

for independent video producers & filmmakers

DVuser

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SONY PDW-700 Review ▶▶
Mark Stuart field-tests Sony's professional PDW-700 XDCAM HD camcorder.

A day in the life of a cameraman ▶▶
Danny Bishop.



New Sony Solid-State HD Products at NAB ▶▶
XDCAM EX SxS solid-state recording system goes full steam ahead.

i-Cuff ▶▶
i-Cuff eyepiece cushion review.



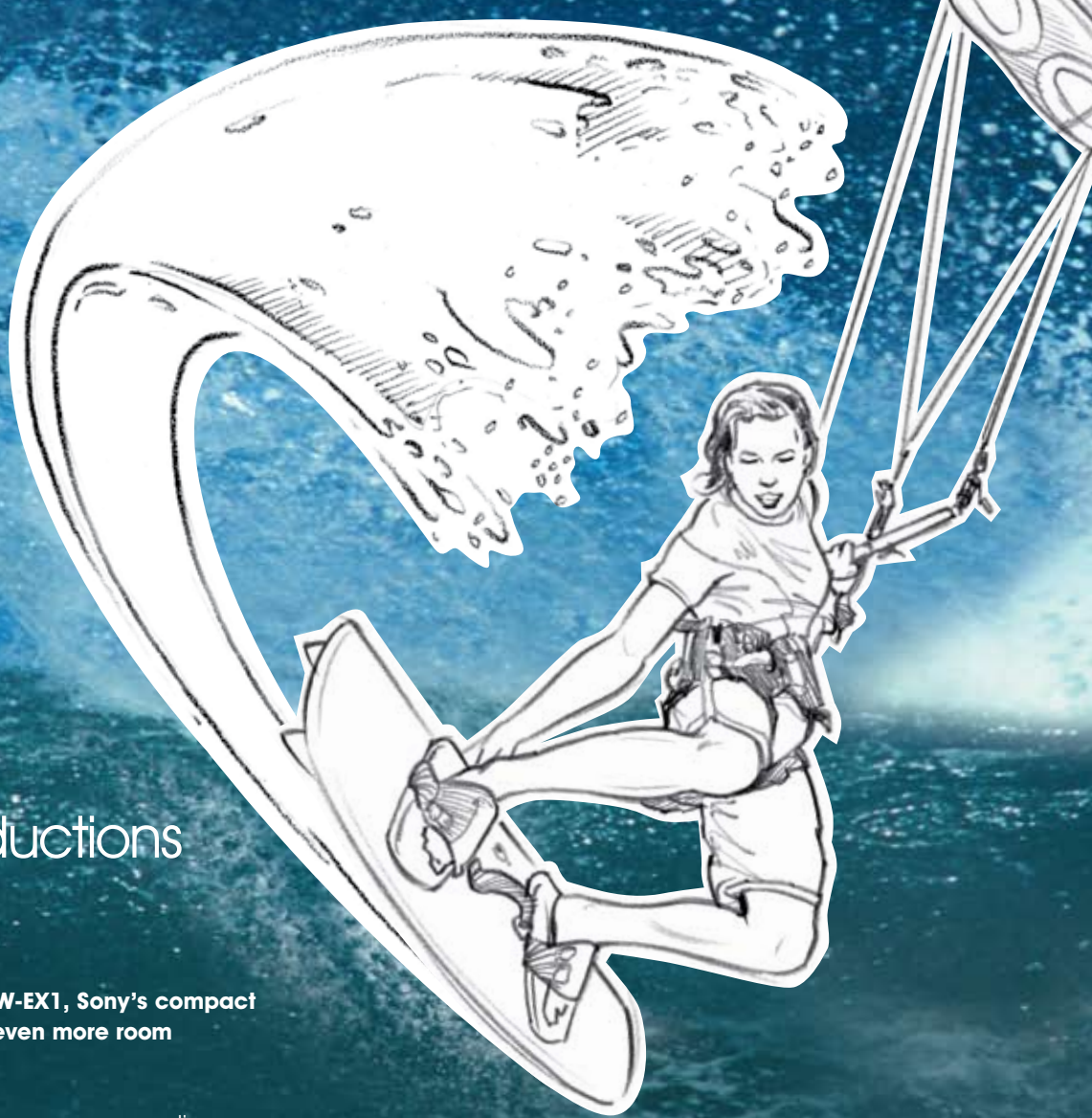
TLS Genus Matte Box ▶▶
Simon Wyndham review.

Steadicam Merlin/Pilot ▶▶
Oliver Horn reviews budget Steadicams.

New PMW-EX3



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Contents

NEWS

- 4. All the latest news from the world of digital video production and editing.

ARTICLES

- 14. Day in the life of a Cameraman
- 20. Latest Sony Solid-State EX products at NAB 2008

REVIEWS

- 6. Sony PDW-700 camcorder review
- 24. i-Cuff review
- 28. Genus Matte Box review
- 30. Steadicam Merlin/Pilot review

REGULAR ITEMS

- 32. Trade Directory
- 35. Classifieds



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Opening Scene

Hello DVuser subscribers and welcome to another edition of the magazine. There are going to be a few changes at DVuser in the coming months. Some of you might have noticed that it has been a good few months since the last issue (issue 8). I've always kept to 4 issues per year (quarterly), but due to my own personal production commitments I have got a tad behind, so what I'm going to be doing in future is producing a printed magazine as and when I have the time (this is how JVC do their Highway magazine, and how Avid do their Access magazine). This could still be 4 issues per year, or it could drop to 3 or even increase to 5, and there will be no specific dates for any given issue. This approach will only make the printed DVuser magazine even better as I will have more freedom to concentrate on quality, not quantity. However, the DVuser website at www.dvuser.co.uk will continue as it always has with loads more content going up in the very near future (around 30 articles, features, stories and reviews). I'm also going to be reinstating the forums once again. The forums were turned off a year ago due to spam-bots signing up all the time, which caused me extra work during what was a busy period for my own video productions. I now have some new phpBB software that will be going live soon. This latest version (along with a few modifications and extra coding) is much more secure than the previous one.



I apologise to everyone who has emailed me with queries of when the next issue is coming out. But please don't sign up for the magazine again as the automated software coding that I use will automatically delete duplicate postcodes/names/addresses etc. I will be sending out e-newsletters again soon to keep readers up-to-date with things.

It would appear (once again) that this issue is somewhat 'Sony Loaded'. Well I won't apologise for this, there is absolutely nothing wrong with a company being innovative and bringing out lots of new products to give customers a huge choice. I can't help the fact that Sony is bringing out a new camcorder every few months.

However, this does make me look like a Sony Fanboy, which is not the case; I simply use the equipment that I personally feel gives me the best possible image quality for the price at the time; right now, that is Sony XDCAM HD and XDCAM EX gear. If in 3 or 4 years when I've had my money's worth from this equipment and the time comes to change it, or upgrade, then as usual I'll look long and hard at the offerings from other manufacturers and I will choose according to my own personal production requirements. There is nothing wrong with other brands or a bit of healthy competition, but at the present time, Sony is miles ahead of everyone else as far as my own video productions go.

I'm looking to get some reviews on some of the new Panasonic models that were announced at NAB recently; both prosumer and high-end professional models such as the AJ-HPX2100 and 3000, as well as the new Canon XL H1s and XL H1a models.

I'm also going to be looking into doing some 'video reviews' as QuickTime movies for the website. Written reviews are all well and good, but sometimes you want to see an actual 3D piece of equipment to get a better perspective on it; this is the next best thing to actually getting your hands on it yourself. In the meantime, enjoy this issue.

Nigel Cooper Founder/Editor DVuser.co.uk



DVuser product review star ratings – how we star up our reviews.

- 1 star = poor, pitiful, appalling, atrocious, inexcusable - 2 stars = mediocre, second-rate, just average
- 3 stars = good, decent, fine, above average - 4 stars = great, first-rate, excellent, amazing, brilliant
- 5 stars = outstanding, exceptional, sheer brilliance, perfection, pure genius

Our final ratings are based on a combination of: build quality - durability - ruggedness - features controls - functionality - usability - cost of ownership i.e. tapes/media cards/servicing costs etc.

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The independent magazine for independent video producers & filmmakers



IANIRO UK EXPANDS ITS RANGE WITH CALIFORNIA SUNBOUNCE

Ianiro UK Ltd has added California Sunbounce light control products to its range after being appointed video channel partner by the German manufacturer. Available in a variety of different sizes, the California Sunbounce system consists of a patented three-dimensional dismantlable framework made from super-strong aluminium. Three types of screen – reflective, translucent or light blocking – can be easily fitted into the frame to create a stiff and stable structure that is ideal for both studio and location shoots.

The California Sunbounce system is designed to be both versatile and robust. Its lightweight construction makes it highly portable and it can be broken down to fit into a tube-like bag with a 5-8cm diameter and a maximum length of 130cm.

Nick Allen-Miles, managing director of Redditch-based Ianiro UK, says:

“Although the core products of Ianiro own manufactured and branded equipment remain the priority for our business, we are always exploring ways of adding value by stocking other products that complement our range. The California Sunbounce system fits this brief because it is a high quality product that is clearly targeted at our existing customer base.”

Ianiro UK supplies and markets the full Ianiro product range within the UK. International agreements prevent the company from handling some of the products sold in Italy, but these have been substituted with a solid line up of equipment from other manufacturers.

“Apart from California Sunburst, we are also the UK agents for ABC Cranes and Dollies, Luggy bags and cases and Kupo Grip equipment, and the European distributor for Libec camera support equipment. Our customer base is growing and now covers more than 20 countries, with 64% of our business carried out overseas.”

About Ianiro UK Ltd:

Ianiro entered the professional lighting market in the 1950s as a family-run business located in the heart of the Italian cinematographic industry, CINECITTA studios in Rome. The present company was established in 1972 by Aldo Ianiro and soon became a specialist in the manufacture of portable and lightweight equipment, suitable to the growing video-photo market. The classic Ianiro product line still carries its original red colour, making it immediately recognisable by the lighting industry worldwide. Besides manufacturing and marketing its own product line, Ianiro imports and distributes exclusive lines for the professional lighting, video and broadcast industries. It also provides turn-key systems, installation, training and after sales support.

For more details visit: www.ianirodirect.com



The California Sunbounce system in action on location in the UK.

