

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VIDEOGRAPHER DENNIS DILLON RELIES ON SONY XDCAM TECHNOLOGY FOR DOCUMENTARY SHOOTING IN GALAPGOS ISLANDS

New XDCAM HD 422 Optical and PMW-EX1 Solid-state Camcorders Combine Seamlessly to Capture Unique Perspective – Above Ground and Underwater

There are several iconic images of the Galapagos Islands that most people are familiar with, but videographer Dennis Dillon recently took on the assignment of telling a different story about the archipelago that hadn't been told. Shooting for HDNet's "Dan Rather Reports," the goal was to examine the increase in eco-tourism in the area, and its "human" impact on the archipelago.

Realizing the need to gather a variety of footage, Dillon knew the tools that would work best – Sony's XDCAM® HD PDW-700 optical camcorder and the PMW-EX1 solid-state memory camera, a combination that had worked together seamlessly for him on previous productions.

"We traveled the area by boat for a week, going to different islands, hiking, diving and documenting the islands," Dillon said. "Then we came back to the main island for primary interviews, with locals, politicians, and an American ex-pat who'd lived there for 35 years. The population there has quadrupled. We wanted to go beyond the images that everybody knew, get real scenes of the city, its water supply, its garbage collection, and sewer treatment or lack thereof, and how that affects the aquifer. Basically we were going for a look at the balance of tourism and the environment."

The PDW-700 optical camcorder was used for interviews, environmental shots and “real big widescape beauty shots, since the 700 blows other cameras away,” Dillon said.

The PMW-EX1 compact camera was fitted with a specially designed Gates underwater housing for all underwater shots. According to Dillon, both cameras performed exceptionally well for their intended applications.

“The 700’s speed and low-light capability are phenomenal,” he said. “That’s why we were able to start earlier in the morning and go later in the afternoon. I was also impressed by how well the black levels dealt with the high-contrast situations because of the high sun, and the ability to pull details out of shadows. The equatorial sun is dead on in the middle all day, and you get these very hard shadows to contend with.

“At times, looking through the viewfinder,” he said, “I wasn’t sure how this was going to end up in terms of range and latitude, but back in post we were very happy. With certain interviews, we were a little worried about getting what we wanted in very difficult lighting conditions, with the high, hard sun directly overhead, but there were absolutely no problems with these cameras.”

One of Dillon’s two PMW-EX1 camcorders was always kept in the housing and only used for underwater shots. The other was small enough that he could easily fit it into a backpack and pull it out when the need for that type of compact camera presented itself, for B-roll, for example.

“When we were hiking, the EX1 - fitted with a wide angle adapter - was great for its portability in certain instances,” Dillon said. “Each time it was a logistical decision about which camera to bring or use.”

The PMW-EX1 also performed great in other areas, too, Dillon said.

“We were shooting marine iguanas, and we were able to use the EX1 to get very close to the iguanas, within a foot. We ended up with some really great images.”

Dillon also used some of the camera’s special effects features, such as time lapse.

“On the last day of the shoot, I snuck onto the runway and hid in the bushes for an hour and a half, and we were able to catch the incoming plane for our outgoing trip, to get a really nice ending shot.”

When it came time to inter-cut footage from each camera, Dillon and his team encountered no problems at all.

“Without doing any grading at all, we just dropped them into the timeline, and they totally matched up,” he said. “I did very little, if any adjustments.”

In the field, the XDCAM optical system exhibited all the flexibility and immediate random access that users have become accustomed to, and the newer ExpressCard-based memory in the PMW-EX1 camera also was a big benefit.

“There were a couple of sessions on the boat where we’d set up a couple of monitors and hard drives for ‘data wrangling sessions,’ we’d dump all the footage and instantly you knew what you got that day. We were able to go into the next day knowing we weren’t going to have to repeat anything and waste time.”

Dillon said he and his team used Sony’s SxS PRO™ Memory cards for the PMW-EX1 camcorder, four 16 GB cards and one 8 GB card.

“The underwater shots came out great, in very difficult conditions, with high current and a lot of turbidity,” he said. “But this camera’s low light capability is also incredible, it adjusts phenomenally.”

Dillon noted that one of HDNet's goals is to continually assemble an archive of beautiful HD images whenever a crew goes on location, to acquire footage for future use and for possible sale. "So having the 700 and the EX1 to get the very latest and full HD resolution was top of the list for all of us."

The show's producer, who was also on location with the video teams and witnessed the cameras' performance first-hand, added that they were definitely the right choice for this type of project.

"This is a story about nature, the environment and wildlife," said producer Michael Rosenbaum. "It's the kind of footage that can be unbelievably arresting when shot in high definition and when the image quality of the camera is extremely high, as in this case. I would look at the footage at night, when the day's shooting was done and it looked great. We definitely accomplished our goals for this project."