

Aleš Norský: Martin Trenkler was the first Slovakian to enter the inside world of Formula 1 championship, and over the past two decades worked with and for some of the biggest names in the sport. I had an opportunity to have this e-mail chat with him, just prior to the (re)start of the 2020 season.

A.N. If I understand this correctly, you've entered the world of Formula 1 in 2000 via Slovak publications F1 Sport and GRAND, and already in 2003 you were the lead photographer for the monthly F1 Magazine that was supported by Formula One Management, then led by Bernie Ecclestone. That sounds almost unbelievable.

M.T. Yes, that is exactly how it happened. Before that I did design work for then the largest F1 web-site in the world: DailyF1 (later sold and disappeared completely). Paradoxically, via this international detour, I have met another Slovakian Peter Fritz, who already had published a book about Formula 1. Together, we founded the F1 Sport magazine, which later became GRAND. I gained my first F1 accreditation to the 2002 Austrian Grand Prix, and that was the start of my freelance career. Burning desire and hard work landed me the opportunity at the F1 Magazine, and cooperation with FOM continued even after the magazine folded. As I said, hard work, passion and sacrifices. That's what it takes to succeed in any walk of life.



Schlegelmilch and Cahier are not just any names, of course. If we step back a generation, Bernard Cahier is to motorsport photography what Denis Jenkinson means for motorsport journalism. How did you manage to get under their patronage so early in your career?

This goes way back to my high school years, when I was working on web-pages for Honda's return to F1, and needed some historic photo documentation. Unfortunately, the project was scrapped after the sudden death of chief designer Harvey Postlethwaite, nonetheless, I managed to obtain contacts for these two photographers. We kept in touch and when I finally reached Formula 1, they became my mentors. Just to clarify, besides Rainer Schlegelmilch it was Paul-Henri Cahier, whose father Bernard really was the first to recognize art in Formula 1 photography. It was his work that inspired me the most. Anyway, apparently, they saw my enthusiasm and some talent as well, but we also clicked as people and that was essential. Over the next several years, I've spent lots of time with Schlegelmilch and that taught me everything I needed to know about photography. My style has developed into basically a mix of these two legends.

You worked for them for the next ten years, are you still in contact?

Of course, we still maintain close contact, although we cannot meet in person much often these days. Rainer has retired and Paul-Henri concentrates on maintaining the archive and does not travel to races so often, anymore. Remember, they both were working since the 1960s.

Did Paul-Henri Cahier in private ever say anything unprintable about his incident with Kimi Räikkönen at Silverstone 2008?

I was standing right next to him during that 'incident' and it was hard to understand what exactly had happened and why. Incidentally, we were also sharing a room, so there was plenty of time to talk about it. Kimi thought that Cahier stepped on his gear and, in the pre-race tension, pushed him hard enough for Cahier to lose his balance and fall to the ground. But there never were any ill feelings towards Kimi, mostly we just laughed about it.

For a while, you also were personal photographer for Mark Webber, what does such work entail on daily basis?

We became friends when he visited Slovakia during his first year in F1 with Minardi. His people made me an offer to send them all his pictures from every race, and that arrangement actually lasted for several years.

Over those past 20 years, you passed through several agencies and worked in F1 for a number of organizations, from the ones noted above through Honda to Red Bull. Your resume includes photography at Le Mans, WRC, WTCC and other fields beyond motorsport. How demanding a lifestyle this brings?

It is a lifestyle that I have chosen and that suits me. I have always enjoyed it and still enjoy it. It is physical as well as mental workout, but above all creative work that gives me satisfaction. Lots of travel, lots of running around, it is demanding and rewarding at the same time, with each good picture and every satisfied customer. I would not trade it for anything.

In a recent interview, your colleague Vladimír Rys mentioned that he feels lucky to be of a generation that has learned photography still with classic camera and film, but at the same time were young enough to fully embrace and smoothly transition into the digital age. Do you agree with that assessment?

I think that the analog era had its specific charm and it certainly needed different approach. But at the same time, it carries a lot of nostalgia. In my opinion, even the older generation of photographers did not have much trouble to switch to digital. A lot has changed and today, the speed is crucially important. Thanks to digital technology, we are able to experiment a lot more and be more creative. Vladimír himself provides good example of this.

Since we are talking about colleagues. Is there any rivalry among the on-track photographers? In the end, you are all after basically the same thing and just want to get a better shot of it.

I would not call it rivalry, but certainly everybody fights for his client. It is all moving in the direction of large agencies that are able to provide greater numbers, which a lonely freelancer cannot match. They can also offer more competitive pricing. But nobody wants to intentionally ruin someone else's shot, there is mutual respect. When it comes to tight quarters, such as parc fermé after the race, everybody tries to get the best spot, but that is natural. One learns to be flexible and alert for quick action.

