

D-21 Shoots 3D in Dubai

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The recent opening of Dubai's brand new Metro system was marked with a screening of a nine-minute 3D film. Played to an audience at a specially erected theatre at the Mall of the Emirates shopping centre, the film provided an immersive experience of what it would be like to travel on the Metro, which runs the entire length of Dubai, before passengers embarked on its inaugural journey

The film was produced by Boomtown Productions for event management company HQ Creative, who had contemplated using 3D several times in the past. After winning the tender to undertake the management of the Metro's launch, they felt that the project presented the right occasion to showcase the potential of 3D. Boomtown teamed with 3D specialists Vision3 and together they settled on using the ARRIFLEX D-21, a decision driven by the camera's image quality and the fact the final film would be viewed on a large screen. Camera and grip equipment was supplied by Dubai-based Filmquip Media, in conjunction with ARRI Media.

To create a 3D effect two cameras are required to film images simultaneously. The D-21s, along with matched sets of Cooke S4 primes, were mounted on a StereoCam rig (more popularly known as the Hines rig) - a sturdy 3D mirror rig where one forward-facing camera records an image through a beam-splitting mirror and the other camera angles down at 90 degrees to capture the reflection. This forward-and-downward arrangement enabled the cameras to be put much closer together than would have been possible with a side-by-side rig.

Shane Martin of Boomtown directed, while Anthony Smythe, head of Filmquip Media, served as cinematographer and operator. It was the size and weight of the 3D package that presented the biggest challenge to Smythe. "Because the rig was so big," he says, "it meant I couldn't actually see the live action in front of me, so I had to try and anticipate what was going to happen." Once shooting was underway it was quickly discovered that wider lenses appeared better suited to 3D than long. "It was difficult to get a good 3D effect with a long lens," says Smythe. "We mostly worked between an 18mm and a 32mm or 50mm, which seemed to work the best."

Another reason for choosing D-21s was their reliability; the cameras had to be able to withstand the harsh summer heat and humidity of Dubai, which reached over 40 °C on a daily basis. Throughout the seven-day shoot a number of location moves and various configurations kept the crew busy, but on hand to help out was one of ARRI Media's digital technicians, Jay Patel. The heat wasn't the only problem the cameras had to contend with - one of the more unusual locations was an indoor ski slope, where the cameras were subjected to below freezing conditions. "It was -2 inside the ski slope," recalls Smythe, "and then we went straight to our next location inside a shopping mall. Everything ended up covered in condensation because we had no feasible way of acclimatising the equipment; we even had to get some hairdryers to help dry everything off. But despite that fact we pushed the cameras to their limits and they didn't let us down. They coped with both the cold and heat; we didn't have a single problem."

For the majority of the shoot the signal from the D-21s was recorded in Lin 4:4:4 at 25 fps onto Sony SRW-1s, with the occasional sequence shot in 4:2:2 at 50 fps. Vision3 were on set throughout, carefully monitoring the 3D image. Using a frame synchroniser to sync the signals from both cameras it was possible to view a live 3D picture, which was displayed on a 12" Transvideo monitor.

There are two sides to monitoring 3D on set, explains Chris Parks, stereographer and partner at Vision3. As a stereographer, I have to check that both cameras are perfectly aligned - that there are no discrepancies between the two.

In order to get a greater feel for how the 3D was going to look, rushes were then viewed on a 46" JVC flat screen 3D TV. Although the JVC can't give a completely accurate representation of what the 3D will ultimately be like on the big screen, says Parks, it does give a much better idea of the quality of the 3D.



When shooting 3D there are many considerations that have to be taken into account: While there are certain things you should avoid in 3D like quick camera moves, which might lead to strobing and a breakdown of the 3D image - there are also things that lend themselves particularly well to 3D, states the stereographer. Aerial views can be particularly effective in 3D: in the Dubai film we shot looking straight down onto a golfer on the golf course and also some traditional dancers. In 2D those shots would have been quite odd looking, but in 3D they work very well. The golfer and the dancers come right out of the screen towards the audience.

During postproduction the positioning of the 3D images was finalised. We decided exactly where and how the scenes would appear within the theatre, explains Parks. Whether we wanted the whole scene to be behind the screen, or whether, for instance, we wanted the head and shoulders of the golfer to come out through the screen, or the dolphins to leap out into the theatre.

After the Metro's launch on Sept. 9, the Mall's theatre, which had a seating capacity for 200 people, was packed for every 15-minute screening that was held during the seven days following the opening.

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