Ianiro's New IANILED Range arrive in the UK

IANILED, which received its European premier at IBC 2007 where it won a best of IBC2007 Editors award from TVB Europe, has moved Ianiro into an exciting new area. LEDs were originally introduced for signage and decorating purposes, but the technology's ability to deliver a cool and effective light source has brought it firmly to the attention of the film and television lighting industry, which now sees this as the technology of the future. By combining the Ianiro name with LED technology, the company has reinforced its reputation as an innovator— a reputation it has held since the 1950s when it was the first to create industry portable luminaires using incandescence and halogen sources. The IANILED range is the culmination of three years research into correcting the white balance problems that have previously plagued LED technology. To solve the blue and green bias that makes existing white LEDs look cold, Ianiro has carefully blended selected, latest generation LEDs to create lights that achieve a colour temperature of 5600K – the standard for traditional day lights. This is achieved by incorporating a sophisticated microprocessor within the Driver Domino Cube (patent pending), which allows IANILED products to be dimmable to a constant colour temperature of 5600K and adjustable towards warmer or cooler tones, depending on the environment and the complexion of the person being filmed or photographed. For more details visit: www.ianirodirect.com



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Mark Stuart tries the all-new Sony PDW-700 professional tapeless camcorder

The Sony PDW-700 top-of-the-range three 2/3-inch CCD sensor "Power HAD™ FX" technology, full 1920 x 1080 2.2 megapixel resolution, 14 bit A/D conversion, 4:2:2 sampling, 50 Mbps MPEG-2 Dual Layer professional disc recording XDCAM HD camcorder is scheduled for official worldwide launch at NAB, Las Vegas mid April 2008. The first shipments to UK dealers are expected in the weeks that follow - around the end of April. Sony's preliminary product information indicates a list price of around £21,500 + vat (with street prices of around £17 - £18k expected) for the camera body including the same 2-inch HD 16:9 viewfinder (HDFV-20A model) found on the HDCAM range of camcorders. The camera is scheduled to ship at launch with 1080 50i/60i HD recording only, with a free firmware upgrade which is reported to be available late summer adding support for 1080p and 720p. SD recording and down conversion is currently talked about being a chargeable firmware upgrade around October 2008 (more about this later). Sony very kindly let me have for the weekend, the pre-production model PDW-700 that was shown at Broadcast Live, to take out on a shoot.

Picture Quality

I'm going to go straight to what really matters - what the pictures look like. For those who do not know me, I am as fussy as it gets when it comes to evaluating picture quality. I can assure you that any performance issues do not get past me and I'm definitely a hard customer to please. The pictures I've predominantly been used to seeing and working with in recent years are from my Sony 2/3-inch chip DVCAM DSR-570 (with Broadcast Canon J17 x 7.7). Having also owned and operated various B-Roll HDV cameras and the PDW-350 1/2-inch XDCAM HD camcorder, up till now I've not been content to move completely over to HD because of the trade off in noise and sensitivity with the first generation of HDV/ XDCAM HD camcorders. With the number of new cameras Sony are currently bringing to market, including the PMW-EX1 with its superb front end imaging for the size and money - is this now the



turning point to move all back end production over to HD? And where does the PDW-700 fit in? Quite honestly, the PDW-700 image quality has surpassed all my expectations. Having recorded over two and a half hours of footage in mixed lighting conditions including a wedding and other test recordings, the pictures produced by the PDW-700 are extremely clean and absolutely stunning, with a level of detail and clarity that has to be seen to be appreciated. Using the review supplied Fujinon HA18 x 7.6 BERM-M48 lens, colours were vibrant, blacks were solid black and edges razor sharp. Under normal shooting conditions and viewing close up on a Sony LMD-2450W 1920 x 1080 24-inch Grade 2 LCD monitor - to my eyes, the pictures were amazingly noise and artefact free. It was only when viewing extremely close-up and unreasonably so, with

my eyes just inches from the screen, could I start to see the slightest hint of compression artefacts visible only on the highly detailed, busy scenes with fast motion. Understandably, such scenes are going to expose the weakness of any video compression system and short of recording with the top end formats in the industry such as HDCAM SR, the new 50 Mbps variable MPEG-2 recording rate available on the PDW-700 offers an excellent ratio between performance and data rate for high end applications - very likely comparable to HDCAM quality (although I didn't have the resources to do any comparison tests). The 50 Mbps variable MPEG-2 rate is naturally a step above the highest 35 Mbps variable ratio rate found on the existing 1/2-inch XDCAM HD range and is clearly a significant step up from the 25 Mbps fixed rate used in HDV.



Very fine noise was only barely noticeable, again at extremely close viewing in some mid tone/ shadow areas - however the minimal levels found were negligible to the point of not worth mentioning and were more than likely a limitation of the grade 2 monitor than the camera. It didn't stand out to me initially, but after a colleague brought it to my attention, zooming right into a still frame in Photoshop – there were occurrences of very thin black lines around certain white parts of the image. Like someone has run a fine tipped black pen down the edge of subjects such as where a white shirt or dress meets a contrasting background colour. I must admit the line is very thin and was mistaken by me for a shadow until I zoomed right into the picture. Apparently this condition is found on other camcorder models and can be fixed with adjusting parameters in the paint menu. Bearing in mind the unit I had for review was a pre-production model – this phenomenon (reported to be excessive edge detail with factory default settings) may not be an issue when the production model ships, however it will certainly be worth checking. The black line edge isn't severe enough to put me off the otherwise flawless picture, and since tweaking factory settings to create custom scene files is standard practice in applications where cameras of this grade are used, I personally would seek expert help to create a custom profile that gives the most pleasing picture to suit my purposes. Sony have scene file settings available for existing camcorders in the range available for download from: <http://bssc.sel.sony.com/BroadcastandBusiness/markets/10014/xdcamSceneFiles.shtml> The more I looked closely at the pictures the more I could only manage to find lens defects. The only suspect pictures I could find were hazing/ ghosting around a very bright white set of lights against a dark wooden ceiling. However, I suspect that this was more likely a limitation of the lens given that the edges of the lamps also suffered badly from blue fringing chromatic aberration. The MPEG-2 codec certainly stands up very well at 50 Mbps to complex scenes with fast movement and time will tell if the format gets



the full approval of broadcasters for the likes of fast sports coverage. Sony's new 2/3-inch "Power HAD™ FX" CCD, 4:2:2 sampling, 14 bit A/D conversion and 50 Mbps MPEG-2 codec quite clearly all adds up to make this camera something that may very well become a industry defining standard for many years to come. The front end of this camera

announcement stated sensitivity as F11 at 2000 lux which improves somewhat over the PDW-F335 and PDW-F355 rating of F9. The PDW-700's F11 rating equals the sensitivity of Sony's 2/3-inch crop of SD cameras which simply dismisses any concerns about filming HD in low light with the PDW-700. However F11 is not where this model stops; in practice



is reportedly taken from a studio camera (HDC1500) in the Sony range costing more than twice as much than the PDW-700, which I can quite believe. Sony's move to make this level of performance available to a camcorder in the XDCAM HD product line and also for the first time with 2/3-inch lens mount opening up access to the full range of broadcast 2/3-inch lenses, certainly strengthens the position of XDCAM HD as a serious broadcast format.

Low light shooting

It is a well known phenomenon with HD cameras that due to the laws of physics - HD cameras are less sensitive than comparable SD models due to the light entering the lens being spread over a larger number of pixels. Sony's PDW-700 preliminary product

the pre-production PDW-700 actually beat my DSR-570 in my own real world tests which I find completely astonishing and was hard to believe at first. With the same lens interchanged between tests, lighting kept the same and the cameras set up the same, recording test footage from a test chart, file import in to Canopus Edius then exporting a still image from the timeline to Photoshop – using the colour picker tool on the same white part of the chart image – the PDW-700 luminance level reads higher than the DSR-570 level. I know, my test set up was rather crude and hardly scientific, however it does give a good indication of the sensitivity improvements Sony have been making. It wouldn't surprise me if the final spec announced at the official NAB launch is more



like F12 which will be quite a breakthrough and a turning point in HD camera development (without reverting to using lower resolution sensors with pixel shifting technology, as employed by some other camera manufacturers). Low light filming issues don't stop there – Sony have made significant developments in noise reduction processing allowing higher levels of gain to be used than is conventionally acceptable. Adding 3db, 6db and 9db of gain barely adds any visible noise; it's only at levels of 12db, 18db and above that noise is worth talking about. However at normal viewing distances, even with 18db of gain, the noise is not visible until you move



much closer to the screen. At normal viewing distances, degradation to picture quality is practically nonexistent – quite remarkable! It's also worth mentioning here, that Sony's move away from colour temperature filter dials with physical optical gels inside the camera to the new method of electrical colour correction filters goes somewhat to improving the sensitivity and also avoiding introducing noise. Full respect and credit goes to Sony's R & D department who appear to have been very

busy over the last few years answering the cries from the marketplace. The PDW-700 is a revolutionary product where technology has not only caught up with physics, it surpasses what I thought possible, certainly so soon.

Ergonomics

Weighing in at 4.2kg for the body is a step up from the 3.6kg DSR-570 I am accustomed to using; the weight is comparable to HDCAM models. Within 30 minutes of shoulder mounting I was starting to be aware of discomfort on my shoulder. For reasons unknown to me, perhaps due to durability and environmental/green compliance issues - the old rubber gel-like shoulder pad material used on older Sony models have been replaced with a hard moulded foam-type pad in recent years. I brought up this same issue when reviewing the DSR-450 back in October 2005. With continued use, I'm sure my shoulder will adapt and get used to the new pad in time, however if Sony continue to supply the hard pad, an opportunity exists for third party manufactures to come up with comfortable options available as an aftermarket purchase. Weight balance

is good, being heavy at the back end helps counterbalance a standard broadcast lens up front, battery selection and stackable options will help balance with the heavier broadcast lenses. A new chassis design feature we haven't seen on previous models is a separate LCD display panel which permanently displays remaining battery power, remaining disc storage, as well as displaying timecode which I thought was a useful addition. The chassis and layout of buttons are where you'd expect to find them, my only comments being that I miss



a couple of buttons – such as mic low cut and a button which toggles between shot duration timecode and total timecode in the viewfinder. I have given my feedback to Sony and hopefully such minor issues can be added in a future firmware release, albeit if they do come, will be menu accessible only. You can't beat switches on the camera body itself for being quick

and easy to access in live filming conditions. I'd also like to see more menu functions assignable to the four assignable buttons than the limited set you get to choose from.

