

## InForm

# 'You Wouldn't Choose A Crescent Wrench When You Need A Phillips-Head Screwdriver'



Panasonic's Rob Tarrant examines how the workflow capabilities of the VariCam make it an essential tool in the filmmakers' kit...

The headline above is taken from a speech by Michael Cioni, the Chief Exec of Light Iron, when describing the new Panasonic VariCam to a theatre full of film makers in Hollywood.

It struck me as an interesting way of looking at the cinematography camera market. He argues that, the market has become commoditised, with little to choose between the cameras. In short, it's difficult to stand out.

This is something we thought about long and hard whilst developing the VariCam, and it's why we talked to Michael, and many other Hollywood heavyweights, during development.

We wanted to know what we could do to make this camera stand out. How could we improve workflow? How could we help the post house as well as the DOP?

Cioni argues that while the VariCam is not the greatest camera ever made, it is the best at certain jobs. So good in fact, that it will become an essential weapon.

## Light Work

Shooting in low light is one such feature. VariCam, like most cameras at this end of the market, has around 14 sensitivity stops of latitude and a base ISO rating of 800. However, unlike other cameras, it has a second native base of 5000 ISO.

Only a live demonstration really hits this home, so I will struggle to do it justice here. But, the native 800 ISO pushed to 4000 ISO produces an image with relatively high noise levels, because of the artificial gain applied. However, at 5000 ISO, the second native ISO kicks in and produces an image which is crystal clear.

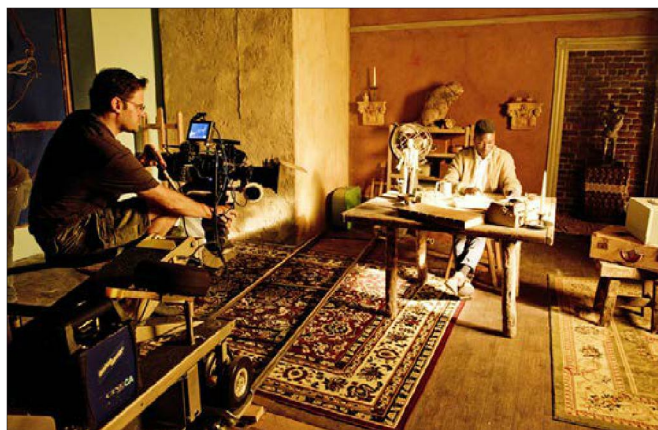
This second base makes it possible to shoot up to 12,800 ISO and opens up a range of shooting options and locations that previously would have been off limits.

## Codecs Gains

Another feature is the range of codecs. Every cinematographer has been involved with, or heard of stories, where the hand off between the set and the post house has been beset by data problems.

The bigger the file, the more likely there are to be problems. Equally, the bigger the file, the greater the cost for storage and the longer the edit process, by nature of the time it takes to download and manipulate large files.

VariCam allows the use of a number of codecs, chiefly AVC Ultra. The difference with the AVC Ultra codec is that it is very efficient at processing video, in fact it's over 45% more efficient than Pro-res, the industry de



Panasonic VariCam on a shoot

facto standard.

This means that the VariCam allows you to process 4K data more speedily than you can 3K data, shot in Pro-res on other cinematography cameras.

This opens up the world of 4K footage, without the penalties of the extra cost and time, which is currently putting much of the industry off. Essentially, it's 33% more pixels at no extra cost.

## Grading Looks

Additionally, the camera has inbuilt wireless CDL grading. The camera works with a PC to feed gamma corrected images to an on-set monitor, without any additional hardware or cabling.

The CDL and LUT corrections aren't baked in to the data, you simply have the benefits of shooting V-log but seeing it gamma corrected on the monitor.

What's more, inside the camera's P2 folder the CDL and LUT data is saved within the negative. In the past, this has been a manual process carried out by the data manager,

making it open to errors.

With VariCam, even if you did 50 different LUTs and CDLs will be forever attached to their hero negative. It's a game changer for the visual effects community.

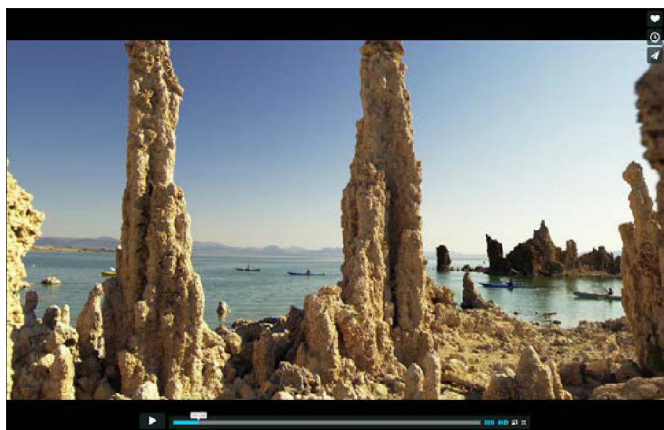
However, I'd argue that it is the VariCam's ability to simultaneously record in three different formats, which will have the greatest impact on the industry.

It means, for instance that it's possible to record in 4K, 2K and HD proxy, edit in proxy, with those edits being automatically made within the other formats. You can treat each stream separately, having it in either a log or gamma corrected format in either 17:9 for 4K/2K or 16:9 for UHD/HD.

This will greatly help production companies to streamline their workflows, making the camera perfect for high end episodic productions.

Much of the VariCam talk has been about the two front ends and common recorder but, for me, what is happening inside the camera

is much more impressive. ■



The first showreel for the VariCam is available on Vimeo



Panasonic VariCam boasts a second native ISO base for low light shoots