

9 April 2009

Changing times for sailing photographers

Since the onset of digital photography in the late 90's, the number of 'newcomer' yacht racing photographers has increased dramatically, causing a major shift in the way images are distributed and paid for by the media and other clients. The distribution of copyright free pictures also affects the sustainability of their business model, and puts their profession at risk. We ask veteran yachting photographers Thierry Martinez (FRA), Gilles Martin-Raget (FRA), Kos (UK) and Carlo Borlenghi (ITA) how the market has changed and how they are responding to the increasingly cluttered marketplace.

WYRF: What are some of the key issues yacht racing photographers are facing at the moment?

Gilles Martin-Raget: "Digital imagery and the development of internet have changed everything in photography. There are more images instantly available from more sources. The globalization of the economy has also set a crucial distortion between developed countries and newcomers who can instantly offer the same service for a lower price. On top of this, professionals now even "compete" with people who can shoot with their mobile phone and transmit to agencies specialized in distributing M. anybody's pictures at a ridiculous rate. So basically, the press has become a display and doesn't deliver much money; pictures published on the web are free; books publishers sell fewer quantities. The only sector that still brings some value to the photographers is advertisement, through sponsorship or classic advertisement. The generalization of copyright free pictures has also become a real problem. Now nearly every press release is sent with a free picture attached. As a consequence, some magazines base their accounts on the fact they will never pay pictures. This is not normal."





WORLD YACHT RACING FORUM 2009

Thierry Martinez: The communications budgets are going down, so sponsorship and advertisement are also going down. There are therefore less teams and projects, and less advertisement in the press. As a consequence, media try to get copyright free photos. It has become impossible for photographers to work as freelancers, because the fact of publishing photos in the press does not cover the big costs we have before we have even started taking the photos: material, travel, hotels, helicopters... We will make a profit only if we earn more than the addition of those costs.

Kos: "No photographer should ever give away copyright when it is automatically theirs to own. It is unnecessary and devalues the work. There is no harm allowing free editorial use of a limited number of images if the client requires it, but never "copyright free". If photographers do this anyone can exploit their work in any way they want – there is no longer any commercial interest or control by the photographer. If the client wants unrestricted use, which is normally all they actually need, then an All Uses License can be granted for a defined period, charged at a higher rate, after which it can be re-issued for a further fee, if necessary. This is entirely different (and more profitable) to transferring copyright. When images "Free for Editorial Use" are sent out it tends to be only the poorest magazines that take advantage of "PR pictures". The top magazines that pay the best print the best pictures regardless of whether or not they are free. The most unfortunate issue in our profession is that many photographers (and some agencies that represent them) do not know how to value correctly what is skilled and specialist work. In an effort to gain market share there is a naïve belief that you have to continually lower your price but this is terribly misguided. All it achieves is devaluing the market for everyone, it makes it less worthwhile investing in taking good pictures, so everyone loses - there are no gains, even for the clients in the long term.

Carlo Borlenghi: "Our business is going well when the events are going well... So from time to time. During the good times, even bad photographers find work. I think that the biggest problems we face are that many event organisers are more interested by numbers rather than quality, and also that non-real photographers break the market. Some events distribute accreditations to everybody, because they want to show good statistics to their sponsors. Only the Olympic Games have a proper accreditation system, the other events accept everyone. Another



Carlo Borlenghi / (c) Thierry Martinez



**WORLD YACHT
RACING FORUM**
2009

problem is that the media are in a tough situation; they have no more money. Ten years ago, we lived thanks to the media. This is no more possible today, and there is a real risk for the freedom of press. Only sponsors and events have budgets for photographers. Finally, a lot of people want to become photographers. They stop their career as a dentist, take some photos and give them away to get a name. This is killing the market.

WYRF: Is there space for newcomers in the business? How should they go about starting in the industry?

Gilles Martin-Raget: “Yes. There is a normal turnover with photographers who stop their career. And also, Internet allows newcomers to make some noise about them in a way that was not possible when only magazines were publishing photos. Many top events are not covered by sailing photographers, because they don't have time or make better money elsewhere. As for the Internet, it wants more and more pictures everyday. So there is room for newcomers, as long as they are prepared to work 12 hours a day, with no week-ends, six months in a row. And there are always customers in advertising or event organization who have smaller budget, so go and take it !...

Thierry Martinez: I have no idea how a newcomer in sailing photography can make a decent living. The equipment is very costly, and the publications don't have money. As a result, many newcomers cut their prices; they often don't survive more than 2 years, but their actions will have taken the market price down, pushing the professionals in a dead zone. The only way for a photographer to survive is to produce photos for a team, sponsor or event which is then distributing them in the press for free. The risk is to have too many © free images and see the quality go down. What is nowadays considered a good photo is not a quality image, but a cheap or free image.

Kos: “There is always space for newcomers in any industry. It's progress and evolution. But they need to realise that no one will ever value your work more than you value it yourself – so understanding the commercial value of what you sell is fundamental. The focus on business is as important as the photography (unfortunately!).”



Kos / (c) Kos/Kos Picture Source



WORLD YACHT RACING FORUM 2009

Carlo Borlenghi: “It is difficult for new people to make a living out of this job, but there are possibilities, for example by becoming the assistant of a photographer. I currently have three assistants and it is a great opportunity for them. They can cover important events, and get experience. I have also trained six or seven people in the past; most of them are still active photographers, and good ones.”

WYRF: How can the current issues be resolved or improved?

Gilles Martin-Raget: “I don't think the situation of the written press or book publishers will improve. I think advertising will still be there, but people who are running big budgets will never give it to rookies because they want to be reassured with the result of their investment. I hope the internet situation must improve, we must work on it. Today, it's the main consumer for images, and there is no budget to pay the images. It's a silly situation, which is not helping the guys who want to start because it is the most accessible market. I also think that people (sponsors, event organizers) who distribute heavily branded copyright free images should pay more attention to the pictures they distribute. There should be some restrictions about the use that can be done; they should for example not be used for covers and the size should be restricted. It is not normal that some magazines or news websites never pay an image. It is possible today, but it shouldn't be tomorrow.”

Thierry Martinez: “One option would be to set rules, for example saying that a copyright free picture can not be used on more than half a page. Sponsors should also not be allowed to buy cover page in exchange for an advertisement inside the magazine. But I know it's only a dream, because the sponsor's goal is usually to get the maximum exposure. It makes me wonder who will manage to become a photographer in the next decade if there is no way for a newcomer to start in that job?”



Kos: “Concentrate on quality not quantity. Don't work with people or agencies that flog images around the industry for supermarket prices – they are ultimately killing themselves and will kill you too. Always retain your copyright (unless you are in full time employment in which case it legally belongs to your employer).”



**WORLD YACHT
RACING FORUM**
2009

Carlo Borlenghi: “There should be rules, but it is not the case. For example, if you have an assignment from a sponsor, you will include all the rights of use in the contract. Often Teams, official suppliers related with the sponsor/event believe they have the right to use the pictures for everything, including advertising when in reality they can use them only for press release and editorial. But we all live in different countries, the laws are different everywhere and I can’t think of a global solution. For me, the only thing to do is to work with honest clients and work in a sustainable way.”

* * * * *