

# AT THE

# CARNIVAL...

## It's Not Just Cotton Candy and Hot Dogs!

by Jack and Sue Drafa

**L**ights—camera—action can signify more than the beginning of a movie scene; it could refer to the start of a creative photo expedition into the world of carnivals. Colorful lights, high-speed rides, and a camera in capable hands are the basic ingredients necessary to enter into this exciting world of color photography.

Almost any camera from 35mm to 4×5 can be used for this type of photography, although the smaller formats allow you the freedom to move quickly around the carnival grounds. The newer TTL/OTF-metering cameras, with their sophisticated, built-in pattern meters, make it easier to obtain perfect exposures. Wide-angle and zoom lenses allow the photographer to work in tight spaces, since the rides are usually close together and have long lines of people waiting their turns.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

A tripod and a cable release will be necessary for obtaining long time exposures of the various rides. A medium-speed (ISO 100) slide or color-negative daylight-balanced film will ensure aperture and shutter-speed versatility when attempting different exposure combinations. High-speed films restrict the photographer to fast shutter speeds, and consequently, tend to eliminate the creative edge.

People of all ages seem to enjoy carnivals, so you will undoubtedly find them crowded. You should therefore minimize your photo equipment in order to avoid damage or theft. We recommend wearing a photo vest, rather than carrying a camera bag, and we've also found that one camera body with a single zoom lens ranging from wide-angle to normal is adequate. Be sure to

bring along a small yet sturdy tripod.

### WHAT TO DO

The best shooting times are from about one hour before sunset to about two hours after sunset. After arriving at the carnival, make a quick tour of the rides to determine the best shooting locations while there is still daylight. Look for rides that have lots of colored lights and move in a variety of directions. At sunset, mount your camera on your tripod in position at the best ride. Set your camera to its automatic exposure mode, and the camera's meter to average or pattern metering. Spot metering will give erroneous readings, due to the bright lights and overabundance of dark areas. Make exposures with the lens wide open, stopped halfway down, and stopped all the way down. Each of these settings will necessitate longer and longer exposure times, each creating different effects.

For shutter speeds up to one second, you don't need to use the cable release. Instead, press down gently on the top of the camera to stabilize it while depressing the shutter release to make the exposure. The use of a cable release at such shutter speeds will not compensate for mirror vibrations that take up to one second to settle down. If you do want to use the cable release, make sure that you apply pressure to the top of the camera at the time of exposure.

If exposure times are longer than one second, a different type of time exposure is made. Calculate the exposure for manual mode on your camera, making sure to employ a shutter-speed/aperture combination that allows for long exposures. Place a black card in front of the camera lens, depress the cable release, and wait 3–5

seconds for the camera to settle down. Remove the card and count off the exposure time using the 1001-1002 method. Be careful not to bump the camera with the black card. After making exposures at a variety of times, move to the next ride and repeat the sequence until you've photographed all the rides.

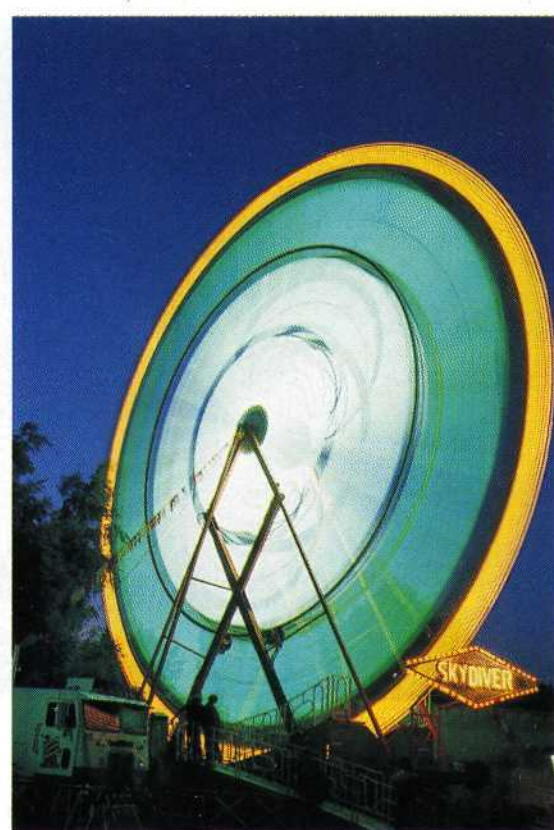
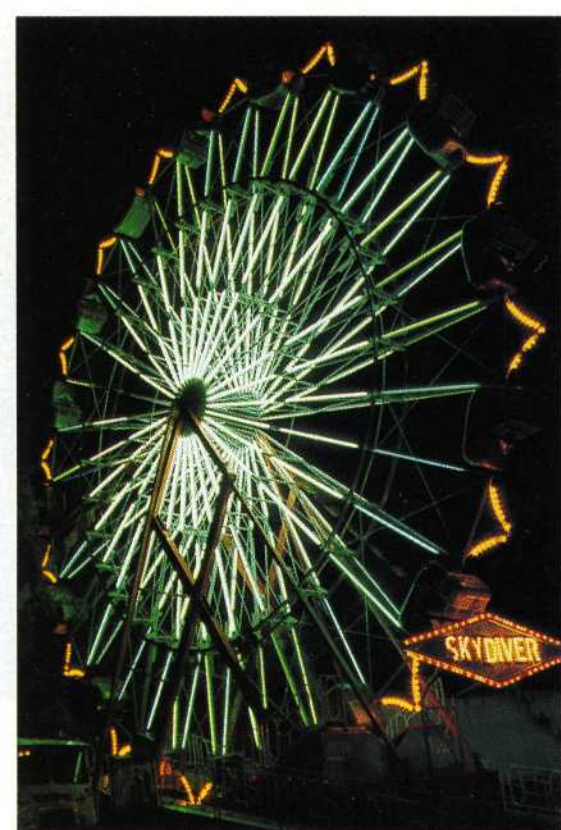
Film reciprocity failure generally occurs when exposures exceed ten seconds, and results in a shift in color balance. The color-balance shift is not critical when shooting carnival lights due to the wide array of colors present. But reciprocity does have an effect on exposure. Generally, you need to bracket your exposures to the overexposure side from one to two stops.