After all these years you must have some good friends within F1.

For sure. When I attended races more often, it was like second family. You share many experiences, good and bad. I still have few very good friends with whom we spend time outside of racing. People like that make it a pleasure to attend a Grand Prix.

Your best and worst Formula 1 experience?

It's hard to put it that way. The most memorable for me was probably the 2008 Brazilian GP where Hamilton won his first title literally at the last turn. The weather, the atmosphere and the entire situation...one really cannot put it into words. I will never forget that day. Worst experience, I don't think I have any. At every race you get angry and frustrated about something, people walking into your intended shot, or someone stopping you from entering an area that looks promising but is restricted. There always are some obstructions that can sour your mood.



How is life of a professional photographer during the pandemic?

I try to make the best out of it. All of the sudden I have a lot of time on my hands and I use it to do things that I like. Sports, hiking, and such. There is very little work, but there is nothing I can do about it, so why waste time being upset? Everything shall pass eventually. In the past, I went through some barren periods, so this is not completely new to me.

We are still not sure how exactly this season will unfold, but one thing is certain. Media accreditations will be severely restricted. Do you expect to visit any of the Grands Prix this year?

The first three races are practically closed to media and it is unfortunate that they are those closest to me, in Austria and Hungary. They are only allowing in few invited people, about 16, mostly from large agencies and a couple of leading, predominantly British, photographers. I hope to go at least to Monza, but today it is still hard to say whether they will let us in or not. Without fans and with restricted rules, it will be challenging to enjoy, I think. Hopefully, we can be back next year. Everybody is waiting for a vaccine. That would solve it.

Here I usually ask my standard question Prost or Senna. But I am not sure how relevant it is for your generation. Perhaps Hamilton or Alonso...although it is not the same at all?

I prefer to think that all eras had their own legendary races and rivalries... Senna definitely had an unbelievable aura about him, and those cars were awesome. I enjoyed other duels that I watched as a kid: Schumacher vs Hill, Villeneuve vs Häkkinen and certainly Alonso vs Schumacher. It had witnessed that one first hand and have some amazing memories. Today I admire Hamilton the most, I have been watching him from early on and it was clear that we were seeing an exceptional talent. I don't really like this generation of cars, but I admire all the talented drivers we have now.

And did I forget to ask anything?

?

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF WWW.TRENKLER.PHOTOS

Aleš Norský: Martin Trenkler byl prvním Slovákem, který pronikl do vnitřního světa šampionátu Formule 1 a během posledních dvou desetiletí pracoval s a pro jedny z největších jmen tohoto sportu. Těsně před (znovu)zahájením sezony 2020 jsem měl příležitost s ním provést tento e-mailový rozhovor.

A.N. Pokud tomu dobře rozumím, do světa Formule 1 jsi vstoupil v roce 2000 v rámci slovenských publikací F1 Sport a GRAND, a už v roce 2003 jsi se stal hlavním fotografem měsíčníku F1 Magazine, za kterým stála samotná Formula One Management, v čele s Bernie Ecclestone. To zní skoro neuvěřitelně.

M.T. Áno, je to tak. Predchádzala tomu práca grafického dizajnéra dovedy najväčšieho webu o F1 na svete: DailyF1 (neskôr ho predali a zanikol). Paradoxne až cez tento medzinárodný web som sa zoznámil so Slovákom Petrom Fritsom, ktorý vydal knihu pre fanúšikov F1. Spolu sme založili časopis F1 Sport, z ktorého sa neskôr stal GRAND. Dostal som cez to prvú akreditáciu na Veľkú cenu Rakúska 2002 a odvtedy som fungoval na voľnej nohe. Tvrdou snahou a prácou som sa napokon dostal k F1 Magazine a práci pre FOM. Tá fungovala aj po zániku tohto mesačníka. Je teda za tým veľa tvrdej práce, snahy a odriekania. Tak ako vždy v živote.

Schlegelmich a Cahier samozrejme nejsou jen tak nějaká jména a pokud se posuneme o generaci zpátky, Bernard Cahier je pro motoristickou fotografii totéž, co Denis Jenkinson znamená pro motoristickou žurnalistiku. Jak se Ti podařilo dostat pod jejich patronát tak brzy po začátku své kariéry?

To siaha opäť do doby gymnaziálnych čias, keď som pripravoval web pre nový tím Hondy a potreboval som preto fotky z histórie tohto tímu. Honda však ukončila celý projekt po nečakanej smrti hlavného dizajnéra Harveyho Postlethwaita. Získal som však kontakt na oboch spomínaných fotografov. Ostali sme v kontakte aj nasledujúce roky a keď som sa dostal do F1, stali sa mojimi mentormi. Teda presnejšie s Rainerom Schlegelmilchom to bol Paul-Henri Cahier, syn Bernarda, ktorý je akýmsi zakladateľom umeleckej fotografie v F1. Práve jeho tvorba bola pre mňa najviac inšpirujúca. Videli moju snahu a zjavne aj nejaký talent, navyše sme si nesmierne sadli aj po ľudskej stránke, čo bolo pre mňa najviac smerodajné. U Schlegelmilcha som napokon strávil mnoho času v nasledujúcich rokoch. S jeho pomocou som sa naučil všetko o foteňí. Môj štýl je akýsi mix týchto dvoch legend.

