

The advantages of exposure latitude in advertising

Bill Bennett, ASC is the go-to guy for automobile advertisers seeking beautiful, sleek images of their cars gracefully slaloming down picturesque byways. He recently created running footage for several of the latest models of Honda vehicles. The images are designed to be used at car show presentations, in national local television commercials, or on promotional DVDs from the car company.

Bennett and Steve Tom, senior producer for RPA, were on the same page when it came to capture format. "We don't always have the luxury of controlling the light that we shoot in during the day, so having the greater exposure latitude of film has always been a big advantage over digital," says Tom. "Although we make use of early morning and evening light, we also shoot during the day in hard light, so highlights on the sheet metal can be a problem."

Bennett uses KODAK VISION3 250D 5207 film in such situations. "Even in bright sun, I don't have to worry about shooting a slower stock to get sufficiently fine grain," he explains. "And even if we are shooting with long lenses or high frame rates, I have enough stop to continue shooting longer into the magic hour period, which is of course when shots of the car look best."

"Cars are particularly problematic for digital cameras in part due to difficulties in handling highlights," says Bennett. "When you are looking at a car, what you see are the highlights - light playing off the sheet metal. That is what is considered beautiful car photography. It's all about the sun dancing off the car as it's driving in and out of dappled sunlight. When you have a system that clips highlights, it's very challenging. Film has the innate ability to beautifully roll off into the highlights, very smoothly and slowly, with no abrupt transition."

The marketing hype from digital camera manufacturers claims that shooting digitally saves significant money. According to professionals working in the field like Bennett and Tom, that's false.

"What we discovered in the Camera Assessment Series done by the American Society of Cinematographers and the Producers Guild of America (a comparison of seven different digital cameras with 35mm film) was that all these formats were within 10 percent of each other in terms of costs," Bennett reports. "That test analyzed images for theatrical display, but I think there is a lesson there for images bound for television as well."

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"As far as costs, the differences are pretty much isolated now to the shooting phase of the production," adds Tom. "Film stock and processing always have been such a small percentage of our overall budget that it's never really been a factor. Equipment-wise, I suppose you could make the argument that one costs more than the other, but we don't believe there's a huge advantage one way or the other. Whether we shoot film or video, everything gets scanned or downloaded to hard drives in the post process. The bottom line has always been how to get the best images possible for our client."

Bennett adds that shooting film brings the maximum amount of information into post-production, giving the client tremendous flexibility when tailoring the images for various end products. "This footage is color corrected in a variety of ways depending on the delivery method," he says. "Often, some of those uses are unknown at the time of photography. The client likes the confidence and reliability of knowing that at the end of the day they are going to come out with beautiful images with no issues, no matter where and how they will be seen."



1 Bill Bennett, ASC with Camera Car Industries' Porsche Cayenne camera car rigged with a Filmotechnics Flight Head and Gemini Crane. (Photo Michael Helms)