After photographing several rides, return to the first ride and repeat the process. By this time the sky will have become much darker, creating a totally new effect for each ride. Three full cycles of photographing all the rides will give you a variety of pictures that will cover most of the basic effects. The best shots come from exposures that last longer than it takes for the ride to make one full revolution. Partial streaked circles will appear if you employ shorter exposure times.

### THINGS TO TRY

If you have a zoom lens, you can also add a creative touch to your photos. In combination with a longer exposure, the zoom lens can be zoomed in and out several times to achieve an explosion effect. With cameras that can make multiple exposures, you can get more of a stroboscopic effect by rapidly firing the shutter as the ride turns. The more exposures you make, the smoother the blur.

With some of the newer cameras



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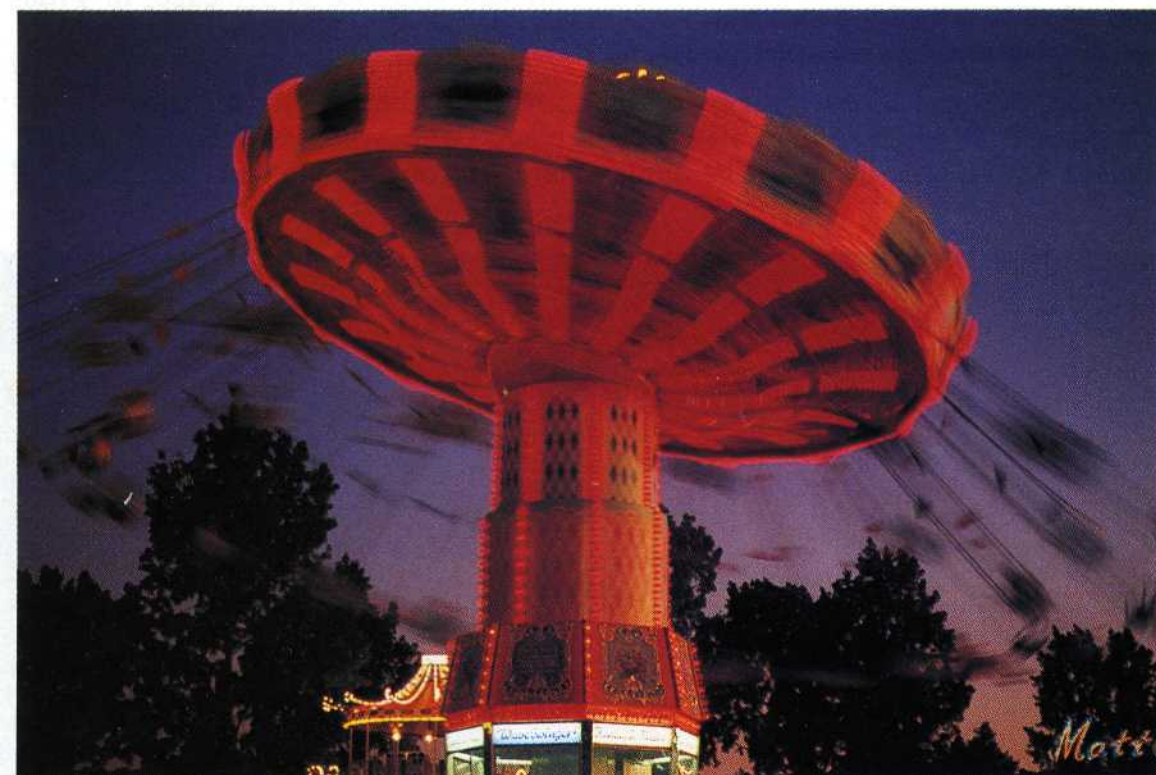
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1.-3. This series of images illustrates the different effects you can achieve simply by varying the shutter speed. The first shot was exposed for  $\frac{1}{30}$  second, the second for  $\frac{1}{8}$ , and the third for 15 seconds. The longer the exposure, the more blur there will be.

