

Panavision in depth

TV Drama on the rise



Equipment from Panavision has contributed to a number of exciting TV series this year, including 'Packed to the Rafters', 'Spirited', 'Underbelly II - A Tale of Two Cities', 'Rush Series II', 'Underbelly III - A Golden Mile', 'East West 101 Series II', 'Sea Patrol' and 'Rescue – Special Ops'. The Directors of Photography on these projects have useful comments regarding the on-set performance of the lens-camera packages and service from Panavision.

Cinematographer Bruce Young said he and his crew used three Sony 900Rs for both Underbelly Series II and Rush Series II. "Having three cameras on 'Underbelly II' meant we were able to get the Steadicam ready to go without losing time, and weren't locked in to having to do a shot with the Steadicam simply because there was not enough time to change back to production mode. Anything you can do to save time between set ups will help you get more and better shots, and give the director more time with the actors to work out a scene.

"All three of our cameras matched almost perfectly and if we ever had problems, we got great back up support, which is essential when you are shooting on HD. The fact that Panavision delivers the camera and lenses packages, and provide the kind of tech support that they do, means better production value on screen."

The Sony 900Rs were chosen because of the picture quality. Bruce can select a number of different gamma curves that function well in situations that are not always predictable. "The Hyper Gamma settings are particularly good for day exteriors", Bruce says.

"The workflow is very straightforward shooting on HDCAM. We rarely had problems with time code, and the grading, which for me is the most important part, was good. There is enough latitude to get the look you are after, although I did find the Hyper Gamma curves didn't handle low light situations that well."

Bruce believes there are many advantages in shooting HD rather than film. He does most of the lighting in the viewfinder, and uses it to expose the shots. "It means I can react to situations very quickly, and because the director has a monitor, it gives them greater confidence that they are getting what they want. Shooting ratios are no longer a problem. Rush would be a very different show if it were not shot on HD. Otherwise, there is no way we would be able to get the coverage we do.

"Panavision has delivered - and they give you free hats with your show's name on it, too!"

DOP Lou Irving, ACS is currently using two Sony F900R HD cameras from Panavision on 'Spirited' as he did on 'Rafters' - with an important difference. This time he has a lens converter and a compliment of 35mm primes, rather than two cine style zooms.

"The difference in images is considerable," said Lou. "The P+S Technik lens converter softens the pictures and smoothes the colour range, much closer to the way film does. Lighting becomes a pleasure and less likely to fall into damage control, particularly with faces that can sometimes read too sharp with HD.



The F900Rs have proved very reliable over long shooting periods in a variety of situations. Their extreme sharpness works well when combined with the converter and I have enjoyed the look I am getting on 'Spirited'."

"My lighting routine is the same for both film and HD. I set the lamps where I think they should go and add diffusion, cutters or whatever I need, then either look through the lens or check out the monitor for fine tuning. To be able to see something close to what your images look like on a good monitor is an advantage when shooting quickly. Film demands a little more time because I process how it will respond to various lighting conditions."

"Post production grading has a significant influence on the images and I try to attend as many grades as possible," said Lou. "Establishing a relationship with a grader or colourist that complements your work is a good thing. In my case I have worked with The Lab in Sydney over many years. For shows like 'Rafters' that are broadcast on free to air television, there can be a considerable discrepancy between the final graded episode and what appears on individual televisions due to vagaries in transmission, which I have never managed to resolve."

"The importance of reliability and consistency in acquisition with digital equipment is the same as it is with film equipment. Economy in post production will always start at the shooting stage so really, in principle nothing has changed. The biggest change I have noticed over many years shooting is in the catering.



Tech Info:

Rescue Squad

Cameras Sony F900R
Lenses Fujinon Zooms

Packed to the Rafters

Cameras Sony F900R
Lenses Fujinon Zooms

Underbelly: A Tale of Two Cities

Cameras Sony F900R
Lenses Fujinon Zooms

We now have tables and chairs, terrific food and don't have to sit in the gutter to eat anymore."

On DOP Russell Bacon's last two productions, the cameras were two Sony F900Rs for 'Rescue Special Ops' with long and short zooms and doubler, and two Arri 416s, ArriSR3 Hi speed with Zeiss 11-1 zooms, Zeiss primes and Canon 200mm with doubler for 'Sea Patrol 4'. This kit was used at sea off Far North Qld and for the VFX components. Back on the Gold Coast in studio and locations, the crew used two Sony 900Rs with long and short zooms and doublers on the main and 2nd unit respectively.

"On 'Rescue' the reasons for using HD were budgetary," said Russell. "I used 900Rs as I was quite familiar with them and have been happy with their performance. But 'Sea Patrol' is different because nearly half the footage is shot at sea where conditions and situations can change rapidly and a minimum of crew and equipment are used. Given the very high contrast conditions, the small lighting package carried and the time given to shoot a large amount of screen time, film was the only choice."

The equipment also had to withstand quite hostile weather conditions, and the Arri 416s stood the test. The 900Rs were then used under more controlled locations in a studio in SE Queensland. "After much testing before series 1 and 2, we found we could match Super 16 film with the 900Rs and intercut quite seamlessly. This required a bit of in-camera 'tweaking' with the Sonys and close attention in the grade, but few people can spot the difference."

As well as the reasons already mentioned above, Russell says shooting with HD has its merits, such as the good results obtained under low light and accurate on-site monitoring, although he still feels that film has a better overall look and more latitude.

Panavision have supplied Russell with equipment on almost all his recent projects and been very helpful, in spite of the fairly extreme requirements. "They even sourced Arri 416s from Italy for me for 'Sea Patrol 4' for which I am very grateful. As well as the equipment at the Sydney and Gold Coast offices, we have had gear shipped in from NZ, Hong Kong and LA. If any technical problem has arisen they have always coped and made it go away, which is what you really need."

2009 has been a great year of ratings for Australian television series. The quality of production and story telling is testament of this success. Panavision have another jam-packed year ahead with series shooting from mid January.

Sea Patrol

Cameras ARRI 416, Sony F900R
Lenses Zeiss Super Speeds and Zooms, Fujinon Zooms

Spirited

Cameras Sony F900R
Lenses P&S Pro 35 Adaptors and Zeiss Super Speeds

