

## The Tour de France Guy

James Startt had no intention of making a living through photojournalism. It wasn't until he moved to France in 1992, without a job and running out of money, when the idea came to him.

"I probably could write some stories about bicycle racing and illustrate them," Startt recalled thinking, "and that's how it started."

Fast-forward 30 years. When Startt walks into the press room at the 106<sup>th</sup> annual Tour de France in June 2019, he is the senior American journalist in the room. This is quite a contrast from his first Tour de France, where he "pulled up with a little pocket street camera," next to all the sports photographers carrying their heavy professional cameras and multiple lenses.

"I never set out to be a cycling photographer," said Startt when asked how he got into the highly specified field.

Startt attended graduate school at Indiana University for a Masters in Art History that eventually morphed into Photography and Fine Arts. The work of artists like Diane Arbus and Robert Frank, who were attempting to take the ordinary and make it extraordinary is what initially sparked his interest in street photography.

A self-proclaimed urbanite, Startt focused on the city and modern art. He started by painting and then moved onto photography. While completing his Master's thesis, he was profoundly influenced by the work of photographer William Klein.

With a fine arts background, Startt initially thought his creativity would lead to exhibitions and gallery work. He contemplated teaching photography, as his passion was for the creative aspect of street photography. Alongside street photography, Startt discovered his love for bicycle racing during graduate school. When he moved to Paris after graduate school, he continued racing bikes. But without working papers, he needed to find some source of income.

Startt combined his two passions, cycling and photography, and decided to submit story ideas to a bicycle paper as a way to make money and get his pictures published. While "it was things like street photography that really sparked my interest," Startt realized sport photography was not so different. In both street and sport photography, "you have to work very quickly, be very spontaneous, in order to capture the moment and the little details in movement," Startt said. "So it was a no brainer shifting to sports."

Startt found a specialty very quickly. After years studying fine arts, Startt used his highly developed sense of composition to form his own style of cycling photography. His self-described "real in your face, lots of emotion, blurr, tilted camera angles" style and his sense of composition set him apart from other cycling photojournalists and led to his success. With his high-action, emotional, close up cycling shots, Startt hopes his images "take people away from the reality of the world."

When asked what his most memorable photographs has been, Startt cites his time with Lance Armstrong. Armstrong is an American cyclist who survived cancer and for many years was idolized as one of the greatest cyclists until he was found guilty of doping. Startt was covering Armstrong and his battle with cancer for the French and American press, and as a result they became very close friends. Startt visited Armstrong before his last chemo session in 1996 and encouraged Armstrong to let him document the important moment.

“I had 12 shots, and I said give me six minutes,” Startt said. “I set him up in a chair by the window, using natural light. I got two rolls off in six minutes.” Those black and white film portraits became very famous pictures; Nike bought them for an ad in Times Square.

Startt’s work has been featured in Vanity Fair, The New York Times, LeMonde, Bicycling and Rouleur Magazine and he has published several books including, “Tour de France/Tour de Force” of Chronicle Books, the first “English History of the Tour de France” and “Shut Up Legs,” the Jens Voigt autobiography. He is the European Associate of PELOTON magazine, a premiere cycling publication in America.

As the European Associate, Startt travels around the world photographing and reporting on cycling culture and lifestyle. He covers everything from the three grand tours of cycling to wine harvests and independent bookstores; anything that is of interest to the bike world.

For his most recent work, Startt followed bikers as they rode the Natchez Trace Parkway, which is a National Parkway that starts in Natchez, Mississippi and ends in Nashville, Tennessee. “It was a cool thing where bikes and music link together,” Startt said. The road passes through Muscle Shoals, Alabama, home to famous recording studios FAME Studios and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio that recorded many hit songs and artists from the 1950s and 1960s. Classic recordings from Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Eric Clapton, Lynyrd Skynrd and the Rolling Stones came from Muscle Shoals.

At PELOTON, Startt has the creative freedom to decide his own projects and stories about anything cycling related. Startt is “at a place right now where my magazine has total confidence in me and like all my ideas.”

Startt believes two things are essential to a successful career in photojournalism. “One: pursue it,” said Startt. He emphasizes how important it is to truly love photography and journalism. While the means of telling a story are constantly morphing, “there is always going to be a place for it.” Startt disregards the idea that journalism is dying, saying “as long as I’ve been around journalism has been dying, but it’s still here, because people need to read, people need to see, people are interested in stories.”

“Second thing: I stumbled upon a niche.” Startt’s focus on the specific field of cycling photojournalism is how he makes a living. Choosing a specialty, and mastering that specialty, is key to having a successful career as a photojournalist. Startt’s advice is to concentrate on a specific area of work and keep digging deeper and deeper in that area.

“Push yourself,” said Startt, “The one thing that’s interesting about photographing the same thing over and over is that you have to look for new ways to see it.” After decades in the industry, Startt is constantly searching for a unique angle.

As one of the greatest cycling photojournalists, Startt credits his success to his first Tour de France, where he discovered his beat. “Mine’s cycling,” he said, “I’m the Tour de France guy.”