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ponds.

The Compact Camera winners show that point-and-shoot cameras are capable of capturing images every bit as interesting as images captured by SLRs. Small size and increased depth of field given the same amount of light make compact cameras versatile tools for the underwater photographer.

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Trials and Tribulations.....

of shooting a Dive Training reverse cover

By Joseph C. Dovala

Few directives cause more abject terror amongst the photographers of Dive Training Magazine – OK, mostly me - then “make it an exact 180 degree reverse.” These seven simple little words so casually uttered by Cathryn Castle Whitman, the Executive Editor, pretty much never translate to an effortless pair of “mirror” images on the cover. Many of these projects require real work and take more shots than Britney Spears to get it right. Covers have been shot from the ocean to fire stations to driveways and virtually everywhere in between. All manner of critters, boats, microscopes, toys, water, and of course divers have made their appearance on them. They also come in three enticing flavors: 180-degree exact reverse, where all the components of the image remain relative to each other without moving them; conceptual, where the two images convey an abstract idea for a feature inside; and a reverse/conceptual combined, which keeps most of the elements in exact positions but some maybe changed

to fit a concept. Considerable effort is made to get it right, but as many of you can attest by your letters to the editor, details do slip by and our mistakes are exposed for all to see. What follows is a first ever account of anecdotes of some of the difficulties faced while setting up these images. And if you think shooting these photos is tough wait to you hear what it's like to model for one.

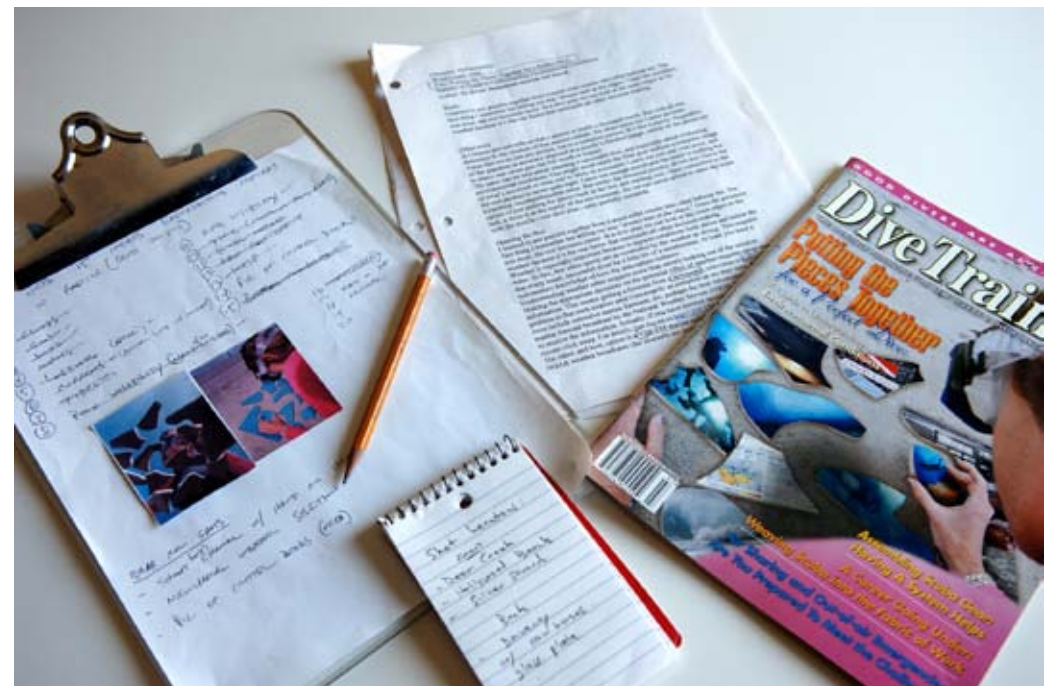
First I'd like to qualify that I'm a relative new comer and didn't shoot

Topside “Dive Lights” 180 degree exact reverse cover. Land versions of the reverse covers are usually not restricted by time but often become more complex.

