intuition and familiarity with my equipment had saved the day. Despite the camera gyrations, the bullfrog was rendered tack sharp, even at f/16 with the shutter open for a tenth of a second.

The RCT remains a permanent resident of the dark recesses of the trunk, flimsy insurance against the scourge of brain-fade. While its deployment will never inspire confidence, this portrait is proof that a really cheap tripod can better than no tripod at all, even in the presence of Royalty.

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