





BUILDING A LOOK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHANE DALY

In the midst of some gruelling night shoots on his current assignment lighting *The Big I Am*, a tough new British gangster movie about human trafficking, Shane Daly reflects on the people who, and projects which, have helped shape his excitingly varied career to date.

While studying Film, Video and Photography at the University of Westminster back in the 90s, one of his tutors (Ronald Gow) was production designing a feature (*Killing Time*) and he nominated Daly as a camera assistant.

Daly recalls: "Sam McCurdy was the cinematographer and I continued to assist Sam and other DPs on films and commercials after I graduated in 1996 until 2000 when I started lighting.

"Those years following University were 'on the job' training and helped me gain the experience film school cannot teach you: on-set etiquette, the hierarchy, how to conduct yourself properly. It took a while to learn!

"Focus pulling, then operating B camera and eventually lighting 2nd Unit for Sam was a real career break, a constant learning curve, and I'll always be grateful to him for those years. He really finished off my training after I graduated."

Other mentors he cites include another pair of lighting cameramen - Jonathan Bloom and Nic Knowland. "Both are very experienced, kind and talented men who always answered my questions with inspiring stories."

However, "probably the biggest break", says Daly, was meeting producer Phil Waley on a Nescafe/McClaren ad in Barcelona. "We are both Formula 1 fans and as we couldn't be sure how long we had driver Kimi Raikkonen for, we had to employ four camera crews spread around the track to ensure we captured the moments we needed - one on a crane, two on sticks, and a moco rig in the pit lane.

"After that, Phil asked me to work in some of the features with which he was involved in Prague including both of the *Hostel* films, *Bangkok Dangerous*, starring Nic Cage, and a horror film called *Psych 9*."

A comics (Marvel and DC) and cinema ("I remember seeing *Vertigo* at the Phoenix East Finchley when I was 12 and being totally blown away") buff since his childhood, Daly says he has felt, even after first cutting his lighting teeth on music promos and commercials, that he was a "features cinematographer at heart."

However when TV did come calling, it proved to be quality - >

SHANE DALY

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◀ first on a couple of episodes of ITV's *Wire In The Blood* in Newcastle then BBC's recent BAFTA-winning drama series, *The Street*, shot in Manchester.

It's only quite recently that Daly has started using Fujifilm. "It was for an ad for a show on National Geographic for my friend director Lars Tovik. He wanted a very punchy look so I chose ETERNA Vivid 160T.

"I had always thought of Fujifilm as being a more pastel, gentle, 'real world'-looking product, but the Vivid really impressed me as a glossy commercials stock. I wasn't overwhelmed with the location we were locked into but the rushes looked better than I had hoped.

"The spot involved two blokes bragging over a beer in a pub over who had the perfect weapon, pulling out each example in a humorous game of one-upmanship. It starts with a crossbow and ends with a medieval cannon. At one point a musket is drawn and accidentally goes off with a bang.

"The stock held the extreme exposure change really well as the flash set the skin tones four stops higher for a moment. The end shot is off the destroyed bar following the cannon firing and there was a lot of smoke and sfx, which the stock also captured nicely."

Daly has also been using ETERNA Vivid 160T for all the day work on *The Big I Am*, co-starring Leo Gregory, Vincent Regan, Bronagh Gallagher, Steven Berkoff, Phil Davis and Michael Madsen.

According to Daly: "Director Nic Auerbach and I wanted to design a brave, bold look that tries to evolve the British gangster movie genre. He wanted a dark and cold look so I decided to shoot uncorrected tungsten stock day and night with a 100 per cent bleach bypass emulated in the DI.

"I always try to use the craft to build the look in the camera as much as possible so I wanted to bias the neg towards the finished look

from the start. I think anyone can expose a neg neutrally and grade it; it's much better to use the craft and manipulate the image before then.

"It makes it easier when you have a brilliant director like Nic who's very cinematography savvy and is certain of the look he wants. Sometimes on commercials I have had to be less decisive with 'cooking' the look in camera as it may change with agency input later.

"But most of my reel has work on it where the end result wasn't just achieved in grading but using other variables such as lenses, stock, lighting and filters to manipulate the image in order to tell the story.

"So I've left the stocks here uncorrected and pushed them one stop in developing to rough up the image a little before 3K scanning. You have to find the best way to tell the story visually which, ultimately, is the cinematographer's key role.

"The main challenge here has been the schedule - shooting a picture with a lot of night sequences in the Spring and Summer! We just gunned from dusk until the dawn caught us around 4am.

"The idea is that we'll draw the warmth out of the night work and balance the sodium street wash to neutral white, and the day footage will keep the cool feel while both enjoy the grainy de-saturated contrast of a bleach bypass effect."

Daly, who admits that if he could have his time again he'd love to have been a DP in the 70s - for him "the Golden Age of cinema" - concludes: "The DI does allow Nic and I more control later. It means I have left some imperfections on the neg knowing I can solve them easily later rather than keeping the crew waiting on a tight schedule."

QUENTIN FALK

■ *The Big I Am* is partially originated on 35mm Fujicolor ETERNA Vivid 8543



Photo main: Shane Daly on set, with director Nic Auerbach shooting *The Big I Am*; top and right: various shots of Daly's commercials and some scenes from *The Big I Am*

