

99 francs a caustic look at commercial advertising

The star of *99 francs* is advertising man (and ex-secret agent) Jean Dujardin. His conscience troubles him. He works hard to get dismissed. Fired. Sacked.

But without success; his every deliberate blunder is highly praised by his delighted superiors!

David Ungaro, working on his first feature film as DP, explains “*99 francs* could have been a classic comedy; if someone other than Jan Kounen was directing it! Jan is a filmmaker bursting with ideas. *99 francs* is a subversive movie which denounces our “over-merchandised” society - where style supersedes substance.”

“We’re shooting Super 35 in Scope 2.35 format because anamorphic distortions don’t work well with special effects - especially blue screen. Also Jan adores working close to the actors with a Steadicam. So the lighter spherical lenses and closer minimum focusing distances are added attractions.”

“When the film begins, the character is still naïve - and a little reckless. We have illustrated this with short focal lengths, smooth movements and much depth of field. The character moves freely inside the frame. Later, a meeting scene provides a dramatic pivot and we suddenly switch to 50mm to highlight the difference. We used different camera angles to develop the characters. To get the best feel for the actors’ performances Jan loves to do the framing himself.”

“He has an original way of telling stories. Sometimes, the set

itself may move and influence the characters.”

How influential can the light be?

“Very. For example I sometimes use surreal lighting; unacceptable in a classic movie, but here it makes sense.”

“Jan Kounen stages at 360°. So we clear the set, and let the actors improvise without constraining their movements. For big settings - like the one equipped with ninety-eight feet high windows - I set 18kw HMI and Alpha lights on scissor lifts. Indoors, I used easy to manoeuvre half-HMI and half-tungsten balloons.”

“I chose KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 and 250D 5205 films. I used the 5218 for all indoor and outdoor night scenes - but also for many day interiors - without any filtration. I don’t like to balance indoors: I’m never quite at 5600°K, with frequent colour temperature differences between a shot and a reverse-shot, or between parts of the decor. Whenever there is a backdrop, I like it to be blue outside. I like the grain of the 5218. For indoor day scenes, it allows me to light less. I favour natural light - preferring to add black, rather than light up from the outside. The 5218 is sensitive and handles low light levels well. It suits the 2K calibration.”

“It is also suitable for chroma green action. When you have to make several shots for a long green-screen performance, it’s never easy to perfect the effect. The 5218 is ideal for this exercise. I rate it at ISO 400 to give post-production as



much image information as possible. When underexposed, some films shift in tone a little, but the 5218 holds perfect skin tones. I used the 5205 for daylight outdoors in the South of France - and in Venezuela where the story ends. South America represents the character’s return to true values. The images will be natural. Natural, but with a double meaning; one for the viewer to interpret. The strength of *99 francs* is its topical theme. We must all try to preserve ourselves from being exploited by images in general - and especially visual images. It is a satisfying challenge for a DP to work with the most sensitive, the most controversial part of his art: the deceptive power of images.”

Stocks KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 and 250D 5205 films shot in Super 35 in Scope 2.35 format

1 DP David Ungaro (under light) preparing a shot
Photo by Bernard Benant