

By royal appointment

HENRY DALLAL TALKS TO ANGELA AUGUST ABOUT FULFILLING HIS SIX-YEAR PROJECT



Left Early morning rehearsal for the State Opening of Parliament.
EOS 1N and EF 28-70mm f2.8L lens.

Unusually for a photographer, Henry Dallal is wearing a suit and tie. It's fortunate that he is comfortable in such formal attire since his most recent projects have demanded both sartorial elegance and the strictest etiquette.

Last year, Henry was bestowed the honour of photographing Her Majesty The Queen for the front cover of *All the Queen's Horses*, a commemorative book to celebrate her Jubilee. The pinnacle of Henry's photographic career was not the easiest of shoots – a ten-minute window with his royal subject surrounded by three unpredictable equines. The harsh spring sunlight made conditions far from perfect, but to be able to work within the prevailing conditions, however unfavourable, and still be able to produce work of exemplary standard is the sign of a true professional.

"It was a real honour for me," says Henry. "I could not have photographed a person of greater dignity, one whom I respect so much. It was a relaxed atmosphere in a natural setting."

Originally Persian, Henry spent sixteen years in Colorado before settling in London in 1994. He soon became entranced by the pomp and pageantry that is uniquely British. Living just around the corner from the home of the Household Cavalry has enabled Henry to build a unique photographic library of the famous soldiers and their steeds. His collection amounts to over 20,000 images, exhaustively covering every aspect of a trooper's life, both on parade and behind the scenes.

But an access-all-areas pass to this jewel of British establishment is not granted overnight. Henry has had to build up the trust and support of figures in high office in order to duck under the red tape of precedence and protocol to get to the heart of his subject. His library is the result of six years' hard work.

"Without this kind of access and getting to know my subject so intimately, I would not have been able to take these pictures," admits Henry. "But I feel I have earned it. >

> I have been driven by the experience and am very grateful to have been allowed to the places that I have been. The pictures I took six years ago are not as good, purely because I can get much closer now. But you have to develop trust. Most importantly, you have to respect their space.

“My interest in life has always been to travel around the world and experience different nomadic tribes and cultures in remote areas, such as with the mountain Laps of Norway, the Turkaman and Shasavan tribes in Iran, the Apaches and Ute Mountain Utes in North America... but I never thought that you’d have a similar tribe right here in the heart of London.”

And Henry’s attitude to the Household Cavalry was just the same as if he had been photographing any other tribe: firstly develop in-depth knowledge of your subject, then approach the powers that be with due respect. In time you will be trusted enough to be granted the access you so desperately need.

Henry has been to every parade and performance that is part of British tradition, from Changing of the Guards to State Opening of Parliament, but he has also documented the sweat and grind that goes on behind the scenes.

“Part of my success with the Household Cavalry photographs has been because I’ve taken a wholehearted interest. I’ve absorbed the culture somewhat, which has helped me take incredible pictures – not just at certain events, but all the time. Part of the reason, too, is that I love horses. I was able to develop the eye for the subject and the appreciation for it.

“I aim to portray the spirit behind the colourful world of the Household Cavalry,” says Henry. “A kaleidoscope of colour and movement representing the hard work, pride and harmonious relationship between horse and soldier.

“When people in high places started telling me it was good that I was documenting the Household Cavalry, it was all the encouragement I needed to continue.”

But without a press card, access has sometimes been a battle and Henry has relied on cunning tactics rather than the royal rota (where newspaper photographers are guaranteed access on a fair basis) to secure a place in the thick of the action. The day of the Jubilee parade to St. Paul’s Cathedral in London is a case in point.

“I couldn’t get access because I’m not press,” explains Henry. “The press officer didn’t want to deal with me – they have certain allocated spots and the whole world wants to be there. So I went on my bike two days before and I looked at where the press were going to be, and I decided where I wanted to be. I wanted the entourage to be facing me and I wanted to be far enough away from St. Paul’s to be able to include it in the picture.”

Henry spied the perfect vantage point – a second floor office. He tracked down the owner in Chicago who, despite the fact that he had turned down desperate pleas from both press and television, allowed Henry to use the office. He is justifiably proud of his coup.

“I had the whole floor to myself and was

AS THE SUN RISES AT ABOUT 7.15AM, SUDDENLY THE MIST BECOMES ORANGE

able to take a series of unique pictures.”

Henry gets around by bike with his camera gear in a pack on his back. At a parade, pedal power is vital in transporting him quickly from one location to another, but efficient though it is, it poses problems of its own. Leaving his bicycle unattended at any point would be regarded as a security threat and Henry has to work out how to deal with this critical issue.

“During parades, I cycle into Westminster Palace, Horse Guards, Wellington Barracks, Hyde Park Barracks – wherever the troops and horses go. It gives me ultimate flexibility, but I try to let the police know beforehand so they know not to stop me.”

Like many successful photographers, Henry has received no formal training. At the age of ten he was given a camera by his father and he has never looked back.

His modest amount of equipment has not prevented him from obtaining the images he wants, though he concedes that his life would be easier with an image stabilising lens. Whether it is an abstract close-up or a blurred impressionistic image with patches of fleeting colour, he admits to being less than technical, but it’s not something that particularly concerns him. There is a time and a place for precision and careful consideration – when you’re being hounded by 300 horses is probably not one of them.

“Don’t ask me what shutter speeds I use. I usually have no idea! I’m sure if I were more technical I would probably do a lot better, but it’s an art and I don’t want to become scientific about it.”

For Henry, time and place is more important than technicalities, and he works hard at getting these right. There can be very few people who, with one strategic phone call, can gather a posse of soldiers to a specific spot in Hyde Park at first light.

