

A life lived in all its glory on the fast track

Qin Jian and Yang Di

After a four-year hiatus, the Chinese Grand Prix returned to the Shanghai International Circuit on April 19. From the first race in 2004 until the 1,000th race in F1 history in 2019, this 上-shaped (the first Chinese character for 上海, Shanghai) circuit has witnessed the inseparable relationship between F1 events, fans and the Jiading District.

Chen Di, a national first-class photographer and president of the Shanghai Art Photography Association's Sports Photography Branch, has been involved in the planning, marketing and event photography for major global events, including the

Chinese Grand Prix.

"China hosted the first Formula One race in 2004. At that time, many Chinese photographers had not yet experienced high-speed racing photography. So, most of the photographs of the first race were captured by foreign professional sports photographers," Chen explained.

Formula One has strict qualifications for photographers. Chen got his chance in 2009 and became one of the photographers for the Chinese Grand Prix, stepping onto the race track and using his camera to record the lightning-fast moments.

However, the initial efforts dampened Chen's spirits.

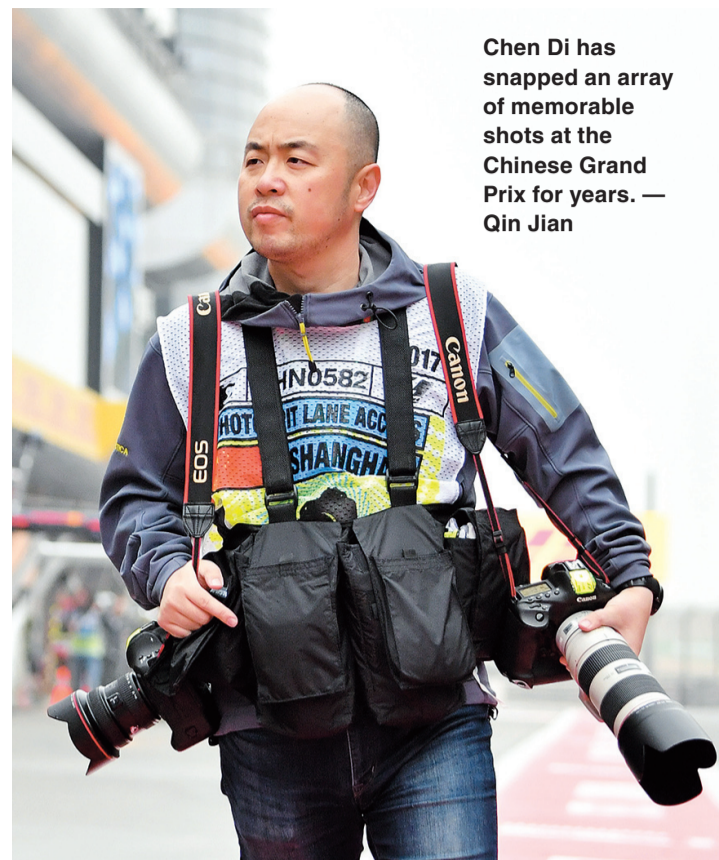
"I watched the cars coming toward me, confidently pressing the shutter, only to

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find out later that the photo showed an empty track; the cars had already passed," Chen said. "I had to progressively figure things out. I would sometimes pay great attention to foreign photographers during shoots, noting how they adjusted their cameras, the lenses they used, their movements, and the elements around them. Once they left, I would quickly move to their position and try to do the same."

Since 2004, the Shanghai International Circuit has hosted a growing number of



Chen Di has snapped an array of memorable shots at the Chinese Grand Prix for years. — Qin Jian



"Bulls Out of the Shed" by Chen Di

car events, giving Chen many opportunities to practice photography. He spent those years shooting, gaining experience and familiarizing himself with composition, settings and tracks.

Over the years, he has shot over 100 racing events, walking every corner of the circuit hundreds of times. Capturing the photo "Bulls Out of the Shed" stands out as one of his most memorable experiences.

During the 2011 Chinese Grand Prix, Chen got an opportunity when the Red Bull

Racing team's car entered the pit stop. He dashed to the scene to take a photograph of the car leaving the pits. However, just as he hit the shutter, a team technician approached him and informed him that he was too close to the car. Despite the chaotic setting, he was able to get the shot that is now permanently archived at the China Art Palace.

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Veteran commentator insists F1 is a lifetime obsession

Qin Jian and Yang Di

CHINESE F1 fans may not be familiar with Pan Yongyong, but the phrase "Arctic Shrimp" is sure to ring a bell.

Known by his pen name "Arctic Shrimp," a nod to his fondness for the delicacy, Pan served as a commentator and analyst for Shanghai TV's Five Star Sports channel, where he provided insightful coverage of both Formula 1 and MotoGP races.

When the spotlight flashed on him in 2004, and the countdown to the live broadcast began, Pan's life became inextricably linked to F1.

On June 6, 2004, the Ferrari F2003-GA — the 2003 championship-winning vehicle, joined 58 other Ferraris in a procession around the brand-new Shanghai International Circuit. Gerhard Berger drove Michael Schumacher's championship-winning Ferrari for four laps. Chinese spectators had never heard the thunder of V8 engines at an F1

circuit before, and their screams echoed around the venue.

"At the time, some media friends were taking photos at Turn 1 but couldn't stand it for more than 15 minutes," Pan remembered 20 years later. "The sound surpassed 150 decibels. The feeling at the venue then was as if the ground trembled."

The inaugural F1 Chinese Grand Prix took place at the Shanghai International Circuit from September 24 to 26 of the same year, drawing 260,000 spectators over three days and setting a single-day record of 150,000 attendees.

"The ticket sales at the time astounded the overseas media. They even had some admiration for us because the ambiance was wonderful, and the circuit's hardware facilities, design standards, building procedures, and so on were far superior to other venues," Pan said.

Pan became the official live commentator for the F1 Chinese Grand



Pan Yongyong (left) was back in the commentary box for this year's Chinese Grand Prix.

Prix in 2009 as F1 events in China developed and improved, offering fans live commentary at the Shanghai International Circuit from then on.

"We're all growing up and getting older with F1. We have witnessed the changes in this circuit and city," Pan said. "For those who enjoy this sport, it is a lifetime obsession.

They've secretly supported it around the world. I believe that this is the purpose and significance of our existence as fans. With all this, I believe it is already more than enough."

Pan currently holds track-related positions at Shanghai Juss Sports, where he contributes to the long-term development of Formula One in China.