



CHASING THE ACTION

He played pro football, drove a rally car for 10 years, ran a paintball company and even served as a reserve police officer with SWAT training, but today **Chris Hitchcock** is best known for his stunning sports photography, particularly covering triathlon, trail running and mountain biking, and he's running up a storm to train for a big upcoming job. — **BY SEAN FALCONER**

Later this year in October, Chris Hitchcock will head to the Kalahari Desert in the Northern Cape with a bagful of cameras, lenses and flashes and his running shoes to shoot the Kalahari Au-grabies Extreme Marathon. It's a seven-day, 250km stage race through some of the most extreme terrain and temperatures in the country, and just running it is a major undertaking, let alone trying to lug all that equipment around on the route on foot! But Chris is up for the challenge, and that's why he's been heading out around midday each day to train for this event.

"It's not so much about the distance that I will cover on foot each day, but the heat that I will have to be able to manage, so I am currently running in the midday summer heat to try get

used to it. I usually love running at 10pm at night, but now I'm out at midday, doing the 10.5km loop in the Tygerberg Nature Reserve near my home in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, because being 'match-fit' to keep up in events is part of being a professional photographer," says Chris.

"I also know from experience how race organiser Hano Otto works. At the Namaqua Quest, he dropped me at one end of a 10km canyon and said see you on other side in 90 minutes. I had to run to get to other side, with all my equipment, and still get shots of the runners along the way! That's why I have to be fit to do this job. In fact, I reckon a sports photographer has to be 'sniper fit' – able to run, stop and take the shot, then run again."

Expert Behind the Lens

Chris is actually quite used to getting sweaty, or wet, while shooting events. The 57-year-old often hitches two or three camera to his neck and shoulders, puts a few extra lenses and flashes in his pockets, and heads up a mountain on foot to get closer to the action. Sometimes he dives into the water to get stunning swim pics at triathlons, and also uses drone cameras for panoramic aerial shots, and he is fully booked for one, sometimes two endurance sport events for every weekend of the year, while still also managing to shoot weddings in between as well!

Of course, it helps knowing something about a sport in order to know what to look for, and where to position yourself on a course to get the best shots, and here Chris is well covered, since he is an experienced runner, rider and triathlete himself. "I was a mountain bike rider for many years, and even though I actually used to hate running, I decided to do something special for my 50th birthday, so I entered the Ironman –

Images: Courtesy Chris Hitchcock

TOP PICKS: We asked Chris to select a few of his all-time personal favourite images in his vast collection of photos.



Blurred Lines, Indoor Track Cycling



Beneath the waves, Woolworths Triathlon



Sunrise Runner, Old Mutual Two Oceans Marathon

and gave myself six months to learn to swim and run. I came to love triathlon, and that really got me into pro sport photography."

Chris had started photography as a hobby in the 80s, in the days of film cameras, and taught himself by reading magazines bought at the CNA, in the days before online tutorials. Years later, after falling off his mountain bike, breaking a shoulder and being told he couldn't move his arm for 20 weeks, he missed the races so much that he took his camera to an event and started shooting. "I really enjoyed it – even more than competing – so for the next two years I went out every weekend to shoot events, thinking I could make a living from it. Then the organisers of the BSG Tri Series saw my pics and asked me to shoot their national series. I had no idea how to quote for a job that size, but I got the job. So it all really started from breaking my shoulder!"