“I know for a fact that in October almost every year at around the full moon, if it has been a clear night, in the morning the air is very cold and crisp. The ground is still warm and therefore you get a mist rising. I also know that there is one area in the Park in particular that has a bit of a dip, and therefore the mist cover is deeper. I called the big boss at the Household Cavalry and told him that one day soon, I didn’t know exactly when, I wanted to take some pictures. I asked him if it would be possible to get some horses down there with only 15 minutes’ notice.”

A few days later when he knew the light was right, Henry cycled to the barracks to summon some troops.

“As the sun rises at about 7.15am, suddenly the mist becomes orange. It only lasts a few minutes but I managed to shoot about two rolls. I anticipated that there was going to be a morning like this, but it was a bit of luck too.”

A certain amount of luck, but a lot more planning and pleading. It is a clear example of how years spent building a good relationship with staff in the Household Cavalry has enabled Henry to get the picture he knew was there.

A number of Henry’s most evocative pictures are like this – early morning images taken through the mist or against the rising sun – tricky shots which would normally call for exposure bracketing. >

Top Troops exercising their horses at first light in Hyde Park. EOS 1N and EF 70-200mm f2.8 L lens.

Below left Early morning rehearsal for the State Opening of Parliament. EOS 1N and EF 70-200mm f2.8 L lens.

Below right Reflection of the trumpet horse. EOS 1N and EF 70-200mm f2.8 L lens.



> But invariably Henry is not afforded this luxury – one shot and the action has moved on, and not even with his wheels can Henry keep pace.

“I generally don’t bracket the shots, but I will play with the exposure if I have time. I’m really more involved in the adventure which starts as soon as I get my camera out. It’s a real adrenaline rush. I’m out on my bicycle. I’m here, I’m there. I’m constantly wondering where can I get the best shot. There’s a lot to think about.”

But some pictures remain tantalisingly unattainable. Henry has spent years doggedly trying to perfect a picture of the Household Cavalry crossing the Serpentine during an early morning rehearsal before the State Opening of Parliament. It is a case where the light and location have never come together perfectly.

“That October light was wonderful. It happened to be clear and it happened to be that type of morning where you have the mist. But I don’t like the picture because I

would rather have been on the other side of the bridge and had them riding towards me instead of going away. I have tried to perfect it. The following year the State Opening was in November and at that time of the morning it was too dark. The following year it was in December – completely dark. The following year it was raining, the year before last it was in June – forget the June light. So after five years I’ve finished trying. With 20,000 pictures of the Household Cavalry, the chapter’s closed.

Below The charge at the Horse Guards’ Parade. EOS 1N and EF 70-200mm f2.8 L lens

I say closed...but there are always more pictures to take.”

Henry’s hard work photographing the Household Cavalry has culminated in a self-published book, which he also wrote. It has been a labour of love and to have already sold 6,000 copies is testament to how well it has been received. Despite the intensive workload and immovable deadlines, Henry is already keen to utilise his new-found publishing knowledge by working on further books.

“I wanted every trooper, no matter what rank, to be proud of what they do, and I think I have accomplished that. Very little of publishing a book like this is about taking the pictures. You spend hours editing, preparing and writing. Then you have to find a designer and a printer and get the right deal. The photography is the easiest part.”

Henry has also been captivated by the sounds that surround him when he is out with his camera, so he also takes with him

a compact CD recorder wherever he goes. Thinking in both sound and vision he has put together a number of slide shows using simple projectors and carefully editing his pictures to the recorded sounds and emotive music.

“It’s nothing unique. It’s old-fashioned photography – non-computerised, non-digital, photography. For the Household Cavalry slide show over the course of 45 minutes you see 464 pictures in a sequence of beautiful images. The experience >



Clockwise from top right Full moon in Sienna Square, Italy. EOS 1N and EF 70-200mm f2.8 L lens.
 Shandur Pass in the Hindu Kush Mountains, Pakistan. EOS 1N and EF 28-70mm f2.8 L lens.

Henry Dallal.
 Venice Dawn. EOS 1N and EF 28-70mm f2.8 L lens.
 Lord Mayor's Parade. EOS 1N and EF 28-70mm f2.8 L lens.

> of watching a photograph is greatly enhanced when it has been edited in correct sequence, with the added sounds and echoes of 300 horses and the clanging of troopers' swords and brass as they trot through a cobblestone archway."

Henry combines his photography with his other passions of horse riding and mountaineering. His taste for adventure has led to journeys to countries as varied as Africa, Thailand, Pakistan, India, Utah, Jordan and Alaska. His cameras have consistently performed superbly, even at low temperatures.

"I climb very high and my cameras have always worked, but I don't carry my heavy lens and EOS 1N above a certain altitude because of the weight."

Henry has just returned from a three-week trip on horseback, tracing the route taken by General Napier on an ancient British campaign trail through Abyssinia. His only map was dated 1869! He is well-practised with the art of photographing from horseback. Last year he rode through the Hindu Kush in Pakistan and he is quick to point out that a good horse which will stop, turn and wait is critical to the success of his pictures.

"I'm not a guy who plans life," says Henry, "but I have learnt that if you want fantastic pictures, then that has to be your priority. I'm always thinking what would make a good picture and where I need to be to get it." •

Kit bag

- Two EOS 1N bodies
- EF 17-35mm f2.8L USM
- EF 28-70mm f2.8L USM
- EF 70-200 f2.8L USM
- Extender EF 2x

Film

- Kodak or Fuji ISO 100 or 200
- Scala black-and-white

This article is taken from the March 2003 issue of EOS magazine. EOS magazine is the camera magazine for anyone with a Canon EOS camera, from first time buyers to experienced users.

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