Pracoval jsi s nimi pak dalších deset let, zůstáváte i teď v kontaktu?

Samozrejme, stále sme v úzkom kontakte, aj keď sa už nevidíme tak často. Rainer už nefotí a Paul-Henri žije viac z archívu, svoje cesty na F1 rovnako veľmi obmedzil. Napokon obaja fotili už od 60 rokov minulého storočia.



Řekl někdy Paul-Henri Cahier v soukromí něco nepublikovatelného o svém střetu s Kimi Räikkönenem v Silverstone 2008?

Pri tom 'strete' som priamo bol, stál som vedľa a nechápal som, prečo sa to stalo. Navyše som s Cahierom aj zdieľal ubytovanie v Silverstone, takže sme sa o tom veľa bavili. Kimi si myslel, že mu Cahier stojí na veciach, tak v zápale pred štartom doňho strčil a Cahier spadol na zem, no nikdy nemal na Kimiho zlé srdce, skôr sme sa na tom len smiali.

Nějakou dobu jsi byl i osobním fotografem Mark Webbera, co taková práce den ode dne obnášela?

S Webberom som sa skamarátil počas jeho niekoľkodňovej návštevy Slovenska na konci jeho prvého roka v F1, teda keď jazdil ešte za Minardi. Ponúkli mi, aby som im posielal fotky po každej Veľkej cene, na ktorej bude, a táto spolupráca fungovala niekoľko rokov.

Za těch 20 let jsi vystřídal řadu agentur a pracoval v F1 pro celou škálu organizací, od dříve zmíněných přes Hondu až po Red Bull. Fotografoval jsi i Le Mans, WRC, WTCC, plus další témata mimo motoristický sport. Jak náročný životní styl to je?

Životný štýl, v ktorom som sa našiel, a ktorý ma vždy bavil a baví. Je to rovnako fyzická, ako psychická kreatívna práca a akokoľvek je to náročné, vždy je to skvelé a neprestáva ma to baviť. Veľa sa nacistujete, nabeháte, je to vyčerpávajúce, no zároveň odmeňujúce s každou dobrou fotkou a tiež spokojným klientom. Nevymenil by som to za nič iné.

V nedávném rozhovoru se Tvůj kolega Vladimír Rys zmínil o tom, že považuje za štěstí, že patří ke generaci fotografů, kteří se naučili pracovat s klasickým fotoaparátom na film, ale zároveň byli ještě dost mladí na to, aby se bez problémů ztotožnili s nastupující digitální technologií. Souhlasíš s tímto názorem?

Myslím si, že analógová doba mala svoje čaro, bol to iný spôsob práce, no zároveň je to nostalgia. Prejsť na digitál nemal problém vlastne nikto, ani staršia generácia fotografov. Zmenilo sa mnoho, rýchlosť je dnes dosť rozhodujúca, no zároveň vďaka digitálu viac experimentujeme a preto vznikajú často kreatívnejšie zábery. Sám Vladimír je toho dôkazom.

Když už mluvíme o kolezích. Panuje mezi fotografy na trati nějaká rivalita? Konec konců chcete všichni totéž, ale lépe a výstižněji než ostatní, ne?

Nenazval by som to rivalitou, určite však každý bojuje o svojho klienta a viac sa to presúva na veľké agentúry, ktoré dokážu poskytnúť kvantitu, ktorú jediný fotograf nedokáže zabezpečiť. Zároveň dokážu ponúknuť aj výhodnejšie ceny. Nikto nechce prekážať kolegovi v zábere, rešpekt tam je, no ak ide o malú plochu, ako foteenie parc fermé na konci pretekov, každý sa snaží čo najskôr uchmatnúť si čo najlepší flek. To je prirodzené. Človek sa tu naučí nejakej flexibilitě a pohotovému správaníu.

Za ty roky musíš v F1 mít i nějaké dobré přátele.

Určite áno. Keď som tam chodil častejšie, bola to vlastne vaša druhá rodina. Priatelia, s ktorými zdieľate zážitky, no tiež podobné starosti, ale aj radosti. Mám tam stále niekoľko výborných priateľov, s ktorými som v kontakte aj mimo okruh. Je to tiež jeden z dôvodov, prečo človek rád chodí na Veľké ceny.

Tvůj nejlepší a nejhorší zážitek z prostředí Formule 1?

