

Making news in Moscow

Film stocks

KODAK VISION2 100T 5212 and KODAK VISION2 200T 5217

Cameras and lenses

ARRI BL4, two Russian Kinors and three hand-held Russian Konvas crash cameras. Lomo lenses

Director of photography Chris Maris describes his ambitious new feature *Newsmakers* (*Gorachiye novosti* in Russia) as a “wild shoot ‘em up between a gang of ruthless criminals and old style/new wave Moscow police/special forces. The culminating stakeout at a huge Moscow apartment block is captured on ‘reality’ live television and turns into a strategy game.” The action-packed \$4 million Swedish-Russian co-production is a stylised remake of Johnnie To’s *Breaking News*.

Shot mainly on location in downtown Moscow, it focuses on the city’s contrasting old Soviet style and nouveau riche beauty and wealth, its huge neglected housing blocks and tiny apartments, and the restrained emotions and aspirations of its people. “Bright colours against the drabness of reality, without painting over the cracks” says Maris, who credits art director Pushkin with “an absolutely fantastic ability to create a believable Moscow.” The DP’s visual references for the film’s emotional and style elements included *The Bourne Trilogy*, *Munich*, *Heat*, *Layer Cake* and *Dirty Harry*.

Maris was deeply involved in pre-production, providing input to the script and plot. “It was important to create excitement and momentum, and impart an enormous amount of information in the long opening shoot-out. We had to establish the characters’ traits quickly, yet subtly, so the audience thinks they know what to expect,” he explains. The subsequent sequence of an office meeting between bumbling old school police/special forces and a new generation of quick thinkers, led by Katia (Maria Mashkova), was shot with frequent short movements and ‘dirty’ frames that slowly reveal each individual.

The DP chose an ARRI BL4, two Russian Kinors and three hand-held Russian Konvas crash cameras. “We needed to capture

stunts, shoot-outs, crashes and explosions from as many angles as possible to ensure flexibility at the editing stage,” says Maris who used old Lomo lenses for their softer look. He shot 2-perf on KODAK VISION2 100T 5212 and KODAK VISION2 200T 5217.

Rely on the stocks

When explosions took nearly a day to rig, shooting began at sunset. “Trying to match the shots with those filmed the following morning was a logistical nightmare,” says Maris. “But I had decent lights and a great gaffer and crew, and I knew I could rely on the stocks. They held an amazing amount of detail in the contrasty evening shadows and matched them with the flatness of a midday sun behind milky clouds.”

Maris collaborated with director Anders Banke and stunt coordinators on special effects and fast-cut action sequences,

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establishing options of moving or handheld cameras, cable cameras, dolly shots or specialist cranes. “We used a Russian Arm gyro-stabilised system to revolve 360° during a chase between a policeman on a moped and a tram. The scene looks fantastic,” he says.

With available light supplemented by several 12K and 6K HMIs, large silks and huge reflectors, Maris generally managed to maintain light levels even after the sun had disappeared behind the tower block-strewn horizon, but when the weather deteriorated he used a long lens. In a large apartment block corridor, fluorescent practicals provided the

lighting and tubes were turned off or light casings broken to give the illusion of different floor levels.

“My focus-puller didn’t speak English but knew instinctively how I wanted to play a scene, where to focus and when to pull from one character to another. On many occasions there was so much happening in a shot that I let him feel where the focus should be and every time he excelled himself.”

Fascinating people

Maris admits that *Newsmakers* was “a massive labour of love”, but it enabled him to return to a city he was happy to call home when he studied at the VGIK. “I’m a big fan of Moscow and hope its fascinating people will welcome this very open, clever and creative film,” he concludes.

Newsmakers was produced by Tandem Pictures and will be released in the spring.