LCD display

Situated toward the back of the camera is a 3.5-inch 16:9 colour LCD pop out display. I must say, I prefer the LCD screen position towards the front of the camera (like the ½-inch XDCAM HD models) - being closer to the viewfinder and easier to glance from one to the other, also making it more accessible for a quick glance when the camera is shoulder mounted. The screen toggles as an information panel with timecode and four audio level meters as well as a colour LCD monitor. The resolution on the pre-production model was nothing to write home about, certainly nothing like as sharp as that on the new PMW-EX-1. The LCD fitted was acceptable for a secondary rough check to colour balance also as a framing guide for tripod or low level hand held use, however is not really useful for making accurate exposure or especially focus adjustments. Hopefully the production models will have an improved LCD fitted of comparable if not the same spec as the excellent EX-1 screen.

Audio

The PDW-700 records an impressive four channels of uncompressed 24 bit audio. 24 bit offers a wider dynamic range, more headroom and therefore lower noise floor compared to the more commonly found 16 bit audio standard. I am very pleased to see Sony have added three different attenuation settings in the menu (40db, 50db and 60db) which provide compatibility with different microphone systems and also avoids the need to use attenuation pads when filming in high sound pressure environments. The front microphone input is a 5 pin stereo XLR and Sony's ECM-680s stereo mic is reported to come bundled with the PDW-700. The front stereo input is a bit of a pain for connecting an on-board mounted mono short shotgun microphone, resulting in needing to source a 5 pin stereo to 3 pin mono cable, and if you wish to make use of four mono channels, a splitter cable will be required. Running a mono cable



from one of the two available mono XLR inputs at the rear of the camera is an option, however the longer cable run may get in the way of handling/ operation. I intended using my Sennheiser 416 mic on-board the camera, however this mic has no low cut switch on the mic itself and normally I would use the wind low cut switch on my DSR-570 when filming outdoors. Such a facility was not available on the pre-production PDW-700 so I chose to use the supplied Sony ECM-680s switched to mono for improved directionality. These short shotgun mics when fitted with a Rycote softie, do tend to crop into the top right of the picture on the PDW-700 which was another pain to keep checking and adjusting to its limits. I also used a Sennheiser K6/ME66 as a backup mounted onto a second mic holder (CAC-12), mounted further back to the camera body. I was concerned about noise from the camcorder disc mechanism; in testing there was a low frequency hum being picked up by

the Sennheiser 416 and the K6/66 (when not in the low cut position). The hum was reduced on the ECM-680s mic as the mic appeared to have less bass response in the standard setting. Incidentally, I don't get the same level of low frequency hum using the mic mount on the side of the viewfinder on my DSR-570 nor does the softie get in the shot. During recording, the noise from the disc mechanism does settle down a bit, the whirrs and worst of the hum mostly occur in record pause mode, which is not an issue. Of course, we use radio mics for specific applications; there are other times where single op cameramen require good performance from an on-board mic. Bearing in mind this is a pre-production prototype unit, these concerns may not be an issue with the production model PDW-700. Sony are reportedly close to releasing a new range of 24 bit digital wireless radio mic systems and the PDW-700 is equipped with an internal slot capable of housing this





kind of new digital receiver. I am told that the new system will be capable of receiving two channels in the one unit. The other advantage of digital is the ability to encrypt transmissions.

HD Lens

Sony supplied the PDW-700 with a HD model Fujinon HA18 x 7.6 BERM-M48 lens. I was happy enough with the general sharpness and performance under normal shooting conditions. However, I saw far more occurrences of chromatic aberration than I thought I would, given recent developments manufacturers claim are being made in the development of their current range of HD lenses – certainly the price increase from SD glass to HD glass indicates so. Fitting my 5 year old SD Canon J17x7.7B4 IRSD lens produced pictures which looked just as sharp to me and chromatic aberration didn't appear to be any worse or better than the HD badged Fujinon. I did some basic tests with lens resolution charts and the outcome was - both lenses were practically identical – both being as sharp across the entire image when the zoom was set wide and iris set to F8. As you would expect when wide and opening up the iris fully to F1.7, with both lenses the resolution dropped off and went soft around the edges (beyond the title safe area approx). It would be nice to know what sort of percentage improvement in resolution and chromatic aberration can be expected given the differences in list price between SD and HD in the region of 40% on some models. Personally I'll keep my SD lens for the time being and see how I get on with it.

XDCAM recording

The PDW-700 is fitted with the new disc drive unit capable of recording to both single layer 23.3 GB discs and also the newer 50 GB dual-layer discs. MPEG-2 recording times at the 50 Mbps rate are around 43 minutes for the

single layer disc and around 100 minutes for the dual-layer disc. Recording starts instantly the moment the record button is pressed, which I loved, compared to the usual delay with tape based mechanisms. There are loads of thorough explanations and reviews on the benefits of the XDCAM format and benefits of the files based workflow written elsewhere, so I'll not cover everything again here. XDCAM professional disc offers the best of both worlds – similar media costs to tape but with all the benefits of file based workflow. Having



the choice of purchasing a 16 GB solid state memory card costing around £500 compared to having the choice of a 23.3 GB XDCAM disc for around £16 and a 50 GB XDCAM disc for around £38 is a no-brainer. XDCAM discs can be bought in quantities like tape and archived on a shelf without having the extra hassle of moving data off memory cards and the worry of ensuring a secure and reliable storage solution for often priceless and irreplaceable rushes. I had problems with the time taken to display thumbnails on camera for the first time with a new disc after pressing the Thumbnail button. This happens near instantly on the PDW-355 so I expect this to be an issue only with the pre-production prototype and that the production model will function as expected.

Computer connection

The PDW-700 offers three options of connecting the unit to a computer for file based downloading/ ingesting of clips.

- 1) The i.Link/ firewire port after switching to FAM (File Access Mode) in the menu
- 2) A 10/100 ethernet network port (with configurable IP address in the menu)
- 3) Hi-Speed USB (USB 2.0)

Since there are no tape heads to wear and Sony provide a 7 year guarantee on the laser, using the camera as a source for ingesting will suffice for many independents to begin with. Those whose budget doesn't stretch to the new PDW-HD1500 deck (tentative list price of £14,000) are likely to opt for the PDW-U1 USB-2 connected external disc reader/writer. With a list price of around £1,800, it offers a convenient and cost effective method of ingesting and outputting to/from the computer. However, this device does playback only at the moment, with recording apparently coming as a free firmware update in the summer. The PDW-U1 also offers a sensible backup solution for PMW-EX1 SxS based memory cards.

The Sony supplied software for working with XDCAM files is the PDZ-1. The latest version is a free download from the XDCAM section www.sonybiz.net. V2.23 onwards support the new 50 Mbps recording rate. I did not use this software instead I chose to ingest the files from the PDW-700 via my NLE system – Grass Valley Edius Broadcast. V4.6 supports the new 50 Mbps format and also the new XDCAM HD EX1 format. I chose to connect via the network connection option. First I went into the camera menu and changed the IP address into the numeric range I knew my Netgear routers DHCP server would accept. After switching the camera off and back on again and after connecting a CAT 5 cable, connecting via Edius - it worked first time. Within seconds of the disc spinning up, all the thumbnail clip

images came up on the screen. Within Edius, I chose to download both Proxy files and Hi-Res files. After selecting the clips I wanted (Ctrl + A for all of them) and clicking "Register to Bin", all the clips appeared in my Edius project bin, which I then dragged to the timeline and could start editing. The clever thing is that the low res proxy files clips transfer so quickly and you can start editing immediately whilst the Hi-Res files download in the background. The moment each Hi-Res file is 100% downloaded, the timeline clip automatically updates and displays at full resolution with 4 channel audio. The clips in the BIN and timeline display with a "P" symbol when they are still proxies and a red "H" with progress indicator marks the current clip which is being downloaded in Hi-Res. Clips which are already downloaded at full resolution are displayed without the "P" symbol. I found in practice that I could start working and scrubbing immediately with the full resolution clips already downloaded at the beginning of the timeline. I could work my way along the timeline with the clips further up the timeline downloading away in the background before I got to them - unless I went at great speed and caught up with the proxy files. I found transfer times to be around half real time, therefore an hour of footage took around 30 minutes to ingest. The only issue with editing in native XDCAM HD, as is the case

with all long GOP codecs is the hit that the extra processing has on the computer CPU decompressing the GOP sequence into individually editable frames, which has a knock on effect to the real time performance of CPU based filters and effects. Edius solves this issue by offering the facility to convert the XDCAM HD clips in the project bin to their own frame based HD codec - Canopus HQ. Compatibility with NLE systems is something that will need to be checked. At the moment, Edius is one of few editing packages that currently support the 50 Mbps XDCAM HD format. There is of course the option of ingesting via HD-SDI to a frame based codec which offers increased compatibility



amongst editing systems and a slicker editing experience working with complete frames, although some of the file based workflow advantages will be lost taking this route.