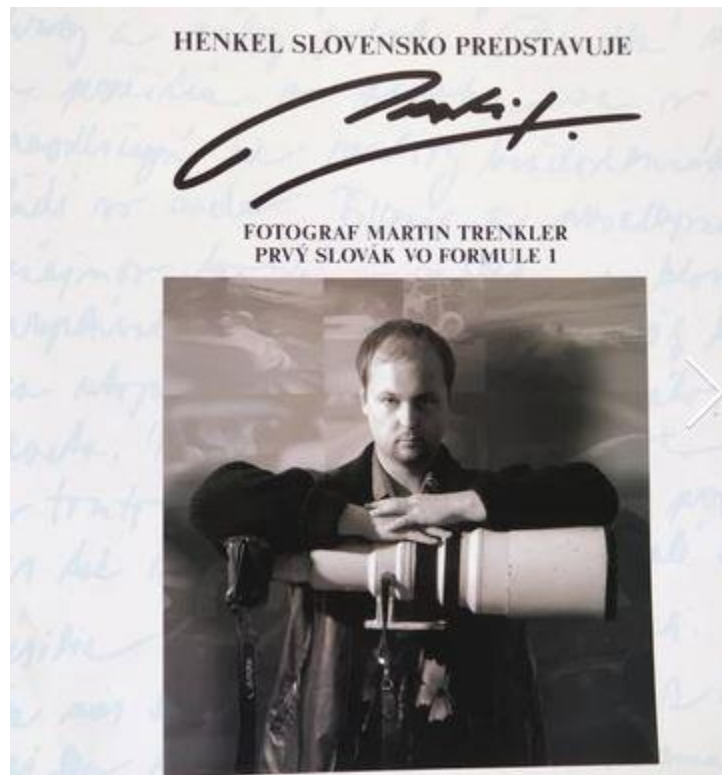
Ťažko to takto opísať. Najpamätnejšia Veľká cena je asi Brazília 2008, keď Hamilton získal svoj prvý titul prakticky v poslednej zákrute. To počasie, atmosféra a celá tá situácia sa nedajú ani opísať. Na to si budem vždy pamätať. Najhorší zážitok vlastne ani nemám. Na každých pretekoch nadávate a rozčuľujete sa, že vám zábery kazí vždy niekto, kto nečakane vojde do záberu, alebo že vás nepustia tam, či onam. Čiže obštrukcie všetkých druhov dokážu človeka zakaždým rozladit'.

Jaký je život profesionálního fotografa v době pandemie?

Ja si z tej pandémie snažím zobrať to najlepšie, čo sa dá. Mám zrazu veľa voľného času pre seba, čo patrične využívam na to, čo ma baví. Teraz najmä šport, turistika a pod. Práca veľmi nie je, no keďže s tým človek nič nenarobí, neoplatí sa preto ani rozčuľovať. Všetko raz prejde. Prežil som si veľa dôb, kedy nebolo čo robiť, takže som vycvičený.

Stále nevíme, jak se bude odvíjet a dopadne letošní sezona, ale už je jisté, že akreditace pro média budou značně zredukovány. Počítáš s tím, že se přece jenom na nějakou velkou cenu v tomto roce dostaneš?

Prvé tri Veľké ceny sú pre médiá prakticky zatvorené a žiaľ ide o tie najbližšie v Rakúsku a Maďarsku. Pustia len niekoľko pozvaných, asi 16 ľudí, zväčša veľké agentúry a pár významných väčšinou anglických fotografov. Rád by som šiel aspoň do Monzy, no dnes je ešte ťažké povedať, či nás niekam pustia. Bez divákov a s danými pravidlami to bude pekne oničom. Snáď sa to o rok zmení. Myslím si, že každý čaká na vakcínu. To by mohlo všetko vyriešiť.



Tady obvykle pokládám svou tradiční otázku Prost nebo Senna. Nevím ale, jestli to pro tvou generaci dává ten pravý smysl. Možná Hamilton nebo Alonso...i když to ale zdaleka není totéž?

Skôr sa dívam na jednotlivú dobu, na legendárne preteky, súboje... Tie priniesla každá doba. Senna mal určite neuveriteľnú auru a tie autá boli neskutočné. Rovnako ma bavili súboje, ktoré som už ako dieťa sledoval: Schumacher a Hill, Villeneuve a Häkkinen. Určite aj Alonso verzus Schumacher. Bol som pri tom, sú to úžasné spomienky. Z dnešnej generácie obdivujem najviac Hamiltona, ktorého som zažil už pri jeho začiatkoch a bolo jasné, že ide o obrovský talent. Dnešná generácia áut ma síce vôbec nebaví, no obdivujem týchto talentovaných jazdcov.

A zapoměl jsem se na něco zeptat?

?