Story behind the still

Photographer: John Hicks
Websites: www.johnhicks.co.uk, www.avisuali.com
Location: Times Square, New York City
Client: Personal work
Shot details: Canon EOS 5D with 16-35mm lens at 25mm and f4.5, 1/15sec, ISO 100

This shot was taken as part of a personal series of urban street/sports portraits in and around New York. Bike couriers are fantastic subjects as they often have a very individual sense of street style and a crazy love of speed and danger.

I'd stopped Carlos at the traffic lights one day and arranged to meet later that night in Times Square. I love neon and the light trails it creates when shot on slow shutter speeds and I knew there was a ton of artificial light there that I could use to my advantage.
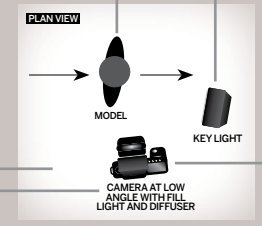
I wanted to avoid the cliché shots and to separate Carlos from the background, so I decided to use techniques of panning combined with flash and blur to create the feeling of movement.

As with all my work, I wanted to achieve this motion in camera without digital manipulation. There was no time to get a permit but my camera gear was simple – just a body, wide-angle zoom lens, two small flashguns and pocket wizards to trigger them. I shot without a tripod and only had 30 minutes to nail the shot. Although I also photographed Carlos cycling across the frame I preferred the low angle and the 'decisive moment' of this frame.

LIGHTING

People don't realise how little added flash light is needed to 'freeze' motion in twilight/nightlit shots while also retaining the subtlety of the ambient background by shooting on slow shutter speeds.

5 I pre-focused Carlos in the middle of the frame and kept the focus on manual at all times

4 Both flashes set on rear curtain sync and camera panned from left to right to create motion blur

3 I chose a shutter speed of 1/15sec because I knew this would give great background blur and I was able to keep constant on this because the ambient light wasn't falling

1 For the key light my assistant handheld a Canon 580EX flashgun (set in manual mode at 1/30) above head height approx 4 metres from Carlos who moved into the direction of this light

2 Fill light is a Canon 580EX in manual mode at 1/128, set on camera as bounced flash and softened with a Gary Fong diffuser

PLAN VIEW
MODEL
KEY LIGHT
CAMERA AT LOW ANGLE WITH FILL LIGHT AND DIFFUSER

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