Film looks

24P is not supported by the camera as are variable frame rate recording – under and over cranking. I believe these features require additional electronics and not simply a firmware upgrade. One can speculate from

adjusted to create specific looks. A Sony memory stick allows custom scene files to be saved and transferred between cameras and as mentioned earlier, custom scene files can be downloaded from Sony's web site. SD recording and output
The PDW-700 will ship at launch with 1080 50/60i recording only. SD recording and down conversion is currently talked about being a chargeable firmware upgrade around October 2008. This upgrade will bring a range of

Timeline still from 1920x1080 footage shot on PDW-700



this that the XDCAM family will likely see the release of a big brother version of the PDW-700 in the future. As mentioned at the beginning of this review – Sony have indicated that a firmware update will be available late summer adding support for 720p. The menu pages on the PDW-700 are as extensive as other top end models and allow the usual array of parameters such as gamma curves, saturation, matrix, detail and so on to be

formats from DVCAM to IMX with on board down conversion and output options. I must admit being quite surprised at the concept of Sony charging for what is really a basic feature. Depending if Sony go ahead with this strategy of charging and what pricing level is set, Sony may be in for a negative reaction and criticism from the marketplace. A representative from Sony made the point that Sony could build the cost of the SD option into

the PDW-700 price, but would rather keep the price of the unit as low as possible for those who don't need onboard SD facilities and will shoot everything HD and use their NLE to down convert. Time will tell exactly what happens here. With HD delivery to end users



on Blu-ray or the web only likely to make up a small but growing percentage of delivery to clients, SD DVD will likely continue to be the dominant delivery format for some time to come. I tried a quick SD down conversion of the PDW-700 HD footage by changing the Edius project presets from HD to SD and

Conclusion

The picture quality the PDW-700 delivers is pretty much faultless. It doesn't really get much better than this! It just begs the question, where do we go from here? Technological advancements that Sony have made in their high end studio cameras have gone in the brand new front end of the PDW-700 which will surely set a standard in Broadcast HD video imaging in a ENG style camcorder body for many years to come. The clarity and detail of the picture whilst being essentially noise free at full 1920 x 1080 resolution is incredible for the under £20K price tag. The sensitivity improvements and F11 rating (possibly F12 by the time of launch) will make a huge difference for event and actuality filming - delivering the best possible picture in available light. There will be few occasions that camera operators need to use gain with the PDW-700 but when they do, up to +18db is very useable with the new noise reduction processing software. On the audio side of things - having four channels of uncompressed 24 bit audio, offers more than enough flexibility

– as you would expect. With running times around 100 minutes with the dual-layer 50 GB disc, for the time being there is little need for Sony to move away from the proven MPEG-2 long GOP format to the newer and more compression efficient AVC codecs which would otherwise offer longer running times for the same quality. I have been reassured from a reliable source that custom scene file settings fixed the thin black edge issue with whites on the PDW-350 so the same results are likely to be expected with the PDW-700. All the same, the edge issue is minor and the untrained eye is unlikely to detect without pointing out and magnifying the image. It really says it all when one of my biggest complaints is the slightly uncomfortable shoulder pad. The PDW-700 offers a significant step forward for PDW-330/350 users who are looking to upgrade. If 24P and under/ over cranking is important to you or short films is your main genre, the PDW-700 does not support these features and it may be worth holding back for a very likely big brother model to come along. For everyone else who wants the very



playing from the timeline out to the monitor in SD. The SD picture was again amazingly clean, noise and artefact free, more detail than the DSR-570 DVCAM and looked cleaner. However, the edge detail was too high - the diagonal lines were flickering. Naturally this is an issue with HD to SD scaling with Canopus Edius and is another subject beyond this review - nothing to do with the PDW-700.

and level of performance. At last we have a top spec 2/3-inch CCD camera that will elevate the profile of XDCAM HD and the XDCAM professional disc format. The 50 Mbps variable MPEG-2 recording rate goes a long way to delivering pictures which are amazingly artefact free in all but highly detailed scenes with extreme fast motion shooting conditions

best full HD resolution imaging quality you can get for under £20K – I have no hesitation recommending the PDW-700. My purchase order will be going in just after I've spoken to my bank manager!

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A day in the life of a cameraman

Danny Bishop

A day in the life of a cameraman - a hard thing to write about, as one of the reasons I got into the job was the unique opportunity it gives you to have change on a day to day basis and a great first-hand insight to the lives of others.

My name is Danny Bishop and I have been a cameraman since 2001 when I left University. Since then I have worked on a lot of different productions, including Jack Osbourne Adrenaline Junkie, Bring Back Star Wars and Bring Back Dallas, Worlds Apart in Africa, Celebrity Big Brother and also various Pop Promos. I have been very fortunate to have travelled the world with my job, and have filmed in some of the most

Holding and we had been following him and 5 members of the public around the world and putting them through extreme activities. The final stunt in India was to take our guys to a field and send them up a palm tree to get the honey from the hives of 30,000 bees. For starters, I have an absolute fear of bees, and this worried me because of the worry of getting stung, but also it sounded to me like it was going to be a very complicated shoot. Complicated seems like an understatement now, because little did I know how hard the shoot was going to be.

When we travel we always take a lot of camera equipment away with us, and on this occasion, in the UK prior to leaving, I was

to travel with. We had also sorted from the UK a camera crane which, I decided, was not only the best way to film the bees as it would give me a nice range of camera angles, but also by putting the camera on the end of a 24ft crane it would put some distance between me and the bees!!!!

In India, the day before the shoot, I panicked and decided that, in fact, there was not going to be enough light, so I spoke to our Indian fixer and we arranged to get three red heads sent over; at a hire cost of about £4 a day this seemed like a great idea. I also asked him to get two generators, as my experience with them is that they very seldom work and because of the nature of time with this project,



extreme of locations such as – the Sahara, the Himalayas, the Amazon, the Arctic Circle and out at sea in Hawaii.

The great thing about working on productions like these is that it allows you to be very adaptable and go with the flow of things. I thought rather complacently at the ripe old age of 29 that I had seen it all – but this I learned was very wrong, and nothing could have prepared me for the day's shoot I had in India on one sunny day in December. It was a great reminder that I don't know it all and that every day you learn new things.

I had been working on a show with one of the world's best climbers called Leo

checking that I had everything I needed, when someone in the office mentioned that we would be filming this shoot at night and also we couldn't shine light on the bees as they react to it and go crazy. However, they had been told that bees don't react to red light, so could I get some red gel to put over the front of the lights. I had only taken with me an HMI sun gun and also a little hand basher light. Whilst in the UK, I thought this would be enough light, as those two lights kick out a lot of light, and I thought if I could get them up in the trees next to the palm tree they would light them up nicely. Also on a practical level the lights are very small and lightweight and easy

we simply couldn't afford for anything to go wrong. We arrived the day before the shoot and the first set-back we had was that the tree was about 60 ft high and we only a ladder that was about 20 ft. "Not a problem," we were instructed, and so it was arranged that the locals would build us three ladders (as we had to have three people up there) and they would have them done for us by the following morning. Apart from that though, we felt we had everything in hand and we were ready to go.

The next day we arrived at 12 o'clock sharp and we were ready to go, except that the three ladders they had built were still only 20

ft tall, and there was no way we were going to get any higher. So the health and safety riggers we had on hand decided that they could put three rope ladders up the tree and that would work just as well. We left them building the ladders and I met my camera crane crew – all 9 of them! In England we use the camera crane and it is usually a one-man team with an assistant. Indians do it very differently, and it was a bit stressful as it felt like I was managing a team. However, each man does his own job and eventually we got it built. I was filming with a DSR 450 and a Fuji 4.5 wide angle lens, and when I went to place this on the front end of the jib all was going well until we realised that they had



brought all the cables for a film camera and not a television camera, despite the fact I had repeatedly checked this via phone and e-mail. This meant I had no control over the zoom, iris, and focus of the camera. After much deliberation, it was decided that one of the jib guys knew someone who was only two hours away who had a DSR 300 and that would definitely work. I asked him to phone him and I sat and watched in amazement as all 9 of the jib crew took turns to talk and repeatedly shout down the mobile at the guy. 30 minutes later, it was decided he could definitely come but could he bring his brother for company on the long journey at a cost of £30 a day. I of course replied "Yes, for goodness sake, just get him here," before watching again as all 9 of the crew talked to him. So, as we were not to have a camera for about 3 hours we decided to check out the ladder situation.

The riggers had since decided that the rope ladders were not going to be functional, and therefore they would hang three ropes, and the contributors could jumar up the rope, (a clever climbing technique for getting up a rope) which seemed sensible and functional and a lot safer. The only remaining thing to do was rig the lights. I placed the HMI in the tree alongside one red head, and then put two red heads on the ground with the lighting stands at

their top height. They all had red gels placed over the front of them and we were ready to go. All we had to do now was wait for it to get dark. Oh, and get a new generator as the one that we had, (which was an old car engine) did not work, and even though I had asked for two, we didn't get two, so we had to get another one, which I was assured would definitely be here by the time it was dark... We sat and waited.

With renewed vigour, the new generator and the darkness arrived, and I instructed the spark to turn the lights on. I had completely covered the lights in gel (back and front) with the idea that no white light would escape. However, the spark (unbeknown to me) had taken a gel off one of them, and when the lights went on, the light nearest us instantly shot a massive beam of light at the hive. The noise that followed was like no other I have experienced and instantly a swarm of bees were flying into the light. Panic set in and I was screaming for someone to get the lights turned off. Straight away the noise died down and suddenly the full impact of the danger of the situation sunk in. A few phone calls were made to the London office about our situation, the unpredictability and the danger. "Should we continue?" Providing we did everything we were told to by the Health and Safety team we would be fine!!!! We promptly got into our bee suits and rang through to our doctor, who was

in the neighbouring village, asking that maybe she should be here. However, as an Indian person called her, and by the time Chinese whispers had gone down the line, she had understood the message that the shoot had been cancelled and to go back to the hotel. So we had to wait a further hour to get her on the location and so enable us to carry on.

Finally the camera arrives. Bizarrely, even though I had specifically asked, it doesn't shoot 16:9 it only shoots 4:3, but no way we could do anything now with that, so I had to go with it and placed the camera on the JIB. Once it was all set up the first problem arose - the zoom constantly zoomed, which is an absolute nightmare. I asked the head technician if he could sort it and he replied "Yes, just don't zoom once I have tweaked it." This meant that I had two options, not zoom, or use it as it was and have to keep adjusting the zoom, which is very annoying.

Bearing in mind it is now about 9pm and we have been working for 9 hours and not even done one shot, we decided to turn the lights on and to start getting some wides of the tree. The lights went on and it looked fantastic - a palm tree all red and black in a dark forest is a pretty spectacular sight. And so I started jibbing around the tree in 4:3 with my zoom zooming, everything looking fantastic. Except, after about 5 minutes, the gels started to melt as the lights were completely covered with

red gel and white light was starting to spill on the hives. So we had to stop, go back into darkness and put more red gel around the lights but leave enough distance between the lights and the gel to let the air escape without the light leaking and the gels melting. This was something we continually had to do throughout the night, nearly every half-hour or so. Also by now we had discovered the headlights we all had on were attracting the bees, and we also had to cover them with red gels.

swarmed the cameraman in the tree, (as he was next to the two lights,) and despite being in his bee suit he couldn't stand the noise and the bees being all over him, and after filming only about 3 minutes of tape he got down from the tree and the remainder of the filming of the hives was to be done only with the camera on the jib!! It was a fantastic sight though, seeing Leo get the bees off the hive. As they left and flew away, more and more of the hive was becoming exposed and you could see the

The brilliance of this job is the unpredictability- what's going to happen? How's it going to happen? And what's going to stand in your way? All these things are what interest me so much about my job. I love being able to problem-solve and sort things out, and most of the time I do this with just basic sign language to people who don't speak English. All these things happen most of the time before you have even thought about turning the camera on and setting the iris, and that's



By now we had made the decision that it was too difficult and dangerous to get everyone up the tree and had decided that Leo our presenter would be the only person who would do it. This was for a number of reasons but the main one being health and safety

It was now about 1.30 am. We got the climbing cameraman up in the tree opposite, a few bees swarming, but not interested in anyone. The lights went on and the cameras started rolling (and still zooming,) and with fear and trepidation our presenter started the climb up into the tree. It looked fantastic, very beautiful in a weird and wonderful way. Armed with leaves that were alight and smoking he started to smoke the bees. Within seconds the bees went nuts, nearly half of them started swarming anything with a light, and the noise sounded like a drone from a big engine. (Not too dissimilar to the generator we could hear purring in the background!) Instantly they

hexagonal shape of the hive emerging in the tree. We had been told that this would take about 15 minutes. However, Leo hung in that tree for the best part of nearly two hours, the smoke didn't seem to be smoking enough and the bees wouldn't leave the hive. Meanwhile the bees that had left were still attacking the lights, the gels were slowly melting and my camera was still zooming! After what felt like an eternity Leo finally managed to get the honey and get down from the tree. He'd done it and we had a fantastic sequence in the bag.

