

Post war South Lebanon inspires documentary

A personal connection with a family of farmers in South Lebanon triggered Paris-based Suzanne Newman and Sylvia Calle to make a documentary which follows a year in the life of these farmers, as reconstruction goes on around them after the 2006 war. The year will be up in January 2008. Suzanne, the sound recordist, and Sylvia, the DP, are co-directors of the planned 90-minute documentary, due for completion mid-2008. Below is their account of using the GY-HD251 to make their documentary. On account of one of the farming brothers being called Hanna, this has brought about the working title of *Hanna and his Brothers*



Early morning in February, looking across to Yaroun

We planned to go to the south of Lebanon to shoot a documentary about the civilians who were caught in the crossfire and are now trying to rebuild after the war. It was to be taken from the point of view of a family of farmers. We knew we were going to be filming in conditions that would be very stressful in all senses, given the political climate and the physical conditions in the region. Yet what we didn't want to do was make a poor quality film, full of good intentions.

"Cinema verite, but with a poised, stable look" was what we decided would be the documentary's style. To do this we needed to be reactive and highly mobile, knowing that we would go through long hours just on stand-by, but always ready to roll. Also, once started, there would be a high shooting ratio. (In fact, we have come back with 70 hours of footage and there's still another 6 months to go!)

We also knew we had to cater for the unreliable electricity supply. For at least half the day there would be no power. Recording to flash media with limited memory size and high costs or to hard disk which, if only for safety reasons, would require transfer to computers on a regular basis, were both completely out of the question in our situation.

We wanted an HD camcorder that was small and mobile, yet had the professional parameters of a larger format camera. JVC's ProHD range turned out to be far and away the most suitable option for us. We chose model GY-HD251 and added the Fujinon HTs18x4.2 lens. It is wide enough and long enough to be a great all-purpose lens for our needs, and we never found ourselves wishing to have a wider angle. In addition, as compared with more compact fixed lens cameras, we had a real, genuine iris control ring which gave smooth diaphragm (f. stop) changes.

The 251 was a good choice because the HD/SD SDI output meant we could also get a DV down-conversion of our 720p/50 footage and so be able to log the footage on FCP without needing an expensive HD video input card. Also, from a sound engineer's point of view the JVC has all the important controls accessible on the outside. No need to go into menus to change from Line in to Mic in, or from Auto to Manual level. That really is a big convenience.



Filming near the destroyed marketplace of Bint Jbeil

It is a tough camera too. The city of Bint Jbeil was devastated by the 2006 war. A large portion of it is in ruins. Demolition and construction crews are everywhere. While this progress is good for the locals, for us it meant lots and lots of dust. In addition, when filming in the winter there were constant humidity changes when going from indoors to outdoors. Under such conditions many camcorders would jam up with condensation, but the JVC never failed. The camera has held up beautifully.

Being just that bit more bulky than other cameras in its price range, it is easier to adjust it to monopod use, yet it is still fine for long hours of handheld. We often used it with a small monopod and a Manfrotto 501 video head. With that we also used the camera tripod plate, so the weight could be more evenly distributed on the head and therefore be more stable. This solution looks bulky but it works well because it's stable and at the same time is easy to tilt and pan. It thus gave to the documentary the stable look which we were aiming for, yet we had also got round the constraints of using a tripod. Also, if required, the whole assembly could be put on the shoulder.

Sylvia Calle made these additional points. "As a woman filming, I found the ergonomics excellent. It's a great design. For the first time I don't feel that I strain my neck to reach the viewfinder when the camera's on my shoulder.

"We've been shooting in all different extremes of available light. We were often in very high contrast situations or in very low light. The customisable black stretch feature is one that we used quite a lot and it really makes a difference. We have also set our basic configuration with slightly lower detail than the factory preset, and it gives a very flattering look.

"In summary, the images we have seen are beautiful. At the same time they are very precise, with a large range of colours and contrast. In low light conditions, it responds with more flexibility than I expected, giving me the option of going beyond normal permitted limits and being able to shoot images in near darkness. "Judging by the results so far, we know we made the right choice."

Any party who may be interested in distributing or broadcasting this documentary should contact Suzanne Newman by email newman41@free.fr

What's the link between a feature drama doc and fast cars?

ProHD, of course. Deborah Forrest, Head of Production at Studio Scotland, gives an account of why they bought ProHD, the different ways they use it and how its affordability serves to make higher quality productions

The arrival of a camera with a spec like the GY-HD101 was what our director, Stu Menelaws, had been dreaming about for quite some time. As a photographer with a reputation for beautiful imagery and attention to detail, he was desperate to get his hands on a professional HD camera that was small, lightweight, part of a professional integrated system and able to shoot at 25p. When the HD101 was launched, our order was one of the first on JVC's books.

Studio Scotland now has two ProHD camcorders, which are fitted out with the IDX batteries and DR-HD100 hard disk drives. They get used for many diverse projects.

For example, we have just completed a whole range of work for Knockhill Racing Circuit, Scotland's leading



ProHD prepares for take-off and more action

international motor sport venue. The camera was a joy to handle when used in a helicopter that required fast action tracking of race cars, as well as when mounted in a race vehicle, suspended inches from the ground and doing speeds of up to 80mph (130kph). Also, the fully rigged camera is still light enough to be used on the lighter weight camera cranes. This is a real bonus for us when having to keep the amount of location kit down to a minimum.

Currently our main film project is a feature drama documentary, entitled *The Daniel Project*, which is about ancient scrolls, the Middle East and the unrest within it. It is creating a real stir in the broadcast community because *The Daniel Project*, which crosses over the genres of doco and feature, will go straight to cinema rather than down the usual path of TV broadcast first. It is also being prepared for web release. In *The Daniel Project* the camera is being used to shoot both doco style and drama/filmic scenes. The director says, "I love this little camera – it really is a remarkable tool, considering the price, and using the HD100 disk recorder makes handling HDV footage so easy."



Remote places can be accessed with a light-weight crane and compact ProHD camera

This summer, the crew is working for Hilton Hotels in Scotland, where the cameras will be used on 20 foot (6m) cranes, with steadycam and dolly mounts. This short movie promotion will have a widescreen, big movie feel, and Stu, who has years of experience in stunning location photography, will be using various on-camera

filters to get the exact look he wants, whilst colouring will be completed at the postproduction stage.

Producer Deborah Forrest says, "I'm happy when I don't have to spend so much money on video hardware. It means that I've got more for the production itself. So for me these cameras are great value for money, and, more importantly, I'm very impressed by the picture quality."

For more information please visit www.studioscotland.co.uk or call Deborah on +44 1383 420397