

Hi-Motion at the Olympics

The 2008 Beijing Olympics were not only the first games to be broadcast in full HDTV, but also the first to make extensive use of high speed digital cameras. After competitive testing in April this year, BOB (Beijing Olympic Broadcasting) invited ARRI Media to be the official supplier of high speed HD cameras and requested as many of its Hi-Motion systems as could be made ready in time.

“The great challenge has been creating the infrastructure required to enable total coverage of such a huge range of events,” notes ARRI Media’s Digital High Speed Manager, Andy Hayford. “High speed has not been used much at past Olympics because neither the technology nor the infrastructure was in place. Hi-Motion was perfectly placed for this year’s Olympics because it is a true HD camera and has such a proven ability to integrate with OB infrastructures. It provides footage fast enough and of sufficient quality to be used extensively through a live event.”

Hi-Motion came of age at just the right time to be part of the huge step forward in presenting such a complex event to a worldwide audience in HD. As the market leader in the field of high speed digital cinematography at live broadcast events, the Hi-Motion had already been used for a wide range of sports. This proved to be ideal preparation for the diverse challenges of an Olympics at which seven Hi-Motion cameras filmed eleven different events.

One particularly interesting Hi-Motion setup was utilised for the two marathons and the two cycle road races. For these events the Hi-Motion was mounted on a gyroscopically controlled remote head that was itself mounted to a specially adapted Lexus camera car. This was the first time a high speed camera had been vehicle-mounted for the live broadcast of an Olympic event.

Footage from the Hi-Motion cameras was integrated by BOB into its main coverage, which was supplied to all of the RHBs (Rights Holding Broadcasters). Each of these broadcasters, such as the BBC, could also locate Hi-Motion clips on the BOB media server and edit them into their own postproduced programmes and highlight montages.

Though the cameras were supplied on a dry hire basis, representatives from ARRI Media travelled to Beijing to ensure that the integration of the Hi-Motions into the live coverage of each event was as seamless as possible. They also provided training for the operators and technicians who had not used the system before.

Hi-Motion coverage proved a tremendous success, as BOB’s Head of Engineering, Sotiris Salamouris, acknowledged when BOB was presented with an award by SVG (Sports Video Group) in September: “It has been challenging work, with many firsts: the first Olympics in full HDTV, full 5.1 surround-sound audio, virtual enhancement in HDTV by the host broadcaster, central HDTV server in the IBC, HD RF coverage in all outside races with no helis and Hi-Motion cameras in multiple sports. It would be impossible to achieve any of these objectives without strong support from the international broadcast industry, vendors and service providers from all over the world that contributed with their expertise, resources, and hard work; our many thanks to all of these significant partners.”