Settings Front, Nikon D700, Nikkor 17-35mm WA, f/9, 1/50sec, -2EV, ISO 400.

Settings Back, Nikon D700, Nikkor 17-35mm WA, f/9, 1/20sec, -1.3EV, ISO 400.

Covers are generally story boarded out first to see how best to tackle them.





For many shoots there are people behind the scenes helping the image come to fruition. This was required to shoot straight down needed for the forward of the “Swim Cover.” Photo by Janine McMurdie



Finished “Swim” 180 degree conceptual reverse cover. Settings topside, D100, Nikkor 12-24mm WA, f/14, 1/50sec, ISO 200. Underwater, D100, Light & Motion Titan Housing, Nikkor 16mm FE, f/13, 125sec, ISO 200, Twin Sea & Sea YS-120 strobes half power w/diffusers.

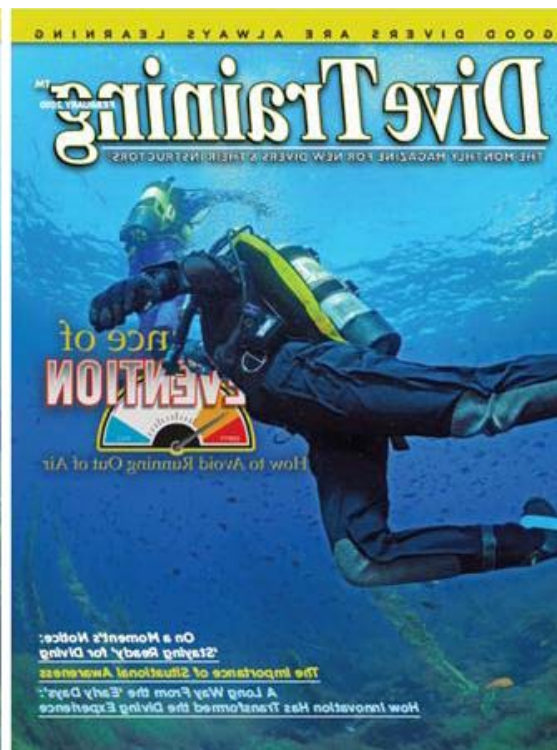
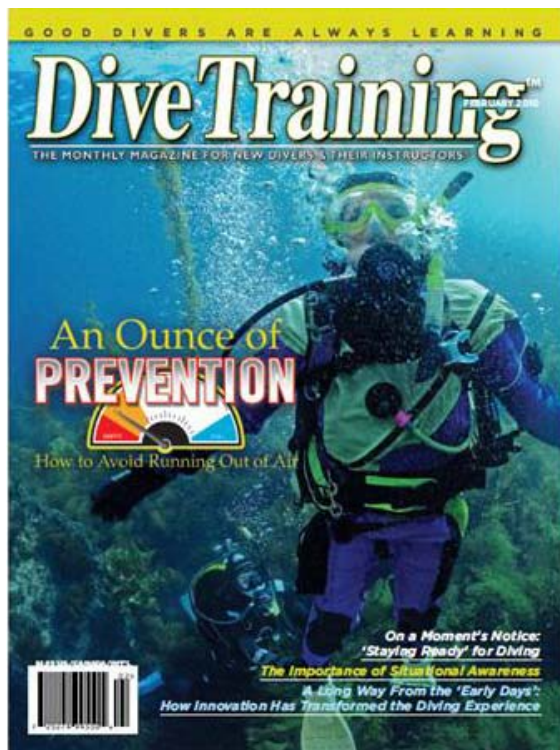
my first cover until July 2000. It was an inside image and was basically a mistake. I was trying to get a better angle and shook the camera by accident, that gave just “the look” Cathryn and Doreen Hann, (art director, aka “goddess of design”), wanted. Sorry ladies. Anyway, there are others who started back at the beginning and are still hot on it today. There were also some who shot a great cover or two and then wised up and got scarce. There just isn’t enough space here to mention everybody, but realize a whole lot of people work very hard to put out this highly successful magazine every single month.