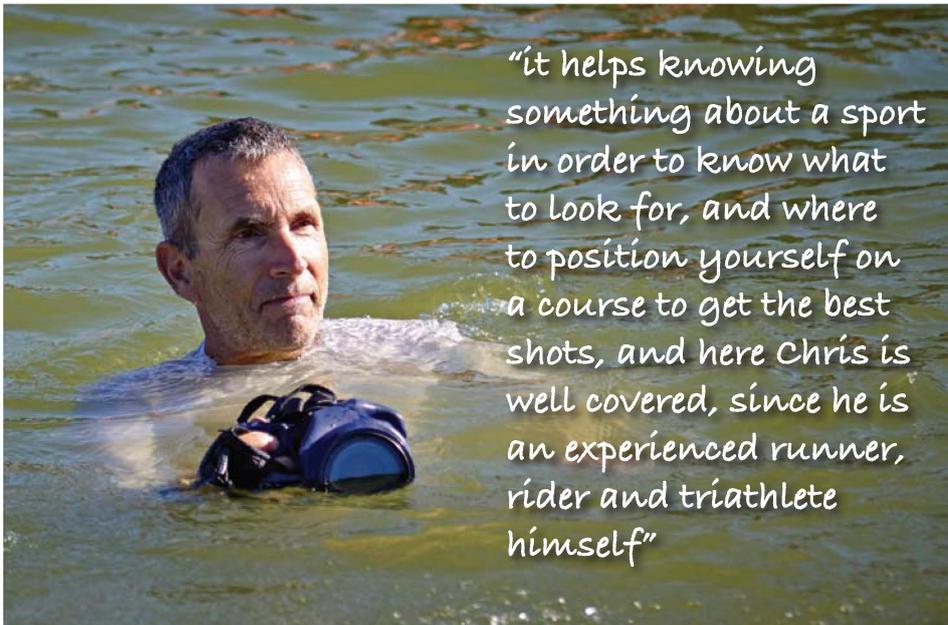
Interesting Career

Born in England, Chris and his family came out to South Africa when he was 11. While still at school and aged just 16, he played two years of professional soccer in what was then the national third division. "I was paid the princely sum of 50 cents a match, which was huge money back then!" says Chris. He also got into rally car driving for 10 years, working up from

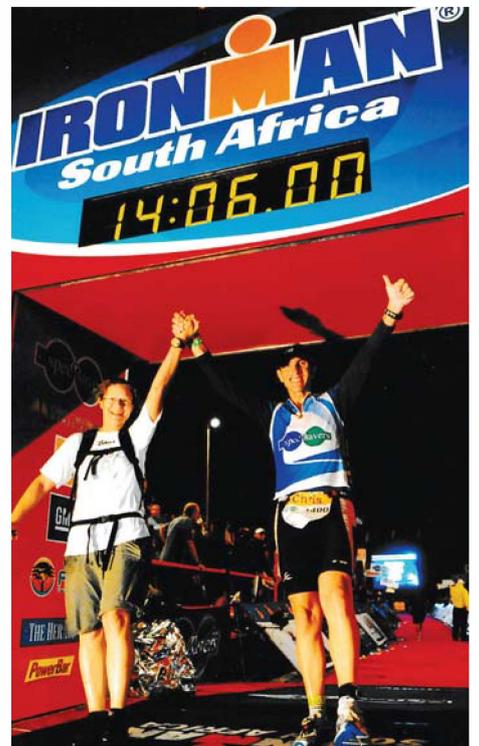
the amateur to pro ranks, and even managed a second place in the Western Province Rally Champs. Other than sport, Chris also had some interesting jobs over the years.

"When I left school, I got into electronics and had a shop in Wynberg that sold and repaired appliances. At the same time, having complained to the police after a third break-in at my shop, they suggested I become a police reservist. Well, I took the challenge and ended up with the Flying Squad, and even did a SWAT course. I was one of only two people who got 100% on the shooting course that year. However, I eventually got sick of the appliance business, because it wasn't challenging and I didn't want to do that for another 40 years, so I sold the business," says Chris.

"Next I started a paintball business, working just two days a week for four years, but then the industry exploded and quickly became oversubscribed, so I went back to electronics. I got into onboard computers for trucks, right at the beginning of the computer age. The company I was employed by, was later bought out by a new Internet Service Provider (ISP) company, so now I was in the Internet business with a company that is now known as Vox Telecom."



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Getting Around

Now well established as one of the leading sports photographers in SA, Chris has had his work published in major magazines all over the world. "I have also been privileged to photograph a wide range of top sports stars, from Springbok rugby captains to Olympians, and most of them are just ordinary, down to earth people, with a passion for what they do, and it is nearly always a pleasure to shoot them."

However, it's action photography that gets Chris the most excited, and he says his favourite event to shoot is the Ironman triathlon in Port Elizabeth. "My day starts at 4am and ends around 1am the next day, and I have to shoot all three legs, so I have to get to motorbike and helicopter pick-up points, all on foot, through thousands of spectators, while uploading and tagging pics! The biggest challenge in this job is knowing where to go to shoot. That's why I often ask organisers for a Google earth file of their route, so that I can pick spots where I think I'll get the best shots, then programme the co-ordinates into my GPS so that I can quickly hoof it there on race day. And that's why being fit really pays off!" /A



Swimming Reflection, Discovery Cape Town Triathlon



Praying Grannie, Ironman 70.3