SIS LIVE

CASE STUDY

ISLE OF MAN TT

SIS LIVE supplied on-board cameras to motorbikes on the 2009 Isle of Man TT as well as other special cameras around the circuit.

In 2009 North One Television started a five-year contract for the television, production, sales and distribution of the Isle of Man TT races. The contract includes all television production, sales and distribution of media. The television tender is part of an on-going programme of development for the TT by the Isle of Man Government, the event promoters.

North One decided to shoot the TT in high definition. Because of the nature of the circuit, North One shot the majority of its footage on XDCAM HD camcorders. This was supplemented by a series of on-board cameras on motorbikes, special cameras on the roadside, a Hi-Motion high speed camera shooting at 600 frames per second, and a helicopter-mounted Cineflex camera system for aerial shots.

Robert Gough, head of production planning at North One Television, says: 'XDCAM HD is a proven format as far as we're concerned and a very robust format. It is easily transportable and the ingest is fast. The turnaround of the event was the most important factor for us. Every minute was crucial.'

'The star shots were the aerials, the Hi-Motion and the on-boards. SIS LIVE provided the on-boards and various special cameras, for example, Kerbcams (effects cameras mounted on the roadside kerb), and also provided our uplinking.'

North One produced daily one hour programmes for international distribution as well as daily one hour bespoke programmes for ITV. SIS LIVE provided a dual antenna uplink to provide two simultaneous feeds.

'Our biggest challenge was the timescale between the recovery of material and putting out the programmes,' Gough says. As footage was recorded with the cameras round the circuit, as soon as a race ended, the media had to be recovered and returned to base for editing.

'It was a huge challenge if you think that there is close to 38 miles of a road course with a mountain range in the middle. On race days, roads were closed, there was loads of traffic and we had only a few hours to edit two one-hour programmes.'

Gough says the race organisers really helped, using course cars to pick up media from cameramen and allowing the helicopter to take off and land to collect media too.

‘The race organisers really understood the importance of the TV coverage for the event. It was down to them that we were able to manage the operation as we did.’

SIS LIVE’s team also played a crucial role, led by Paul McNeil, manager, special cameras.

‘Paul and his team did a great job,’ Gough says. ‘And Simon Stubbs on Paul’s team used to work for the Honda team so we had a familiar face in the paddock. This instantly allowed us to build relationships, which is a vital part of the job.’

SIS LIVE supplied 10 bikes in each race with on-board cameras. But instead of just having a single point-of-view looking straight ahead, SIS LIVE positioned the cameras in different places on the bikes, to maximise the angles. This included looking down at the bike’s chain, the handlebars, or being close to the floor.

McNeil says SIS LIVE recorded on solid state recorders specially designed for the application by a company called Stack. ‘Tape was not going to work on the bikes because of the vibration and because tape only lasts one hour and the races were longer than that. So we went with solid state,’ McNeil says. ‘We also used our bullet cameras on the motorbikes to be able to have all the different angles.’

The other special cameras supplied included a number of track-side cameras positioned where a cameraman couldn’t be.

‘We had five of these systems using a single-chip Sony HD module with a 10-to-1 zoom. Bray Hill is a famous hill in the race and we had two HD Kerbcams. It is just after the start and the bikes go within six inches of the kerb. We had one recording the bikes coming and the other going, so there were some great images.’

SIS LIVE also had cameras mounted on walls. The Special cameras team designed a way to automatically communicate with the cameras to get them to record and stop.

‘Because of the logistics, we couldn’t get to the cameras very easily. So we put them on timers to start to record when the race started. If it rained and the race was delayed, we could text the cameras directly and get them to go to sleep. Then we would text again when it was time to record. The camera would then text back when it stopped recording. It was quite a clever system and it worked.’

Overall, North One Television was really pleased with the SIS LIVE contribution, while hoping to improve things again in 2010.

‘We are going to keep pushing the boundaries with HD,’ Gough says. ‘Paul and his team are looking at that. And next year we want to have new camera angles, as well as looking to improve the process in terms of camera support systems and post production.’