Lynn Laymon and his partner Linda Walden are two contributors who go back to the beginning. They shot many of the covers for the first seven

years. As Lynn puts it, “Living in Hawaii then, we most always had favorable shooting conditions.” Be that as it may, this dynamic duo went to great lengths to get the “exact reverse.” One of their earliest covers required a giant stride from a boat, first shot from the sea surface and then shot from an elevated position from on the boat. Since they were using film at that time there was no way to know for sure if they got it, so Linda, the model, had to perform over 70 giant strides. That’s SEVEN-ZERO picture perfect boat entries in a row. Remember two of the jumps had to match up perfectly. Hands, arms, fins, body attitude, everything had to be lined up. Sounds simple doesn’t it? As difficult as this assignment was at least Lynn could talk to Linda

Many images are needed with slight variances in order to find the best match between front and reverse images in the final version.





Underwater “Panic Ascents” 180 degree exact reverse cover. These are by far the most difficult especially if there’s motion being conveyed. Communication, water motion, dive requirements are all conspiring against the photographer and models.

empty milk jugs used to pour warm water down the model’s wetsuits and tied it in an inverted position under his arms with a spare weight belt to give him more floatation. Don’t laugh; plastic jugs were used by early cave divers for buoyancy control. It took two rolls of film and most of the day but with this in-field adaptation he was able to get the shots. Besides the impromptu dive gear manufactured in the field, sometimes it’s necessary to build some kind of contraption to create an image in the first place. In the “Stewards of the Ocean” issue, Barry had to build a remote triggering telescope to get the camera out over the divers in the water for a straight down shot. Using some spare piping, fishing line, and a ladder he was able to get the camera in the proper position. By this time he was using digital and with instant feedback it only took 75 shots to acquire the front cover photo. He then had to get in the pool and keep all six divers in the correct position for the inside reverse. When you look at the finished product you’d think it must have been a quick setup in a swimming pool and buda-boom-budda-bing – done! The reality is anything but simple and as Barry is so fond of saying, “That’s our job to make ‘em look uncomplicated.”

As mentioned earlier not every month carries an exact reverse but always two different images are used

during the shoot and make suggestions or corrections. Once below the surface communication is reduced to pre-dive briefings, slates, and hand signals, some of which are highly animated. When shooting an underwater communications cover, the job called for two divers swimming along toward and away from Lynn. Sounds easy enough, but fin kicks, breathing exhalations, and desired buddy location all had to be coordinated in openwater, with the limitations of gas supply, decompression requirements, and a constantly moving environment factored in as well. It was up to the

photographer to know when to hit the shutter. Lynn exclaimed, “When shooting exact reverses underwater the keys are kick cycles and exhalations.” I’ve certainly had more than one trashcan filled because of errant fins and bubbles.

In March 1998, Barry and Ruth Guimbellot, another long-term contributor team, set out for their second reverse cover at a quarry with a simple concept - at least on paper. There would be two divers on the surface giving the OK signal toward shore where an “instructor” would be signaling back. The two

covers would be 180 degree reverses of each other. The weather was still cold from the winter and a howling wind screamed down across the quarry. Trying to keep the divers in a relative position with a fluttering dive flag was a constant battle. The environmental conditions were bad enough, but Barry had misjudged his buoyancy in the fresh water and when he lifted his large camera system clear of the water he would sink. Between the howling wind and his lack of positive buoyancy he just couldn’t get the proper positioning. In desperation, he took one of the

(almost, more on that later). For example, in the October '05 issue "The Forever Diver," the front cover shows a boy with snorkel gear in swimsuit (my step son Eric) standing on a wave washed beach from above. The "reverse" cover from below shows a close-up, looking up at, a technical diver (friend Joe Tezak) as the boy all grown up exploring the deep. Seemed easy enough, except 12-year old Eric was "distracted" by all the activity on the beach, the ladder kept sinking into the sand, and Joe was in a full dry suit, which takes all of about three minutes in the hot sun to start sweating like an Enron executive. Barry and Ruth's "Learning the Scuba Language," January '06 conceptual cover barely happened because of lost baggage and a storm named Gamma. While many of the problems associated with an exact reverse aren't necessarily an issue with "conceptuals", there nevertheless needs to be a coherent tie in between the images and deadlines still exist. These kinds of assignments only bring a little sigh of relief on my part.

