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Chasing Neowise in a Porsche Cayman for the perfect interstellar automotive pictures

Tuesday, July 21, 2020

Article and photos by Ed Chang

It's said that we're all descended from astronomers, and our ancient ancestors used the night sky to tell stories across generations, track time, and navigate the world. When I heard about a newly discovered comet, I decided to go for a night drive in the mountains to capture it properly.

I packed my tripod and camera in my 981 Cayman S, and the only real plan was to have more fun finding the comet than your average star gazer. As I was driving, I nearly forgot about looking at the sky, however the comet actually caught my eye out of the side window. I stopped at the next pullout.

The photo locations were on Mt. Wilson, north of Pasadena, CA, near the observatory. The rear-quarter shot (above) was taken about 20 minutes before the side profile (below) while there was still enough light on the horizon to register on the car. There was no need for extra lighting. I shot raw images from the same position and layered different exposures to get different details of the car. Each exposure layer has different settings, blending, and masking. The exposure was 1/80 for the car, and I took a separate exposure for the sky of 3.2 seconds with a lower ISO setting to separate the stars from the noise.



The second photos is a bit different. Here, where it's dark enough to clearly see the comet, it's too dark to properly light the car. The surrounding trees and high brush blocked most of the ambient light and obscured the view, and without the moon helping out, I used the only light source on-hand: the LED flashlight on my phone. I started a 20-second exposure and walked around my car, painting it with light. I used the tall trees and bushes obstructing my view to frame the comet. Sometimes the most satisfying creations come from turning an obstacle into a solution.

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Above: Porsches head out on track at the PEC LA. Photo courtesy Porsche...



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