4. A  $\frac{1}{15}$ -second exposure tends to be long enough to get a nice blur effect, but short enough to retain some of the finer details.

5. This 10-second exposure was long enough for the ride to make several revolutions, thus producing a more abstract view of the subject.



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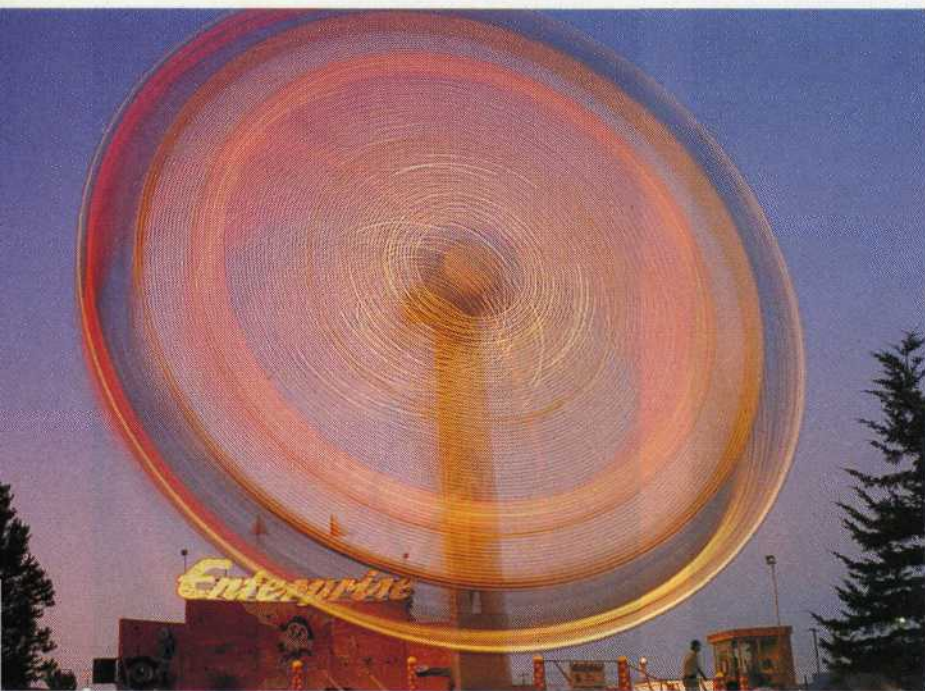


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with TTL flash metering, you can use long-exposure flash-fill for close-ups of some of the rides. Set up the camera normally, but make sure the camera is set to balance the flash and carnival scene with a long exposure. This works very well with the Nikon N8008S and the SB-24 flash system. The SB-24 has a "rear function" that forces the camera to electronically balance fill-flash with exposures up to 30 seconds. If you are using color-slide film, bracketing will be necessary. Color-negative films have more exposure latitude.

Special filters such as cross-screen, starlight, ray-burst, and repeating filters can all add colorful effects to carnival photography. With most of these filters you may want to wait until the ride stops and make a single exposure. Using the multiple-exposure device, you can then add a blurred exposure when the ride begins to move.

One unusual effect we discovered was with the split neutral-density filter. If you turn the filter upside down and block the bottom of the exposure with the neutral-density portion, and photograph a ride that moves in a horizontal



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1. This shot was exposed for 15 seconds at sunset.

2. To create this flying-saucer effect, a split neutral-density filter was placed over the lens, with the neutral-density portion at the bottom of the frame. The

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effect works best with rides that maintain a horizontal rotation.

3. Look for viewpoints that contain a variety of colorful lights, as well as rides that move in different directions.

rotation, you can create your own flying saucers. If you take these newly recorded UFOs, and, using a slide dupli-

cator, double-expose them with a night shot of your local city, you can have the only shot in town of the UFO that hit Los Angeles, or Chicago, or Pittsburgh, or even Hillsboro, Oregon!

So, when the carnival comes to town, let the kid in you come out to play. Grab your camera and tripod, and let your imagination run wild! ■

ALL PHOTOS BY AUTHORS