Being behind the camera takes a fair amount of concentration and definitely requires an attention to detail. On the other side of the lens a good model merely has to have perfect buoyancy control, never blink, make no unnecessary fin or arm movements, have a picture perfect

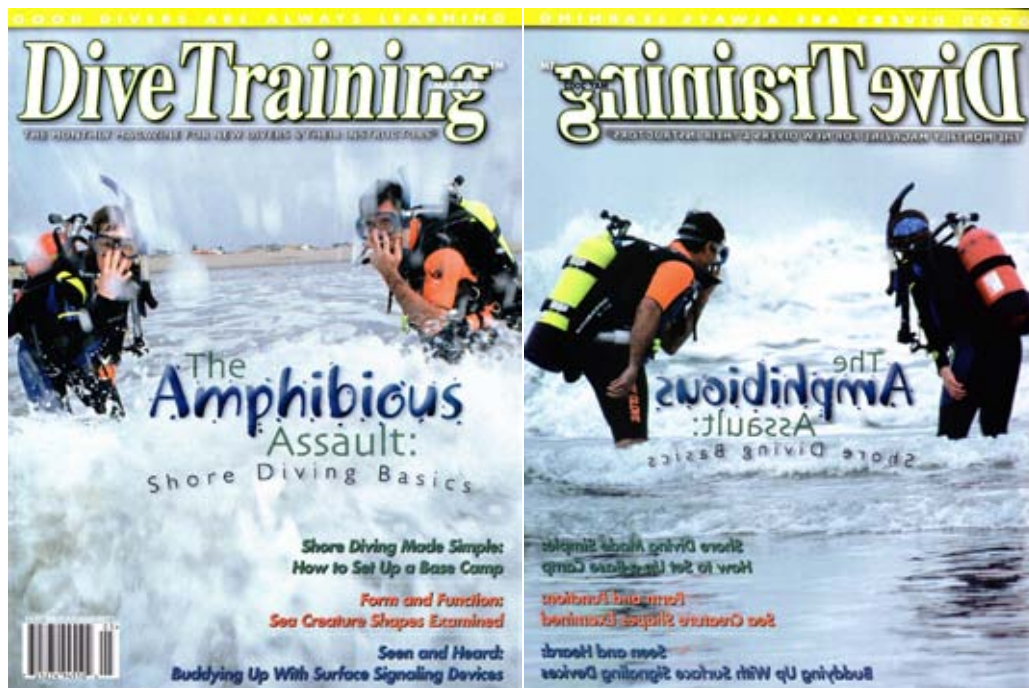
Conceptual reverse "World's Apart" cover. These usually are the easiest and often can be images already in stock. It's a real treat to get these assignments!

form in the water at all times, and most important, know "instinctively" what the photographer wants. Of course, basic black or too much of the same manufacturer's gear doesn't cut it either. I have been fortunate enough to have some friends, not all divers, and my wife Janine who, without a moan or whimper, will gladly subject themselves to the sometimes crazy ideas in getting the shot – well most of the time. One of the most memorable covers we did was an earlier one from May '03. It was actually to illustrate my feature article on shore diving, so

