

Guy Famechon prefers to see his dramas played out on film

For years *Commissaire Moulin* (*Constable Moulin*) has remained a favourite with French TV audiences – and with cinematographer Guy Famechon.

"In the last two-and-a-half years" explains Guy, "I've shot four episodes of *Commissaire Moulin*: three in HD and one – the latest – on film."

So, why change back from HD to film?

"Why? Because you must work fast when shooting police dramas for television", he explained. "We shoot one episode of *Commissaire Moulin* in 21 days – maybe on 30 different sets! The compact Super 16 camera is ideally suited to shooting police dramas and other TV films, thanks to its light weight, its ergonomics, and its HF video-feedback link. It's perfect for filming in confined spaces, like lifts and automobile interiors, and when mounted on the Steadicam, or on the shoulder. Film offers a comprehensive variety of stocks; different grain structures, emulsion speeds, renderings of colours, flesh tones and contrast."

"But HD is far less flexible. The camera is bulky. With all its accessories it measures 60 or 70 cm! We have no viewfinder margin to help avoid framing errors. We have to connect the HD camera via a cable to the image-control monitor. The cable is a nuisance during sequence shots and on the Steadicam or on the shoulder."

"When using two HD cameras the cinematographer becomes a visual engineer. He's always having to check their frequently changing alignment. Lastly, HD monitors are fragile; delicate items that don't take kindly to the hard knocks of film-making."

"Always remember the video-control image is the final image before calibration. On the HD segments of the

Commissaire Moulin series, I worked with lighting as low as the set and script allowed. I much prefer to capture the 'feel' of a silver performance, despite all the limits imposed by video."

"Because of its sharpness, colour saturation, exposure latitude and framing, the HD image conveys an impression of directness and immediacy. Such qualities are perfect for sitcoms, documentaries, or TV news magazines. But for telling a story, film, because of its broad palette of options, is easily the most successful medium for aesthetically involving the audience in a drama."

"So for the last episode of *Commissaire Moulin* I used KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 and VISION2 100T 7212. I worked without an 85 filter in order to get a cool image. I especially liked the 7218 for night-time and interiors, because it beautifully retains detail in shadows and low light areas."

And Guy Famechon is only one of an increasing band of lapsed filmmakers returning to their first love.

This noticeable return to silver-based film for TV dramas delights Jean-Baptiste Leclère, head of dramatic productions for the PM Group, a major player in French Television production.

"It's the TV channels that have promoted HD" he says. "Film producers have not been so keen. Directors of higher-end projects clearly prefer to work with film. So do cinematographers. Film – with its diversity of emulsions – gives them a broader variety of performance characteristics than is possible with HD."

"Right now, the fight for HD isn't really ours, or that of the TV channels. It's an undeniable fact that in terms of the ergonomics of a shoot, film is

still clearly superior to HD, and is still much more practical. HD cameras are bulky, and they're connected to multiple cables, which don't help their manoeuvrability and which prevent or complicate certain shooting situations in which we need manoeuvrable and readily available cameras. I'm thinking in particular about scenes that take place in cars and that are a standard feature in all dramatic police series on TV, for chases, conversations, stake-outs, and so on. Shooting in a car with an HD camera is complicated, and the camera's data-transmission requirements are very time consuming. One can easily see how directors and cinematographers prefer the freedom of working with a Steadicam on their shoulder – all the more so because today they can choose to work with increasingly smaller film cameras, even if these cameras are sometimes a little noisy. Having discussed the matter with various players in the film-supply and camera-leasing area,

Right (L to R): Guy Famechon, José Pinheiro, Yves Renier

Below: Jean-Pierre Castaldi, Elisa Servier



my impression is that the return to film is spreading throughout the profession."

"HD places the emphasis on post-production work. Consequently, as producers, we have no reason to ask cinematographers to switch to HD. It's even less of a problem for us. Television channels still want the product in the form of a PAD* reel in HD format, rather than the direct result of an HD shoot. Two years ago there was still a cost difference between the two media, but today that difference is insignificant." ■

*PAD = 'prêt à diffuser' i.e., 'ready to broadcast'