

I wish the world would stand still so I could take its picture

By Susan E L Lake
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A friend of mine was going on a whale watching excursion and wanted to know how to capture the sights she was hoping to see. I shared with her what may be a well-kept secret. Many “point and shoot” cameras as well as some a bit more impressive have a series of preset functions usually called something like scene mode. On my camera it shows up on the dial as SCN. The professionals often sneer at those of us who use this since the camera does all the thinking for the person taking the photograph. But for the casual photographer this function can be the answer to your need.



Whale watching at Cabo, San Lucas

SCN is a bit different from the auto function on cameras that convert any camera into a true point and shoot type. Auto makes all the decisions for you. I’ll confess to using auto many times particularly when I’m in a hurry up situation.

However, if you select Scene and then specify the kind of scene, you have made one important decision: you’ve decided what kind of photo you are taking. With that information, the camera registers the light and the motion and decides for you what to use. Every camera company seems to have a slightly different selection of scenes but most include portrait, sports, macro (closeup), and landscape modes. There are also often more specialized ones such as fireworks.



A camera dial is more than auto or manual.

The Magical Sports Mode

But today, sports mode (often using an icon that looks sort of like a runner) is what we need. I have to admit that when I first saw that on my camera I ignored it. I wasn’t planning on taking many shots of grandkids playing soccer or tennis since they don’t do either one of these things. It looked like something I could drop off my think about list. But one day (probably by accident) I realized that what this function was designed to do was to stop action. That means if I was in a moving vehicle and wanted to catch that cool looking house we were passing (that wasn’t moving), it might work. And it DID! From that point on the sports mode was my



The sports mode can work magic on your pics.

setting of choice any time we were moving because movement is movement whether you are doing the moving or your subject is. It even works if both you AND the object you want to photograph are moving. That's why on a rocking boat trying to photograph leaping whales, it's your "go to" selection.

Fair warning: This works best on bright sunny days. That's because the camera is trying to do its best for you by speeding up the shutter speed meaning it opens and closes the shutter very quickly so things don't have a chance to blur while it adjusts how much light (aperture setting) the camera lets in. If you don't have much light, then the camera will compensate making your image a bit grainy. While we generally don't want that grain showing instead preferring nice sharp images, it's just one of the hazards of not being able to pick your photographic environment. But if the weather gods smile, you can capture that pretty church while moving at 45 mph. So will you get the perfect shot every time? Nope. But you will get some that amaze you. And remember, you only need one good one to record the day's memory.

Unlike those shows that say "don't try this at home," I do recommend experimenting before you go. Take your camera with you when you are in a car as a passenger and shoot some images at random. It will begin to give you an idea of what's possible. And this will bring you one step closer to having the camera you know instead of merely carry.

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