After we had finished the wrap up interviews and finished packing we got to our transport around 6 am - all in all a very long day. Then we got on our bus that took us back to the hotel. In the comfort of my room I started to unpack my bag only to discover a few stowaway bees. After a bitter battle with a rolled up copy of FHM, I went to bed a very happy man.

what I love about being a cameraman. You work with great friends, and despite the hard work, you end up with a great sequence that hopefully people will enjoy.

Danny Bishop is a full time Lighting Cameraman. Much of his work has involved filming abroad, particularly extreme and often harsh environments such as the Sahara, the Amazon and the Himalaya. Locations which require not only working with specialist equipment but the personal skills necessary to operate successfully and professionally in such environments.

Danny has worked on productions for Sky, ITV, Channel 4, BBC1, to name a few, including: Jack Osbourne - Adrenaline Junkie, Series 1,2 & 3, Celebrity Big Brother, BBC One - One Ident, Panorama, Kelly Osbourne Turning Japanese, Trevor Tonight, Extreme Celebrity Detox and Child of Our Time.



Lance Corporal Steve Candlish Camera Man Read Devils

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Sony continue to go full steam ahead with their professional XDCAM EX SxS solid-state recording system.



PMW-EX3 Solid-State Interchangeable Lens HD Camcorder

Well it would appear that there is simply no stopping Sony. Just a few short months ago they launched themselves into the solid-state HD camcorder market with the PMW- EX1. The EX1 has proved to be a formidable smash hit, so much so that Sony's production line is struggling to keep up with demand. Sony have just announced (NAB April 2008) something even more spectacular; say hello to the all-new PMW-EX3. The EX3 is basically an EX1, but with the option of interchangeable lenses. There are of course a few other slight differences, which I will come to later.

You'll notice by the pictures that the EX3 is notably larger than the EX1; it is in fact what Sony refer to as a "semi shoulder-mounted" camcorder. At first glance the EX3 has a vague resemblance to Canon's famous XL series camcorder, namely the XL H1; but that's where the similarity ends. The EX3 takes half-inch interchangeable lenses, but with a different mount to that found on Sony's professional half-inch shoulder-mount XDCAM HD camcorders. Having said that, the EX3 will ship with an included adapter to allow use of standard half-inch lenses (such as those currently used on Sony's XDCAM HD full size camcorders such as the F330, F350, F335, and F355) to be used; standard B4 mount. And better still, this adapter incorporates the hot shoe contacts like those found on the dedicated Fujinon half-inch XDCAM HD lenses. This will allow information to be passed from the camcorder to the lens, e.g. exposure control. For use in a studio configuration the RM-B150/B750 remote controllers will adjust basic camera parameters

such as gain, iris, white balance, pedestal, and gamma through the 8-pin remote connector on the PMW-EX3 camcorder. Why use a different half-inch mount, you might ask. In a nutshell it's down to ergonomics and rigidity/strength. Due to the size and shape of the camcorder body, the lens mount had to be designed somewhat differently. Because the chips in the EX3 are half-inch there will be no change in focal length when using any other standard half-inch B4 mount lens from Canon and Fujinon. However, there will be a small increase in focal length when using standard 35mm film lenses.

The EX3 will ship with the same lens

Super-16mm filmmakers start asking "Can I now do Varicam-style frame-ramping during a shot?" I'm afraid the answer is no, it only works when out of record mode. Sony have simply moved the over/under-cranking feature out of the menus and onto the body itself by means of manual push/dial; right where it should be. This new external Framerate button lights up with a cool blue ring-light around the outside when pushed in for 3 seconds, so you know you are in Framerate mode. Push again



and hold in for a further 3 seconds to turn off. For me

personally, this is the best thing Sony could have

done. If you use over/

under-cranking as often as I do you will appreciate the convenience of being able to push this button and dial in the framerate without having to scroll through the menus; thank you Mr Sony!

Like the EX1, the new EX3 records to exactly the same format i.e. three half-inch 1920x1080 CMOS HD chips at a variable bit rate of 35mbps. Similarly the EX3 also has two SxS card slots.

The next thing you'll notice about the EX3 is what appears to be the biggest viewfinder you ever saw; allow me to explain. What you

that is built into the EX1, with the main obvious difference being an interchangeable version. Sony have also decided to add an optical image stabilizer button on the lens, as opposed to in the menus like that of the EX1.

Another small difference (though to me, personally, this is a very big deal indeed) between the new EX3 and its smaller sibling the EX1, is the addition of a framerate dial set on the side of the EX3's body. Before all you

are seeing is basically the same fold-out LCD screen found on the EX1, only Sony have stuck a huge magnified eye piece on the front of it. Personally, I think this is a great idea as the LCD screen on the EX1 is quite simply the best on the planet. The same can't be said of the viewfinder found on the EX1, with its rather

questionable image quality; and that's putting it nicely.

Sony have decided to throw this viewfinder away (good choice) and turn the LCD screen into the ultimate high-definition viewfinder; eat your heart out Canon XL H1. The EX3 also sports an ingenious fold-out shoulder-mount system. Though this does not balance the camera on the shoulder like a conventional full size shoulder-mounted camcorder, it is more akin to that of a shoulder support system hence the EX3 is somewhat front-heavy during hand-held/shoulder use. Not too dissimilar to that of Canon's XL H1. The EX3 is not available body only, it comes with a standard lens similar to that found on the EX1. However, Fujinon are also bringing out a dedicated EX3 wide-angle lens. It could be argued that the EX3 is what the EX1 should have been, but this is not the case. The EX3 is aimed at a different market altogether. Corporate video producers and wedding videographers will be more than happy with the built in lens of the EX1, and its focal range capabilities. Hence they could put that money they save to buying a tripod and lighting kit etc. Independent filmmakers and wildlife videographers will prefer the EX3 and its interchangeable lens options, especially with

35mm adapters from the likes of Letus for example (whom I've been informed are making an adapter to fit directly into the EX3's body), allowing the use of 35mm stills lenses for that film depth-of-field film-look. Wildlife videographers, on the other hand, will appreciate being able to fit telephoto lenses to film that far away leopard for example. EX1 is not redundant or deleted, far from it. EX3 is a different camcorder altogether, not a replacement. Think BMW 3-series and BMW



5-series, different size cars for different people's requirements. The EX3 is an addition to the EX family; expect a smaller (A1 size) camcorder to appear too. And finally, why EX3 and not EX2? simple, Sony don't do even numbers.

Other features over the EX1 include BNC timecode in/out, Genlock and remote lens socket for studio operation as it controls many features of the lens such as exposure and white balance etc. The rear end of the EX3 looks much more professional than the rather flat/bland back end of the EX1. The EX3 now has some new professional BNC type connectors, while other connectors have been moved to the side of the camera. On the right side of the EX3 we now have a composite BNC output, a phono out, and an S-video connector. This makes the EX3 the most

versatile HD camcorder in its class. The on/off switch is the same as on the, still very fiddly and it is hard to nock it into media mode when turning the camera off, but you do get used to it. Same for the ND filter switch, which is just as imprecise as before making it difficult to select NDs number 1 (middle position). Shame they weren't improved upon for the EX3. The SxS card slot is slightly different now as it opens in a slightly different way, there is also a 'gutter' at the top to allow the cable to run out when using the new PHU-60K 60GB hard drive, which attaches to the camera via the back (slot B) SxS slot instead of the unreliable FireWire method. EX1 owners will know there is no gutter for the cable, so I'd recommend putting the lead into the back slot (slot B) and closing the sliding door back until it butts up against it, at least this will leave majority of the internals protected from the elements as slot A will be protected by the sliding door, and slot B will be protected by the inserted card/end of the lead. Finally, a small plastic cover now covers the audio pots so you won't accidentally move them anymore. The tentative recommended retail price of the EX3 will be £5995 inc. vat. This is approximately £1500 more than the EX1. The PMW-EX3 is due to ship in July at a tentative retail price of £5995.

PMW-EX30 XDCAM EX SxS Card Recording Deck

Sony have also added a professional deck to the XDCAM EX family of products. The PMW-EX30 is a full size professional deck with two slots on the front for SxS cards. Unlike the EX1 and EX3 camcorders, the PMW-EX30 deck has a built-in DV down-convert feature. This means your high-definition footage can be converted to standard-definition directly from the deck and into your edit suite via FireWire. When using USB2 the deck acts as a card reader/writer. In operation mode the EX30 is not too dissimilar to the EX1 or EX3 camcorders in



the way it works e.g. thumbnail menu system. This deck also has an input so it can also record, from an HD/SDI source camera for example or Edicast HD recording. You can also dump clips from one card to another. The LCD display is 3.5 inches. Power is by means of DC operation, which means that it can be powered using V-lock batteries using a Hawk-Woods adapter. Other features include a HD/SDI input, which will be useful for in-car or helicopter recording. This can also be used to feed a non-linear system. The deck also has an HDMI output, useful for hooking up directly to your HD LCD television set. The PMW-EX30 is due to ship in July for a tentative price of £3000

PHU-60K SxS Professional 60GB HardDisc Recorder

Although Sony has 8 and 16GB SxS cards, and the new 32GB card, there is still a need for a device that allows longer, continuous recording times. Sony has recognised this fact, so they are adding yet another device to the XDCAM EX family of products, by means

my opinion is not suitable for use in the field when connected to camcorders) used on other similar devices. The recording capacity of the PHU-60K is 200 minutes at full 1920x1080 HD 35mbps quality, or 260 minutes at 25mbps. These long recording times now put professional HD solid-state broadcast quality recording into the hands of even wedding videographers; not that anyone would want to broadcast a wedding. Long recording durations will also come in handy for those long drawn-out corporate speeches; yawn. Having said that, the hard drive should have been much bigger in my opinion i.e. 500GB as two 32GB cards will give you 64GB anyway, which is bigger; come on Sony.

