

# The Basics Of Great Vehicle Photography

## OUTDOOR Vehicle Exterior Lighting Rules

1. Great car photography requires LIGHT – Lot’s of it.
2. The right kind of light is very important.
  - a. Vertical Light is BAD (e.g., high-angle, high-in-the-sky sunlight)
  - b. Horizontal light is GOOD (e.g., low-angle, rising/setting sun, obliquely-reflected light (such as sunlight reflected off of a white structure or all-glass office building)--AND your fill flash--is GOOD.



**Note the harsh, murky shadow** (resulting from shooting the shadow side of the car in hard midday sunlight) and the **higher camera position**. This image isn't likely to inspire anyone to purchase.



Soft, evenly distributed, smoothly-flowing dusk sunlight, perfect positioning of his car and good camera position made for a marvelous image. Note the soft, gentle shadows on and beneath the car... and compare it to the harsh shadows in the photo at left.

You don't get great photographs by shooting in harsh, glaring midday high-angle sunlight (you get color-faded paint on the top surfaces, harsh, murky shadows in the lower regions, and a thoroughly bleached-out cockpit), and you don't get photographs by shooting the shadow side of your car.

So... it's not exactly possible to always shoot your vehicles at dusk or with overcast conditions. Here are some tips to help you.

1. Try to find a place on your lot that has a nice background (e.g., no dead plants, and only show your facility IF it photographs well. Note the photograph below has a clean dark cement ground and no distracting background features. Some concern about reflections on the hood, however, this is not a bad shot overall. Looking at the direction of the shadow the light is definitely coming from the right direction – aimed at the vehicle.



2. This photograph was framed ok, however, taken at the wrong time of day! Look at the shadows – they should never come towards the camera. You would be better served finding a place on your lot that works and know you can only take pictures on nice days and during certain hours before 12 or after 3. The time of day you can shoot will simply depend on the position of the morning sun vs. after-noon.



## OUTDOOR Vehicle Interior Lighting Rules

The most important aspect to great interior vehicle photography is EVENLY DISTRIBUTED LIGHT. You do not want harsh sun shadows. Harsh sun reveals everything from dust on the gauges to lint on the carpet.

We have also seen great success with dealer's only pulling 3/4 of the car under the covered area to allow more sunlight reach the vehicle. You will just have to try different things here. It all depends on the positioning of the sun to the covered area.



We have experienced great success by positioning vehicles under carports, covered service drive bays, or any covered area that still get some good light.

## INDOOR (PHOTO STAGING AREA) Vehicle Tips

Find a location that has a suitable clean surface and neutral background against which to position the vehicles. In many cases, hanging large neutral colored drapes works really well and can achieve better results than painting a wall.

Sufficient space must be available to position the cars so as to avoid cluttered views through the windows when taking interior shots. The floor area needs to be level with no unsightly blemishes such as oil stains or drain covers. Grey or neutral colored flooring is preferred. Painting concrete, even industrial floor finish tends to streak and show tire marks and oil stains. For easier cleaning and less streaking, a tile or sealed stone floor is preferred. A less expensive "streak free" flooring alternative is to use industrial carpet. Distractive photo blemishes can be manually removed using the integrated Picnik photo-editing feature in eCarList.

The walls should be free of windows and doors, and painted a color that will show off the majority of vehicles to be photographed. Typically a chalk white is ideal, although a dealership may wish to create its own Internet identity by selecting a memorable color palette for the walls and floor. Or in some cases, have well designed dealer logos on the walls.



Again, the right kind of light is VERY important. As in good outdoor lighting a softer more diffused light is preferred. Harsh spotlights result in harsh spots of light on the vehicle and do not look good. Below are examples of what not to do.



Note the incredible amount of harsh light on the vehicles? Both have harsh lighting from above. Lights can also be made worse from the reflective flooring used on the left. Do not use reflective flooring if it can be avoided. Also, this shot on the left appears to include some sunlight from windows AND artificial lighting. Do not mix lighting sources. You can confuse the camera and alter the color of the car. Note also that the photo on the right looks very washed out? This is why we recommend using gray or neutral colored flooring with a “chalk white” backdrop.

## What is “diffused light”?



A softbox is a box that fits over a flash head or tungsten lamp made of black sides, with white, gold or silver interior and a translucent front where light passes through. A softbox is most popular for its soft, even light. Softboxes are used heavily in portrait photography and many other types of commercial photography.

The light that comes from a softbox is directional and diffused making it a light that is easy to control. The Softbox eliminates hot spots and evenly distributes the light as well (see photos below).



Harsh light with no softbox (BAD)



Diffused “even” light with softbox (GOOD)

Where can you get softbox lighting? Here is a good “cost conscience” recommendation from B&H Photo.



Very lightweight, burn cold. Screw in the light while holding the base though.

[http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/638598-REG/Impact\\_VA903\\_2KII\\_5\\_Lamp\\_Cool\\_LT\\_2\\_LT.html](http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/638598-REG/Impact_VA903_2KII_5_Lamp_Cool_LT_2_LT.html)

or visit <http://www.bhphotovideo.com> and search for item # IMVA9032LDK

These lights are just under \$350.00 a piece and two are all you will need.

## Preparing the Vehicle

When preparing a car for photography ensure that the car has been fully detailed, and remove all POS materials and other items from the car such as paper floor mats, seat protectors, and be sure to remove any personal number plates, and replace with dealership licence plate frames and plate covers.

When the vehicle is in position, check the following: Straighten the wheels, switch off engine, close all windows, and remove keys. If the vehicle is a convertible then always: Remove/lower the roof, take pictures with both the roof up and down, put on any top cover, lower the windows

Most importantly, maintain a consistency in image composition for all photographed vehicles (see below)

Year	Make/Model	Mileage	Price
2008	Acura RL RL AWD   NAVIGATION, REVERSE CAM, 25K MILES, HEATED STS, AWD, 08	25,894 mi.	
2007	BMW 3 Series 328i   29K MILES, OFF LEASE, AUTO, MOONROOF, TEXAS 10OWNER, 07	29,348 mi.	
2008	BMW 3 Series M3   M POWER, TECH PKG, PREMIUM, COMFORT ACCESS, NAVIGATION	20,597 mi.	
2008	BMW 5 Series 528i   26K MILES, COMFORT ACCESS, PREMIUM PKG, BLUETOOTH, 08	26,611 mi.	
2008	Lexus IS 250 IS250   23K MILES, X PACKAGE, AUTO, CLIMATE SEATS, OFF LEASE	23,127 mi.	

Year	Make/Model	Mileage	Price
2003	Aston Martin Vanquish	22,022 mi.	
2006	Aston Martin Vantage	11,751 mi.	
2007	Aston Martin Vantage	14,036 mi.	
2007	Audi A4 2.0T	43,415 mi.	
2011	Audi R8 Spyder V10	296 mi.	