

feedback

Making Sense of What Isn't There



DOP Tim Palmer with the camera in question on the set of *The Road To Coronation Street*

Charles Sturridge was the director of last month's *The Road To Coronation Street*, a terrific BBC HD drama that used the Canon 5D Mk2 for 80% of the shoot. The BBC HD department have not however cleared the camera for use on the network and are judging its use on a case by case basis.

However Charles is desperate to find out why some of the pictorial issues of using this camera are not consistent through the production and transmission chain and believes that the fact that the BBC don't rate the camera as HD is irrelevant.

"I definitely wanted to shoot on the 5D. I haven't had experience of using before but I had seen and liked the pictures. Originally I wanted to shoot in black and white and I had seen it in B&W and it looked fantastic.

"We went through some hoops with the BBC and are still going through them! It's still not officially accepted. In our case we were only given permission to use it on the tenth day of a 14 day shoot. The truth is that it's a very complicated argument because the fact is there are a number of quite contradictory bits of information put in to it. When initially argued the question was 'was it HD?'. So you're allowed 25% of non HD material in an HD programme, so I was exploiting that fact in the early part of the shoot.

Wrong Question

"The truth is that that isn't really the question, we were asking and being asked

the wrong question because that wasn't really the issue. There are issues but as it's clearly HD that isn't one of them.

"The BBC HD department in the form that we were approaching it doesn't have an opinion, if you like. All it will do, as it turned out, is approve something that has already happened or not approve it. So the issue for the production company was we can't enter a situation that isn't approved and of course it can't be approved as it hasn't been done and so on.

"I can't tell you how tricky this was on a day-by-day basis. The answer to the question and it's still going on is that under different conditions we looked at the picture in a lot of different ways and it wasn't always the same. That's what it boils down to. It wasn't the same on transmission as it was at a BAFTA screening, it wasn't the same in SD as it was in HD. It's not that it's bad or good in one but it does inflect slightly differently in differently situations.

"I'm still trying to track for my own sanity exactly what's going on. The reason the BBC gave for holding back was without seeing it on transmission they couldn't approve it. Bluntly and I think they're correct they said 'You don't know what a format's like until you see it transmitted.'

"When I watched it on my HDTV, my TV not anyone else's, there was some moiré, quite significant in two scenes where we'd never seen it before, either in the rushes, in the grading suite, in the cutting room, at BAFTA, in SD or HD. All of which I've seen it

"I don't know what that means but I do know that I've seen those pictures every day for three months in all sorts of different situations and they've never done it.

"I looked at it again on Sky+ literally 20 minutes ago which should be an HD copy and that moiré isn't there! It's not infuriating but we all kind of want to know what's going on here.

"When I picked the camera initially I was in a very specific place. I had a very low budget, very under resourced programme and a pretty ropery camera the 750. This was a way of getting something more extraordinary pictorially that wasn't expensive.

"On the first day's rushes we had two scenes, one in the pub and one with Celia (Imrie) on the telephone and there was aliasing on the telephone cord and apparently on the glasses in the pub. That disappeared, it was not there in the grade. We were told not to use it after that but I kept going with it. Those two examples of aliasing never re-appeared in any other medium ever again although they were on the rushes. That's what makes this so difficult from a kind of empirical point of view.

"Having said that after a lot of argument and a lot of fuss the grade had no problems at all. There was one shot where we thought we saw it and we cut the shot down.

"But having said all that the pictures are bloody good!"

When Green Lights Turn Amber

Following our story on the use of the Canon 5D Mk2 on a BBC drama - transmitted on September 16 BBC 4 - we got a call from the BBC Technology department asking us to emphasize that DSLRs were not on the approved camera list for the BBC but were being looked at for use on a 'case by case' basis.

Ian Potts who is an Executive Producer at the BBC and part of the approval process explained the BBC's approach to these new cameras: "Cameras like the 5D

and the 7D are going through our R&D departments and our simulations but at the moment they are not cleared for use mainly because of their aliasing issues. Moiré patterns are also a concern but these aren't new and cameras like the Arri D20 and D21 also show them. But the fact that the 5D produces a 22 megapixel image then brings that down to 2 for video without the necessary processing and filtering does concern us but the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

"The images are very clean from the programme and it has passed our 'tech test'. I'm just about to see it and will probably give it my approval as well. But it still has to go through our transmission chain and might not make it on to our HD channel (It did).

"We are very interested in this camera and have taken the view to approach all requests to use the Canon DSLRs on a case by case basis which means production have to send in camera tests without any grading and post route tests with grading. If we then felt the picture quality met the required HD standards we might agree to allowing the DSLR as the prime camera. This is how we approached 'Coronation Street' and it was very touch and go as the early tests revealed unacceptable aliasing, but after much bouncing back of SR tapes between Manchester and TVC which ran into the first days of the shoot we found a camera setting that seemed to work. On this basis we gave them approval to use the 5D but reserved the right not to show the film on the HD channel if it fell short of BBC HD's standards.

"To confirm the show has passed tech review and will tx on the 16th Sept 21.00 BBC 4 & BBC HD".