When attached to a camcorder, the hard-disk unit functions just like an SxS PRO™ card, with thumbnail views available on the LCD panel of the PMW-EX1 or PMW-EX3 camcorders or PMW-EX30 deck. A new “dumping” system is being used to protect the HDD from a 1.5m height drop, and buffer memory is being used to allow recording



of a new professional hard-disc recorder. This hard-drive recording device can also be used to back up your SxS cards in the field without the need for a laptop. The capacity of the PHU-60K is 60GB; hence the name. The key difference between this device and other similar hard-drive recorders is that PHU-60K connects directly to the EX1 or EX3 camcorders via an SxS lead i.e. the lead comes directly out of the PHU-60K and directly into one of the SxS slots on the camcorder. This is far superior to the somewhat unreliable FireWire method (the FireWire lead can easily be pulled out accidentally during recording. FireWire is an IT connection method and in

immediately after powering on. Also, a salvage function enables restoration of content damaged by battery/cable disconnection or accidental powering down during recording. A 3-D G sensor and the buffer memory allow for stable recording. When the G sensor detects that the unit is being dropped, the head of the HDD is immediately parked to protect the HDD. The content is temporarily stored in the buffer memory and then restored in the HDD when it is operating again. Another useful feature is the ability to transfer footage directly from SxS cards to the PHU-60K. This is done by simply inserting a card into one slot and the PHU-60K into the other slot and doing an internal copy from A to B.

Again, this makes fieldwork a breeze when it comes to archiving as there is no need for a laptop. The PHU-60K can also be used as a stand alone hard-drive with your laptop or other computer editing system via the USB 2.0 interface. So it is possible to edit your productions directly from the PHU-60K. Also, when using the U30 (smallest battery) you can achieve 10 hours of operation. The PHU-60K mounts directly onto the back of the camera using the included bracketery. The PHU-60K is due to ship in July for a tentative retail price of £750

SPB-32 32GB SxS card

Sony have also announced a 32GB SxS card to complement the currently available 8GB and 16GB cards.

The 32GB card will store 100 minutes of full 1920x1080 high-definition footage recorded at the highest quality of 35mbps and 140 minutes of 1440x1080 video at 25Mbps. Two 32 GB SxS cards will give you a constant recording time of 4 hours in full 1920x1080



35mbps high quality HD mode. This is more than what most of us will ever need for an entire day's shooting.

The SPB-32 is due to ship in September. Price to be announced.

Clip Browser version 2

The current version of Clip Browser (1.1) does a perfectly good job, but the new version 2 has some phenomenal new features. The Clip Browser software will allow you to bring clips in to your edit system directly from the EX1 and EX3 camcorders, the PMW-EX30 deck, the PHU-60K hard-disc recorder, and of course Sony's USB SxS card reader. You can also add meta-data in abundance. The new version 2 also has the ability to down-convert to standard definition within the software; a useful feature for those who don't want to buy the PMW-EX30 deck. You can also “right click” and choose export to MXF, or export to DV. Version 2 of the Clip Browser software is available for both Mac and PC and will be available as a free download from the Sonybiz.net website when it becomes available later in



owners for example can buy a PDW-U1 for £1595 and a bunch of blank 23GB or 50GB XDCAM HD Optical Discs from either Sony, TDK, Fuji or Maxell for approximately £15 each for the 23GB discs or £35 for the 50GB discs. You can then go ahead and drag/drop your P2 MXF HD video files directly onto Professional Optical Disc for safe future archiving (Sony's Professional Optical Disc has a 50 year shelf life). Digital stills photographers can also use this method for archiving their digital photos, RAW, JPEG, or otherwise. This is a superior (and much safer) archiving solution than the somewhat questionable and risky use of standard computer hard-drives, which we all know can give up the ghost and die without notice.

Current XDCAM HD owner/users will already know that blank XDCAM discs have an allocated file space of 500MB.

This 500MB (as you know) can be used for relevant production files such as Word scripts, photos, Photoshop files and other relevant files. Sony are basically bringing out a firmware update that will allow the entire disc to be mapped this way; as opposed to just 500MB, which is currently the case. To format the disc this way simply insert it into the U1 and it will be formatted automatically in a few seconds, just like the current formatting method when inserting a blank disc into an

2008.

Clip Browser version 2 also allows direct import into AVID systems at full 35mbps in MXF format, something currently not available natively with AVID systems. Sony are also working with software plug-in company Main Concept, who are building some additional functionality for Clip Browser version 2. One such function will be the ability to take your 35mbps HD footage and using the Main Concept option you will be able to up-convert it to 50mbps in 4:2:2 colour space directly onto XDCAM HD Professional Optical Disc using the PDW-U1 USB Disc reader/writer. This is

internet output options too.

Clip Browser version 2 will be available in June as a free download from the Sonybiz.net website. Also the additional option modules from Main Concept will be available at the same time, but they will not be available from the Sony website, they will be a purchasable option from the Main Concept website. Blu-Ray Using Blu-Ray discs, it is easy to archive/back up the SxS MP4 files. In Clip Browser version 2, it is simply a case of dragging the native MP4 HD video files directly onto a Blu-Ray disc. Or if you are using Adobe Premiere, you can author a native HD DVD

using Encore, then export it directly to Blu-Ray DVD for a native HD Blu-Ray DVD disc in full 35mbps.

XDCAM HD Professional Optical Disc

If you own a PDW-U1 USB Optical Disc reader/writer, you will soon have some really super cool, and I do mean 'SUPERCOOL' writing options; Panasonic P2 users and Digital Stills Photographers read on.

When the write capability is added to the U1 (imminently) it will be for standard XDCAM HD formats only i.e. 1440x1080 35mbps 4:2:0 and 1920x1080 50mbps 4:2:2. However, get ready for the supercool bit, later in 2008 Sony are going to release



kind of a 'transcoding' process.

Another function of the Main Concept plug-in will allow you to take any clip from the Clip Browser and to export it as Windows Media, Apple QuickTime, PSP file, iPod file, and even YouTube files. This is a great way of saving video files for multi-media web purposes. No more need to learn the art of compression for the web; nice!

So, native SxS HD footage, DV out, AVID out, Transcode out, and a bunch of web/

a further free firmware update for the U1 Optical Disc reader/writer that will allow you to back up and archive absolutely any type of file or folder your heart desires i.e. just like a conventional hard-drive or blank Blu-Ray disc. This is brilliant news not only for Sony XDCAM owner/users, who can store their native XDCAM HD and XDCAM EX MP4 files, but it is also brilliant news for Panasonic P2 owner/users, or anyone else who needs a cheap and reliable long-term back-up/archive solution. P2



XDCAM HD camcorder.

So there it is, Sony has well and truly hit the professional solid-state HD market with a vengeance, making more noise than a Rhino in a glass Green House. The XDCAM EX range is now a true family of products consisting of two camcorders, a deck, an SxS USB card reader, 3 different capacity SxS cards in 8, 16 and 32GB, an SxS Hard Disc recording unit, superb free Clip Browser/Transfer software, and the U1 Optical Disc reader/writer for archiving. And it will only grow and get bigger from here.

For further details and full tech specs visit: www.sonybiz.net/ex



i-Cuff

Is it really possible to write 1339 words about a viewfinder eyepiece cushion? Nigel Cooper certainly thinks so.

Ok, you would be forgiven for thinking “what can you possibly say about an after-market eyecup?” Well, there is plenty actually. Here I’m going to explain what types are available and why the i-Cuff is the best option.

First of all, allow me to explain exactly what an eyecup is supposed to do. It is supposed to prevent stray light from entering the viewfinder so you have a clear high definition glare/ghost-free image, allowing you to focus properly and check for critical exposure; something you can’t do with stray light entering in the side of the eyecup. A good eyecup will also go a long way in preventing eye fatigue and providing much needed comfort for the camera operator. Here is a brief run-down of the three types of eyecup available, they are: the standard rubber eyecup that comes with camcorder, the foam/chamois eye-cushion variety, and finally, the i-Cuff.

Option 1. Standard Rubber Eyecup included with camcorder (free):

This is the worse option of them all; sure, it kind of does the job, but it basically sucks in real life shooting situations. The cheap rubber eyecup that comes with most camcorders is adequate at best, but light usually comes spilling in from the edges as you press your eye up against it. This basic rubber eyecup will only give you a minimum of protection from glare and stray ambient light, hence focussing and exposure will be compromised. Also, if you wear glasses, the rubber eyecup can be a real pain in the proverbial, as your glasses push the rubber edges of the eyecup away, allowing stray light to enter into the viewfinder giving horrible glare and ghosting. You will also hate the fact that grease and other nasty deposits get all over your glasses, especially when shooting in hot weather.

If you don’t wear glasses, you will be familiar with that uncomfortable feeling you get when shooting in adverse weather conditions such as sweltering summer heat or humid rain. In the summer, beads of sweat and perspiration get all over the rubber eyepiece, making life difficult when focusing and adjusting exposure. In humid rain the eyepiece usually fogs up and it is like looking through a mist filter number 3.

Personally I think the stock rubber eyecups that come with most camcorders are next-door to useless, for any serious shooting applications anyway.

Option 2. Chamois Eye-cushion (£3 to £5 each)

This second option helps somewhat, but is still

not perfect. These cheap (almost disposable) chamois eye cushions fit directly over the stock rubber eyecup that comes with the camcorder by simply stretching over it. They have a small amount of foam padding and a thin chamois

rubber eyepiece will prevent you catching something horrible from the previous operator e.g. Conjunctivitis or some nasty tropical eye infection.



cover. This will give your eye an element of padding, and the chamois will absorb perspiration and sweat from your eye. It will only prevent stray light a little more than the standard rubber eyecup, but not much more, it is designed more for a slight improvement in comfort for the operator than anything else. The Chamois Eye-cushion will get dirty/greasy quite quickly, after just a few days shooting in the summer, so you will need to buy a stock of them, this is a false economy when compare to the i-Cuff; see below.

