You've just detailed your car and it's looking good, so now is the time to hop in and drive somewhere for a photoshoot. Taking professional-quality photos of your car takes careful planning and proper technique, so I've asked my friend Mike from Machines With Souls to lay out the steps he takes below when prepping for a shoot, during a shoot, and the post-production of an image. Forget an expensive camera and tons of gear, you just need yourself, a car, and your imagination.

Preproduction

01 Decide the appropriate location for the kind of car you're shooting. A tough-looking pickup truck might look great going off-road, but out of place in a race track environment.

02 Put together a "mood board", which is a collection of images that you like and can use for inspiration. Think of angle of the car, lighting, environment, and overall mood, or tone.

03 Scout the location you've chosen, first on Google Maps, and then in person. Take note of anything that might block access or get in the way on the day of your shoot.

The Shoot

04 Prep your equipment beforehand. Bring your camera body, lenses, lens filters, plenty of fully charged batteries, a light source, an iPad, and a tripod. If you know bad weather is coming, it might also be wise to bring a water proof bag that can go over your camera body.

05 Make sure your vehicle subject is cleaned the day of the shoot, and bring a bottle of **AMMO SPIT** and **AMMO MUD** with you in case the car needs some last minute touch ups.

06 Once you've arrived on location, set up the car in the position you want, then set up your camera on its tripod. If outdoors, use sand bags to hold the tripod in place once it's set. It's important to ensure the tripod does not move at all once you've set it up.

07 Walk around the car to ensure there is't any garbage around it that might distract in the photo. Now is the time to wipe away any dirt on the car itself as well.

08 EXPOSURE ONE. Take a well-lit base exposure to capture the details of the scene. You'll usually hold the shutter open a little longer to make sure you get everything lit well. To ensure the entire car is in focus, use a higher F-stop, usually around F11-13. You should also ensure your camera is set up to take RAW photos, which are the highest quality available.

09 EXPOSURE TWO-FOUR. If light painting, now is the time to take out your Ice Light or equivalent light bar. Set your camera to a 10-second delay, then walk around the car with your light bar and highlight different parts of the vehicle. Depending on ambient light, your camera should be on a 10-15 second exposure for these shots.

10 EXPOSURE FIVE and SIX. Highlight both front and rear wheels with your light source, and make sure to light any heavy shadow that might be on the bottom of the car.

11 Check your work on a larger screen to make sure everything is in focus. Reshoot if needed, because it will be hard to go back and do it again tomorrow.

Post Production

12 Once complete, download the RAW files onto your computer, and open them up in your photo editor of choice. For the sake of this document, we will use Adobe Photoshop.

13 Opening up your 6 images in Photoshop will open the Camera Raw interface. Sync your image settings, adjust as needed, then open them all.

14 You'll see them all open up separately, so drag each photo into one Photoshop file holding the SHIFT key, making sure the X and Y coordinates match up exactly so each image lines up with the one below.

15 You'll see each image become its own layer. Hide all but one light painted layer. Then unhide the light painting layer above it, and add a LAYER MASK.

16 Using your ERASE TOOL, brush away all the sections you don't want in the image, making sure to leave the highlighted part of the car in place. You'll see that the mask acts as a window to the layer below it, and that you've combined two exposures. Repeat this process for each layer, until the entire car is lit evenly, including the wheels.

17 Unhide your BASE EXPOSURE and add a MASK to that layer as well. Brush out the part that is covering the car, then reduce the opacity of the layer - usually 20-30 percent is enough.

18 Select all your layers and group them using COMMAND + G. Then, duplicate them by dragging them to the bottom menu of your layers panel. Finally, select your first group and use COMMAND + E to flatten the group into one image. From there, you can manipulate it with LUTZ filters, adjustment layers, or any other combination you like.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Mike at mike@machineswithsouls.com