I thought what better way to do that then from inside the surf line at eye level! My models, Joe and Janine, had to stand up, with full gear, to the rushing water, with the sand under their fins washing away with every wave. It was demanding to say the least and they took shot after shot in stride for both front and back. Dozens of times they got back on their feet after being knocked down and continuously kept their masks clear of fog. I knew it was time to quit when their facial expressions took a turn toward the hostile side and the

cursing was starting to draw attention from the beach goers. Besides I'd had enough of the waves slapping me upside the head into the camera housing. But it seemed the shoot went well 'till the slides came back and it was discovered.....well, I'll let Janine tell it. "It turns out that my snorkel was on the wrong side of my mask (this of course was not acceptable for a magazine that is responsible for showing new divers how to do it "right"). So, after some expletives and a serious reprimand from the photographer, it was back to the surf





even a little blood once in awhile goes into the images. We're obviously not curing the energy crisis here, but seeing the finished issue with the concept all laid out nice and clean by the art staff makes the effort worth it. So the next time you look at a DT cover and see a fin slightly out of place or Lego Man's legs on backwards, relax and be happy you didn't have to be the model.

Joseph C. Dovala
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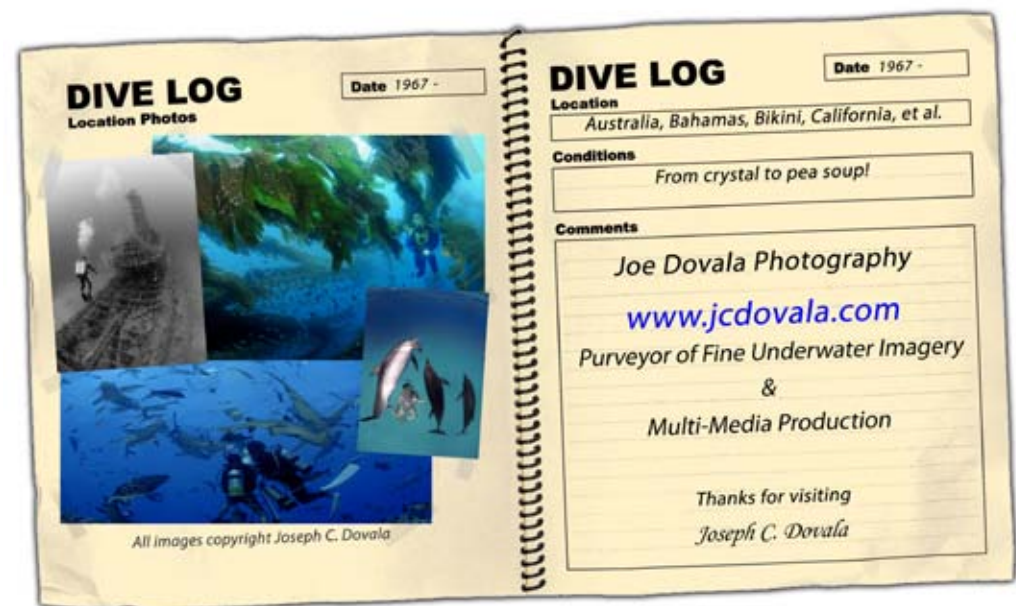


line - and the surf was even bigger - for take two. This was one of those make it or break it moments between photographer and model, however, all well that ends well as we are now happily married." And yes, as the photographer I know all too well that I should've noticed the snorkel during the first session. But hey stuff happens.

Now what about the most recognized name on the masthead of photographers, which of course is none other than Marty Snyderman? He prefers not to do reverse covers because the success rate is too low. He's been in the business a very long

time and knows what he is talking about. When Marty is used for a non-diver cover the art director just flips his transparency backwards. Works for most critters because one side looks just like the other. Nice work if you can get it. Even Keith Ibsen, who creates the animated illustrated covers, as well as quite a number of inside drawings, has had to deal with challenges of the 180-degree reverse. A recent back cover had a shark's tail fin in the "wrong" direction from the front cover orientation.

Making photographs for publication can be very trying at times and quite a bit of sweat, tears, and



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Actual shots taken with Seahorn snoot by Alex Tattersall (www.uwvisions.com)



The full set.
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