However, the Chamois Eye-cushion can be good protection from health issues if you regularly use rental equipment as it separates your eye from the rubber eyecup. Fitting a Chamois Eye-cushion to a rental camcorder’s

Option 3. i-Cuff (i-Cuff DV £20, i-Cuff Pro & i-Cuff HD £30)

The i-Cuff was invented by Ira Raider, who himself is an Emmy award-winning Director of Photography. Ira invented the i-Cuff in an attempt to solve the many problems that most field camera operators come up against when using standard rubber eyecups. And what a great job he has done with the design,



combining both a highly efficient light-shield as well as a very comfortable padded chamois. The i-Cuff comes in three sizes from the smaller i-Cuff DV, to the i-Cuff Pro and the i-Cuff HD. The i-Cuff DV is designed to fit prosumer camcorders such as the Sony PD170 for example. However with certain

forward; (closest to the camera body) getting it out of the way of eyeglasses, and your eye (unlike in my picture as I don't wear glasses). Note: If you remove the rubber eyecup entirely, it will allow the plastic filter that protects the viewfinder from dust to potentially fall out. Once in place (seconds later) I found peering

Here is a bit more info on i-Cuff:

i-cuff is made from a breathable, washable and waterproof hi-tech fabric that reduces fogging in the viewfinder; also protects the viewfinder from dirt and scratches.

i-cuff can be sanitized by lightly rubbing with isopropyl alcohol; (camera head cleaner); only



makes/models, it could be that the viewfinder won't fold away fully with the i-Cuff attached; no big deal in the grand scheme of things. The i-Cuff Pro is designed to fit camcorders with slightly larger viewfinders such as Panasonic's HVX-200 model or Sony's Z1 for example.

The i-Cuff HD has been designed to fit full size professional shoulder-mounted camcorders such as Sony's XDCAM HD and DigiBeta, Panasonic's AJ-HPX3000 and Varicam for example. All i-Cuff models attach to the camcorder's viewfinder by means of elastic and Velcro. Ira sent me two i-Cuff models, the i-Cuff DV and the i-Cuff HD. For my tests, I fitted the i-Cuff HD to my Sony PDW-F350 XDCAM HD camcorder. Fitting the i-Cuff is a simple affair, it's simply a case of stretching the elastic fitting over the F350's standard viewfinder, then securing home tightly using the built-in Velcro strap system.

Personally I found it better to leave the standard rubber eyecup in place as the i-Cuff protrudes 3 or 4mm beyond this anyway, however, if you wear glasses you might want to fold the inner part of elliptical rubber eyecup

down the viewfinder to be a much more pleasurable and comfortable experience. It does a superb job of totally eliminating stray ambient light from entering the viewfinder. This improves the whole shooting experience 100% as you can focus and adjust critical exposure with a clear viewfinder. Finally, prior to putting on i-cuff, set the diopter on the viewfinder according to the needs of the individual users eye; it's not easy to do once it's on.

You could see the i-Cuff as a kind of Matte Box for your viewfinder. Just as a Matte Box shields the front element of your lens from stray shafts of light, preventing glare and ghosting, so the i-Cuff has the same effect on the viewfinder. In fact, since using the i-Cuff it is almost as if I have upgraded my viewfinder to a superior model, as there is no stray light sending haze and glare into my viewfinder, hence contrast and definition is greatly improved, so focus and exposure can now be executed to finer tolerances resulting in better recorded images.

The i-Cuff is incredibly well built and appears to be very durable. It should last for many years as it can even be washed.

on the chamois that comes into contact with the eye and face.

i-cuff can be lightly hand washed with woolite, (or other gentle soap) and hung to dry if it gets dirty.

If you rotate i-cuff 45 degrees counter clockwise, it will act as a shade for shooting under arm down low, or up overhead aiding in seeing into the viewfinder when it's away from the eye.

i-cuff is now being used on telescopes, rifle scopes, spotting scopes, microscopes, binoculars, thermal imaging devices.

For me, the i-Cuff should go down in modern video history as one of the most innovative and useful inventions in 20 years; simple, yet pure genius.

I would have to implore every cameraman (or woman, ala Life of Brian movie) on the planet to get online and buy one without delay.

For more info visit: www.i-cuff.com

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TLS GENUS MATTE BOX

Simon Wyndham tries the latest Matte Box from TLS

For those that use camcorders on a regular basis, a Matte Box is an essential accessory. A Matte Box not only allows a user to stack multiple effects filters in front of the lens, but it is also utterly indispensable for cutting down light flare.

Why haven't more people invested in such equipment? Well, one reason is the expense. After all, even some 35mm cinematographers will quite happily use a piece of black wrap instead! For those that want to have a camera that doesn't look like it is gaffer taped together though, the only solution is a real dedicated piece of equipment.

Enter True Lens Services, a small firm based in Leicestershire in the UK. TLS have been making affordable matte box solutions for a number of years now, and have built up a good reputation for quality products. With new camcorders coming out all the time, Matte Boxes need to be manufactured to suit. The Sony XDCAM EX1 is no exception.

The Genus is the solution TLS have come up with to fit the EX1. Included in the package is the Matte Box housing itself, with one static filter tray, and one rotating, a French Flag and a rail system for supporting the weight of it all on the front of the camera. The system accepts 4x4" filters.



My initial impressions of the Genus were of a very well built system. Everything about it looks professional, right down to the blue anodised screw adjusters. The filter trays slide out smoothly, although the rotating stage can be difficult to maneuver at times due to other parts of the Matte Box assembly getting in the way. People with large fingers might well have

problems with this.

Attaching the Genus to the camera is a simple affair. First of all you attach the rail support system to the bottom of the camera. This section also gives the added advantage of a more robust tripod plate mounting area, allowing a user to attach a VC-14 plate if they chose to do so. Attaching the rail support is performed by way of a thumb screw. You will need to remove the rails themselves to make this easy to access. Once again people with larger hands may find it more difficult, but since this is something you will probably leave on most of the time it is no big deal.

Height adjustment of the rails themselves is performed by loosening some hex key bolts with the supplied hex key which is stowed away very neatly at the back of the right hand rail. Then it is just a case of sliding the Matte Box itself on, clamping it to the front of the lens barrel, and tightening the rail mountings.

So far, so good. The Genus is very lightweight, although when combined with the rail support system it probably isn't a good idea to hand hold for any length of time, especially when the EX1 is pretty cumbersome for such shots anyway. The French flag is held securely at all times, but has smooth movement when an adjustment is required.

I do however have a few gripes with the Genus. The first is a lack of side flags, even as an option. This is a pretty serious omission. On a set with lights, or at times of the day when the sun is at a low angle, side flags are an absolute must. Even when the sun is at a higher angle, performing a dutch tilt for example might be difficult without the option of side flags.

My second gripe is with the main supplied French Flag. Why can't the manufacturers make the top flag collapsible with rotating side sections so that it is easy to place the whole assembly attached to the camera into a camera bag? To be fair on TLS many other brands make this mistake as well, but some like Petroff have got this right.

That said, the Genus is good value for the money. It is nicely built, and for the poseurs among you, it looks the part. If they could sort out the minor niggles with the French Flags it would be perfect.

Prices of the matteboxes & accessories are as follows:-



Genus Standard £448.00 includes French Flag, lens adaptor and complete bar support system.

Genus Wide/Pro £555.00 includes French Flag, lens adaptor, complete bar support system and upgrades as above 1,2, and 3.

Accessories:

Half Flag £20.00 Smaller in height than the standard French flag. Price does not include hinges.

Barn Doors £120.00 Pair includes all hinges and brackets.

All prices exclude VAT.

Comments from TLS after they read this review:

Thank you for the draft copy of the Genus review, it is always good to have constructive criticism of our products as it does give us independent assessment of what are trying to achieve. You will be pleased to hear that the barn doors are already in the pipe line, broadly based on a shrunken version of the existing Kestrel system, already available. When designing and manufacturing all of products cost to end user is always paramount and whilst it would be good to have a hinged or folding top flag, the cost to end user would prove to take the mattebox above the price level we were trying to achieve. A half size flag will be available soon which would make the unit more compact when stowing a camera in a travel bag.

As cameras become more compact the matte boxes and accessories need to follow suit. To fit below inbuilt microphones and not hang too far beneath the camera base, insert a 4" x 4" filter in the remaining gap and then rotate it without vignetting becomes quite a challenge with the ever-increasing wide angles of view.

Unfortunately we cannot do much about camera operators with fat fingers but we do take note of your comments on ease of operation for those with less dexterity than others. More info at: www.truelens.co.uk

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STEADICAM MERLIN/PILOT

Oliver Horn gets to grips with the latest budget Steadicam models

In the beginning there was the big 'G'; Garrett; Garrett Brown. Ever since the mid seventies with films like Rocky and The Shining, movie makers and viewers have enjoyed the unique visual style that is a Steadicam in operation.

Think of Larry McConkey's long (2 ½ minutes in one take) shot from the street, down the back stairs, through the kitchens and out into the main dining room in the movie Goodfellas as a classic example.

No other piece of movie-making equipment could come close to creating that shot. As home movie and then video cameras became more prevalent, there was desire by keen amateur budget movie makers to replicate this style of photography. So the Steadicam JR and JR lite were introduced to cater to the needs of these people. As time and technology move ever onwards, cameras have shrunk in size whilst increasing in performance. The JR was a relatively cumbersome and heavy piece of equipment, so Tiffen Steadicam have now released the replacement - it's called the Merlin.

Whether that's because it is magic, or weighs as little as a small bird of prey I'm not sure, but light it certainly is. Without any weights attached, it weighs in at only about 500g and can handle cameras that weigh from 230g to just over 2kgs. In fact, Tiffen have now changed the gimbal that is supplied as standard, and the Merlin can now support cameras up to 3.2kgs.

So what's in the box?

You get the Merlin itself in the folded configuration, the mounting plate, 5 balance, 1 start and 2 finish weights. Also included is the tripod adapter plate and most importantly, the instructional DVD presented by Garrett himself.

IMPORTANT! It WILL take you time to set this piece of equipment up; the instructions are definitely not optional. Do not expect to unpack, stick on your camera and go off shooting instantly. As with all good things, you have to take time (and this could really mean some considerable time) to set it up.

