

Enewsletter

Shooting the Spartan

Rick Sheremeta captures the adrenaline and emotion of the mud race with the Tamron 28-300mm VC lens.

By Jenn Gidman

Images by Rick Sheremeta

The action, emotion, and grit (literally and figuratively) of a mud race can only be experienced if you're there to run it—or, as Rick Sheremeta was, there to photograph it. Rick headed out in early May to Averill's Flathead Lake Lodge in Bigfork, Montana, to take pictures at the Spartan Sprint race, one of the most popular extreme-obstacle races in the country. With more than 20 obstacles spread over more than 3 miles of rugged terrain, the Sprint offered both beginning and experienced runners the chance to prove their mettle as they took on the Montana mountainside.

Rick brought along his Tamron [28-300mm VC \(../../../../lenses/prod/28300_vc.php\)](#) lens to capture the day. "The range of the 28-300 is perfect for this type of event," he explains. "I'm able to take crowd shots, which is important to get a feel for how many people come to these races, but I can also zoom in to isolate individual subjects. And this is all handheld photos, so the Vibration Compensation (VC) feature helped keep my images shake-free."

Rick's mission going into the Spartan: to create compelling compositions that best portrayed the racers in action, competing in interesting locations, or showing the excitement and exhilaration that can only come with conquering the most punishing obstacles on the course.

"I do this by walking the site before the race starts to get the lay of the land and see what lighting and backgrounds I'm working with," Rick explains. "What helped is that I had media credentials from both the Spartan organizers and from the Kalispell Convention & Visitor Bureau, which allowed me to get real close to the obstacles and competitors when I had to. The organizers have areas roped and fenced off to keep spectators in check and off the race course, but my media credentials allowed me to go pretty much anywhere, even right up to an obstacle. Being able to go over an obstacle, around it, or under it gives you a distinct shooting advantage."

The race organizers tend to put the wildest, most exciting obstacles near the main venue area of the start/finish lines. "The race area is a long course in a mountainous setting, so the logistics of setting up some of the more sophisticated obstacles deep into the course would probably be too difficult to pull off," Rick says. "That also means I didn't have to go too crazy in terms of my own preparation: I wore appropriate clothing for the weather—it was sunny but chilly in the early morning, maybe 30 degrees or so—and good hiking boots."

One of the first obstacles Rick discovered as an ideal vantage point: underneath the cargo net that competitors had to climb. "When we first got there in the morning, there was no one on it, so it didn't click with me at first how well it would work for photographic purposes," he says. "Then later on, as people started crawling up, I realized it was the perfect opportunity to use the versatility of the 28-300 for both crowd shots and individual competitors. The first crowd picture shown here was a little tricky on the exposure because of the bright sky in the background, but I spot-metered the sky to compensate for that."



Once the race kicked into full gear, Rick also realized he was in a prime position to zoom in for individual competitor images as well as group shots. "I hung out until this particular challenger made her way across the net and was able to capture a framed image of her quite-determined face through the squares of the net," he says. "Like the image of the group making its way across, I had to spot-meter the sky, as well as the other competitors on the net to see how much variation I had. I decided to shoot in Aperture Priority at +1, F/8, to get the sharpest image possible. I only had to do minor tonality adjustments in Lightroom to open up the shadows and reduce the highlights."



The effort expended to complete some of the Spartan's feats of strength and endurance can only be illustrated by getting right up next to the competitors and showing them pulling off their athletic accomplishment. "These women pulling on the rope, one down on the ground and one yanking down with all her weight, really tell the story of the work that goes into some of these obstacles," Rick says. "With the 28-300, I could zoom in to frame it nicely and focus right in on them."



One of the money shots at a mud race like the Spartan: the 1,000-foot mud crawl under barbed wire. "Luckily, I didn't have to get down too much in the mud myself," Rick says. "The wires are stretched between these big logs on either side of the mud pit. I found a grassy spot between the logs, crouched down, and zoomed in to 89mm to capture this competitor as she slogged her way through. I took this image in Shutter Priority at +1 EV, 1500th of a second."



There are more poignant moments during the event that don't involve crawling through muck or showing off Herculean strength. "I found this 'Why Race' wall, which told a little story of some of the other elements of the race," Rick explains. "You're able to go up to the board and write your initials or name and a personal note for posterity. I caught these young guys there, all covered in mud and leaving their notes for time immemorial."



The camaraderie and cooperation exhibited throughout the race continues after the competitors have crossed the finish line. It's also the ideal time to capture the emotions of the day, which Rick was able to do with this image of a staff member conversing with one of the contenders. "The helpfulness and good spirits are what I'll definitely remember," he says. "I don't know exactly what's going on here: Is she consoling him because he's disappointed in his race time? Does he have that look on his face because he's just so relieved and happy he's done? To me, it was just critical to capture whatever was going on in his

face. Viewers can interpret it however they want to."



To see more of Rich Sheremeta's photography, go to www.alpenglowproductions.com
(<http://www.alpenglowproductions.com>) .

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