

Channel surfing reaches a new high with Super 16mm

Produced by Southern Star Entertainment in association with ABC TV, the Australian television series drama, *Blue Water High* follows the lives and adventures of a group of teenage surfers who take part in an intensive, twelve month residential surfing and schooling program at the Solar Blue Surf Academy of Blue Water High. Here, they compete to pursue their dream with the prize being a highly sought after three-year sponsorship contract.

The producers chose to shoot on Super 16mm knowing the format would overcome any quality issues associated with working with overseas production partners, as well as managing the various international broadcast requirements, including HD broadcast. The successful series has sold to more than twenty territories.

The talents of several directors were enlisted for the two series however executive producer, Noel Price, who created the concept, had very strong ideas about the look and

briefed director of photography, Russell Bacon, ACS about his expectations. Bacon explains. "It had to be as glossy and sunny as possible with a lot of coverage. Everyday had to be Saturday and sunny."

Shot on location around Sydney's northern beaches, each self-contained half hour episode covers a few days of story time, and took about four-and-a-half-days to shoot. "We had a generous shooting schedule," recalls Bacon. "But we had to move fast because the coverage was a lot in a day, and especially with one camera. The record was 66 set-ups with a single camera in one day including a cast of ten, and on film!"

Selecting the KODAK VISION2 200T 7217 film stock, Bacon is enthusiastic about its merits. "I've used it on almost everything I've done recently," he says. "Telecine people love it, and I like it because it has such latitude - you can push it hard and it still works under extremes. It handles highlights and high contrast while still maintaining a good look...skin tones look good. It's also very forgiving in post-production in terms of grading. It worked because I knew what I could get away with."

To enhance the glossy look, Bacon employed some filtration. "In exterior scenes we always used a polarizer because we wanted a deep blue sky and to cut through reflections. It reduces the light coming through by two stops," he explains. "The aperture is always between 8 to 11, or 11 to 16, so we had a lot of depth of field, which is what we wanted for the

look especially with spectacular location backgrounds."

The technicalities and attributes of shooting film over high definition were discussed between 2nd unit DP, Roger Buckingham, ACS and producer, Dennis Kiely.

Kiely, a die-hard surfer was also second unit director and through personal experience shooting a surfing documentary in Bali, knew how far he could go with film. "I much prefer a film camera crew," he says. "We couldn't have had the same rigs and the same amount of set-ups if we had shot with video. We just wouldn't have got the same shots."

Buckingham agrees. "Film produces the results that HD tries to reach but doesn't, especially with water photography," he says. "HD doesn't live up to the hype at the moment. When it comes to capturing the nuances of water, HD just isn't there yet. The imaging sensors don't have the latitude that film does. With water you're dealing with various tones of white and if you've got an actor in the scene you can have shadowy areas as well. HD has trouble with that kind of range. We hear the argument that HD doesn't need processing and avoids telecine, but everything about HD at the moment is a compromise. Film is full resolution and full colour space, and HD isn't - I'm not saying it won't be, and there is HD equipment coming to the market that will be a big improvement but it will be massively expensive and nowhere near as convenient as a film camera with a 200ft magazine on it!"



1 Gabrielle Scollay plays the bubbly character, Amy in *Blue Water High*
2 Russell Bacon, ACS