



CASE STUDY

LONDON MARATHON 2011

SIS LIVE provides full facilities for 2011 London Marathon for BBC Sport

SIS LIVE, Europe's largest outside broadcast (OB) and uplink supplier, has provided the most comprehensive coverage to date of the London Marathon for BBC Sport. A total of five OB units, ten satellite uplinks, four motorbikes, two helicopters and a dedicated aeroplane were deployed to cover the 2011 race, which was broadcast live on Sunday 17th April to millions of people in the UK and around the world.

On the day of the event, BBC Sport provided comprehensive live coverage of the marathon on BBC One and BBC Two. Additionally, viewers were able to choose between exclusive coverage of the men's or women's races by pressing the red button on their digital televisions and extended coverage of the fun runners was also shown on this service. The BBC website also had live streaming, as well as text reports, video interviews and reaction. All the programmes were put together at Studio TC5 at Television Centre in West London.

SIS LIVE facilities

Geoff Layton, engineering manager at SIS LIVE, was in overall control of the facilities for the event and is the main liaison contact with BBC Sport and the marathon organisers, London Marathon Ltd.

'The coverage is very much a three-way relationship that we've built-up over the years and there's a lot of trust on all sides,' Layton says.

'Because we've been doing this

for over 20 years, the producers only want to make gentle changes to the way we do things. But we are always looking at the technology as it evolves and as new technology comes along, we adopt it.'

For this year's event, SIS LIVE supplied a total of 40 cameras and 11 radio cameras along the route of the marathon, supported by 150 staff.

The two helicopters were fitted with gyro-stabilised cameras and





provided aerial footage of both the men's and women's events. The five OB trucks and Uplinks were positioned at key locations along the route to maximise coverage.

There was an OB at the start and the finish of the race – on Blackheath and on The Mall – and another at the Cutty Sark in Greenwich. A fourth OB was at Tower Bridge, and there was another at the City Pride pub near to Canary Wharf. One camera was fed into an uplink at Billingsgate, where the Mini Marathons start and there was a 5 camera OB to cover the runners through the Blackfriars underpass.

New this year was a 2 camera OB using one of our uplink trucks parked on Westminster Bridge. The Jimmy Jib camera gave sensational shots of the runners turning off the Embankment and into Parliament Square, with Big Ben in the background

Motorbike-based radio cameras

The biggest challenge for SIS LIVE was covering the elite races by motorbike and a lot of time and resources went into this to ensure it went smoothly.

The front runners for both the men's race and women's race

were followed throughout the course by two motorbikes each, one at the front of the pack and one at the back.

Receiving these bikes has always been a challenge due to the unique environment of the race, travelling through very built-up streets, under bridges, between the tall buildings in the City and a lot of tree cover on the way. All this makes it hard to get a clean radio signal and the only practical way of relaying the bike signals is via an overhead aircraft.

In the early years of the race, the only type of aircraft that could be used was a helicopter. Two were used, one for each race. The trouble was, they could only work by line-of-sight to the bikes and then on to the receiving site. What's more, the helicopters would not have been able to go up if the weather was bad, or if the cloud base was low, the helicopters had to fly below it and couldn't see the bikes because of buildings. The helicopters also had to refuel half-way through the race.

These problems were solved a few years ago by replacing the helicopters with a fixed wing aircraft, Skylink, fitted with an intelligent receive-aerial. This innovative piece of technology, developed by the Quinetiq, can electronically 'track' and 'zoom' in on signals from each bike. This makes it possible for an aircraft flying in patterns 25,000 feet above London to receive and relay signals from the bikes. SIS LIVE adapted the system so it could bundle the four separate feeds into one and send it safely onto Television Centre.

