

Printing from a trade printer

There are many printing companies who will be happy to print your competition photos (and just snap shots), normally much more cheaply and with greater consistency than you could do on your home printer. Normally, you would want to do all the preparation work yourself, so that the printing company just prints the straight file without making any (unwanted) adjustments. This guide is based around preparing the image file in Lightroom and Photoshop, and then printing from DS Colour Labs, but the same basic process should apply to other software and printers.

Before you start, download the printer's print profile. In the case of DS Colour Labs, go to dscourlabs.co.uk, pull down the 'Contact & Help' tab along the top bar and select 'Technical Help'. You need the Fuji Standard profiles, and there is one for Lustre paper and one for Gloss. You will also find instructions about how to download it and where to store it on your computer.

Then for each image you want to print :

1. Use soft-proofing to get an idea of how the print will look. In LR Develop module, tick the Soft Proof Box (if you can't find this, use View>Soft Proofing>Show Proof). A dialogue box opens top R. Make sure the DSCL profile is selected and the Intent is set to Perceptual. The colours may change a little if you have any colours which the monitor can display but the printer can't emulate. If necessary, adjust your edit to suit.
2. Take the image into Photoshop, and embed the print profile in the image file. Go to Edit>Convert to Profile. Make sure that the profile is the DSCL one and that the Intent is Perceptual. Click OK.
3. Now sharpen the image - sharpening in Photoshop is much more industrial strength than LR. NB since this is a destructive process, sharpening (& noise reduction, which is related) should be the last process when editing in PS. There are many different ways to do sharpening in PS, some highly complex, but this is a fairly simple one that works for me (sometimes called Double Pass sharpening):
 - a. Zoom the image to 100%. Then go to Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask. Set the Radius to 0.8 and the Threshold to 0. Then take the Amount all the way to 500%. Everything goes very grainy, especially noticeable in smooth tones. Now move the Amount slider to the left until the grain goes away but everything still looks super-sharp. With my pictures, this is normally somewhere around the 120% mark. Click OK when you're happy.
 - b. Zoom the image back to 'Fit on Screen'. Go a second time to Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask. This time set the Amount to 20 and the Threshold to 0. Then slide the Radius all the way to the right and observe a big increase in contrast. Slide the Radius back to the left until it looks OK, probably something around the 20 pixel mark.
4. The next steps are to resize the Image. All DS Colour Labs do is print your file, so you have to make sure the image is the right size and the canvas size matches one of their paper sizes. For club competitions, we have a mount size of 50cm x 40cm, so your image has to work around this leaving sufficient room for the mount to provide a border. I aim to have the longer side of my image print at 40cm (giving 5cm border either side), which works best if it is printed on A3 paper.

5. So first of all, resize the image. In PS, go to Image>Image Size. Set the longer side to 40cm. NB if the picture is quite square, this may mean that the shorter side is then too big, so you also need to make sure that the shorter side doesn't exceed 30cm. Check the resolution as well, because if you have cropped the picture too much, you may have a low res image that won't print this big. Theoretically, the human eye can't distinguish more than 300 pixels per inch, but you can probably get away with 200. Much below 200, and you need to think about a smaller print.
6. The last step resized the image, but it won't have made it a perfect A3 size, so now make the canvas into an A3 size. Go to Image>Canvas Size. Set the longer side (for A3) to 16.54" and the shorter side to 11.69". Make sure the 'Relative' tick box is not ticked, and the 'Canvas Extension Colour' is White. Click OK. The picture will now appear with a white border. Obviously use different sizes for different size papers, but the principal is that having edited your image, you need to print it on the next standard size up.
7. Then save the file as a full quality jpeg, which can be sent to DS Colour Labs. From their home page, pull down the Prints tab from the top bar, and select Order Online Prints. Pick the print size you want, whether Lustre or Gloss, set finish to 'No Border' and then follow the prompts to upload the image files.