The set-up of a Steadicam is the most difficult part, and that's where the Merlin magic starts to really kick in. The idea is relatively simple; isolate the small annoying vibrations of the operator to ensure a smooth floating effect. This is achieved by moving the centre of gravity outside the camera (normally below) and neutralizing all outside influences on the camera other than the basic direction you wish to point the camera and letting the camera



Oliver wearing the Co-Pilot rig

effectively float free in space on an almost friction-free gimbal. The design of the Merlin increases the camera's inertia. By making the camera a heavier object and by separating the weights it increases its natural resistance to movement. Using the weights and the camera's own mass, the trick is to balance all the forces equally.

What sets the Merlin apart from its predecessor and other makes of hand-held stabilizer is the level of very fine adjustments that can be made to get this trick balancing act accomplished.

Once you have got the camera roughly where you want it, you need to be able to make very small accurate adjustments (trim) to the stage to get the final balance. Under the stage on the left hand side and rear, there are what Steadicam call 'Precision Trim Stage Micrometer Adjustment' rollers. These are blue metal knurled knobs that allow you to very minutely move the stage back and forth and side to side. As little as a ¼ turn can be enough to tip the balance; that's how precise it can be.

Once set up, now comes the fun bit, learning how to 'fly' the camera. There are many different ways to use the Merlin. There is simply walking forward or walking forward with camera pointing backwards (known as Don

Juan) or even pointing sideways. You can set the balance so that the camera is set to point up or down, depending on the type of shot you wish to achieve. For example, if you are walking up some stairs, you can balance with the lens pointing up, or even pointing down in Don Juan mode (you're walking forward up the stairs and the camera is looking down behind you) the options are endless. The DVD and instruction book have a section demonstrating various different modes of operation. Ultimately, it's up to you how you do it!

The most important question is how well does it work? Well, very well in fact. Once you have got the basic style of movement you'll soon be trying all sorts of different moves to increase the quality of your productions. So for a fraction of the price of the big boys, you can now produce equally professional results with a little practice. And more practice. And more practice. You see, whilst trawling around various forums dedicated to Steadicams, I've found that some of the world's top operators also use these forums and are generally down to earth and normal people (why shouldn't they be?) and they all say, even those who do it daily for a living – "practise, practise, practise and then practise some more". It must work - next time you watch a movie see if you can spot the Steadicam shot, sometimes it's not

that easy. That's how good they are!

Not content with producing an affordable hand-held stabilizing piece of equipment, Steadicam have also introduced the Vest and Arm to complement the Merlin. The arm is a 7/8th scaled-down version of the full size Steadicam arms used in Hollywood and the vest is a slim-line version that the whole lot mounts to. This has got to be one of the most simple and advanced pieces of equipment ever made! By that I mean the design and physics behind it are beyond mere mortals' comprehension, but it just works. Simple. Strap in, (all Velcro, no tools required, one size fits all), bolt on (again, no tools), and turn the adjustment screws for ride height and off you go. The height has a range of 71cm from one extreme to the other, more than most of the competitors available. The arm takes the weight of the camera off your arm and wrist and allows much longer, smoother more advanced shots. I'm running a Canon XHA1 with wide angle adapter which weighs in at 3.2kg. This is right at the top limit of the arm and Merlin, but I can wear the outfit for extended periods of time without getting knackered. As with the Merlin on its own, practise, practise and more practise is the key to getting it all together.

Not only content with having released the Merlin, Steadicam have also released another model, or in fact 2 variants of the same unit. This is the Pilot and Co-Pilot.

This is a more traditional type of stabiliser. It has the centre column at the top of which



is the camera and at the bottom on the sled is the monitor and battery. The difference between the two is that the Co-Pilot comes with an inexpensive 4:3 colour LCD and a

mentioning that you can buy a special stand too. The main advantage of this is to allow you to set up the balance while not having to actually wear the unit. It also allows you to easily dock the camera and slip the arm from the post. The Pilot also uses the same weights as the Merlin to help fine-tune the balance. The Pilot and Merlin are far more versatile than any other rig in their respective classes. These weights are actually a unique feature in that they aid in achieving perfect dynamic balance on both the Merlin and the Pilot, and on the Pilot, they increase pan inertia so the rig feels like a larger rig and behaves less whippy. These can be attached just below the camera plate and/or at both ends of the sled. I personally find a heavier camera easier to fly than a light one so the weights help if I have to use a lighter camera.

Performance wise the Pilot is very similar to the Merlin with its vest and arm, however I find it easier to maintain balance and avoid 'penduluming'. The other major difference is that you are looking down at the monitor and can see the ground as well, so from a safety point of view it is better too. There is a price premium to pay for the Pilot, but for those who envisage longer or perhaps more complex shots over different terrain etc, the Pilot is a worthy addition to the Steadicam range.

More info at: www.steadicam.com



battery chamber to take AA batteries, whereas the Pilot has a high quality 16:9 LCD and choice of V-lock or Anton Bauer battery mounts.

The Pilot/Co-pilot uses the same arm as the Merlin albeit with a slightly different post to attach the arm to the post. The centre column is expandable and carries video and power cables internally to allow total movement of the gimbal. You can spin it around or even turn it upside down with no worries about cables. The ability to invert the unit means you can shoot in 'low mode' where the camera is upside down closer to the ground.

Obviously you'll have to re-invert the image in post. There is a 'low mode kit' available to buy if you need to. The LCD and battery mounts also slide in and out from the centre column, this is to allow more precise balancing. It is worth

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Email: sales@mvsvideo.com
Web: www.mvsvideo.com

True Lens Services
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Email: sales@truelens.co.uk
Web: www.truelens.co.uk

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Aaduki Multimedia Insurance
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Web: www.aaduki.com

AUA Insurance
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Towergate Camerasure
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Pyser-SGI Ltd (Vocas matte boxes)
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Tel: 01732 864111 Fax: 01732 865544
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Web: www.pyser-sgi.com

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Web: www.leefilters.com

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Web: www.pyser-sgi.com

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Web: www.cirrolite.com

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New Lydenberg Street, Woolwich,
London. SE7 8NF
Tel: 020 8858 2820 Fax: 020 8858 2820
Email: dmlawrence13@lineone.net
Web: www.studiolighting.co.uk

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Unit 7 Walkers Road, Manors Ind Est,
Redditch, Wors. B98 9HE
Tel: 01527 596955 Fax: 01527 596788
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Web: www.ianirou.com

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Unit K3, Cherry Court Way, Stanbridge
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Email: dyl@trackline.com
Web: www.trackline.com

YOPO Production Music
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Web: www.yopo.co.uk

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Web: www.bcassociates.org

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Web: www.nickway.co.uk

Ravensbourne College
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Email: info@rave.ac.uk
Web: www.rave.ac.uk

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Web: www.libeceurope.com

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Web: www.manfrotto.com

Sachtler Tripods
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Web: www.sachtler.com

Vinten Tripods
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Suffolk. IP33 3TB
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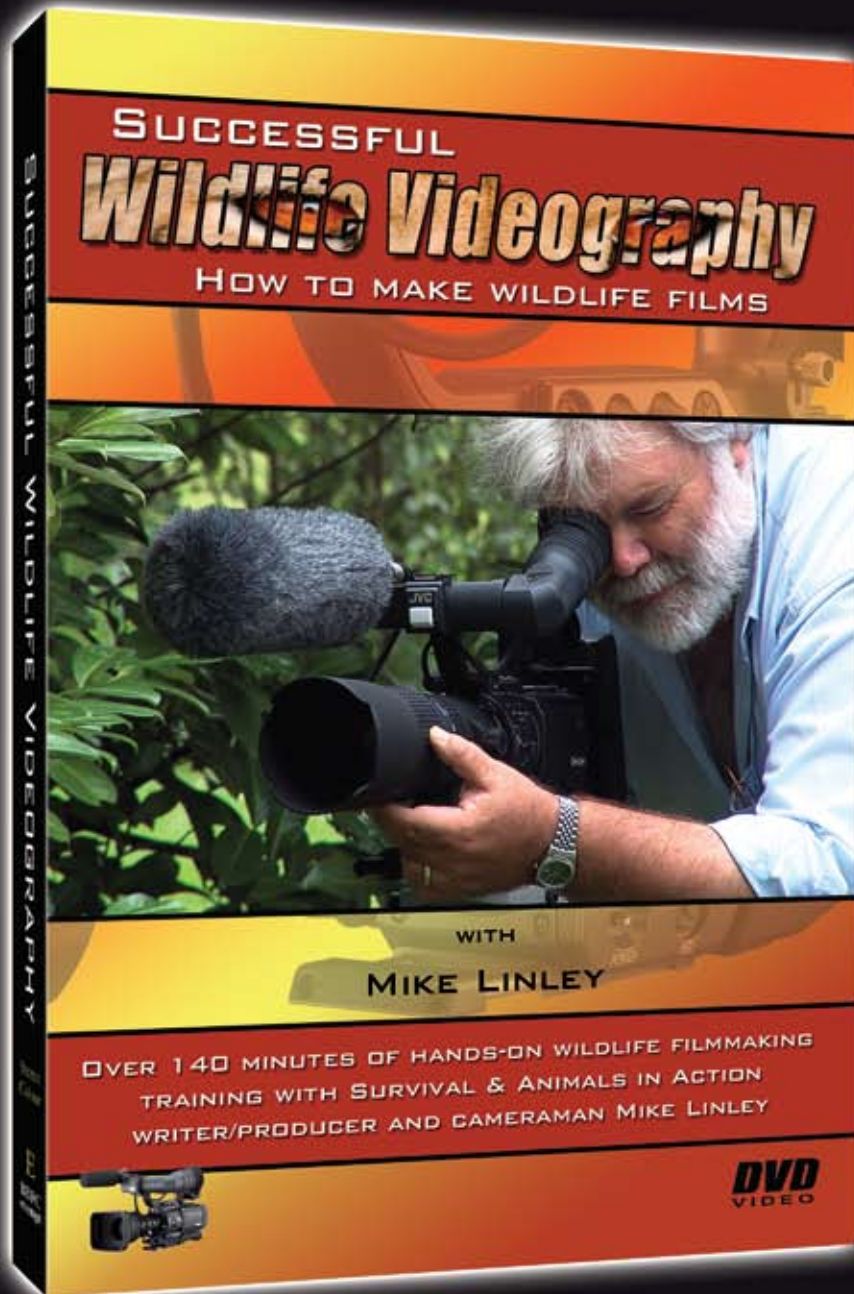
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