



Anyone for a spot of golf?

Novalis produces HD launch film for latest VW model on eQ



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Novalis GmbH, the Cologne-based full service production company, has produced a number of high profile, award winning corporate films for the launch of various new cars for the mighty German motor group Volkswagen AG. The HD film for recent launch of the new Golf, which called for the seamless combining of live action and 3D, stretched Novalis to the full, but eQ proved itself more than equal to the task.

Fusing HD and 3D

The storyline called for a VW Golf to metamorphose into a highly detailed 3D engineering 'schematic' as it drives through an idyllic landscape. The schematic car is so detailed that even the smallest components right down to the suspension and drive shafts can be clearly seen. This leads into the story of how the new Golf is produced – culminating in production line assembly robotics almost dancing to produce the highest technology with absolute precision. The film not only satisfied Volkswagen – it also picked up a gong for Novalis at the German Media Awards Festival.

Shooting began in early 2004, using Sony F900 HD cameras in 25P format. Novalis has been working in HD for four years now and has produced nearly 700 hours of HD material in that time, so the format is more than familiar to them. "I favour HD not only for the clarity of image on screen, but also for the detail

possibilities it opens up in colour correction and special effects," says Novalis founder and film director, Norbert Vander.

An eye for detail

An SD run-out of each day's shooting was carefully looked through each evening by Norbert Vander and Novalis eQ editor Peter Dohr. Having the experienced eye of the editor on-site at the shoot proved to be a tremendous advantage, ensuring that the way the action was shot was best suited to what needed to be achieved in post production – particularly important for being able to combine 3D seamlessly. The avoidance of nasty surprises in post also of course avoided the time and cost of re-shoots.

In order to give the 3D artists accurate reference for movement, view and perspective, all camera moves during the shoot were tracked and recorded, alongside details of lenses, changes in zoom etc.

Right: Peter Dohr at eQ.

Far right: Dirt and imperfections are easily retouched from the image with eQ's on-board Paintbox.

Front cover: Selected frames showing stages in the transition from live action to 3D animation.



Right: The material, shot in HD format, shows the complete development process of the new Golf.



These data were then passed to the Cinema 4D artists to enable them to create a 3D virtual scene that exactly reflected the live environment of the shoot.

A key aim of the film was to convey an almost clinical, ultra-hi-tech feel to both the car and the VW factory at Wolfsburg. Vander therefore worked with Dohr on the eQ in pre-production, making extensive use of QColor to identify and maintain just such a look. This was then carried through into post production.

Keeping it in the family

When shooting was completed, an offline SD resolution edit was completed on Novalis' Liquid Blue system and a CMX format EDL transferred to the Quantel eQ for conforming, and the complex retouching, grading and effects work on the full quality HD material necessary to integrate invisibly

with the 3D. Novalis has a Linux file server with gigabit networking at the centre of its facility to enable the efficient passing of material between editing systems and the 3D department's Macs and PCs. This has resulted in a much more efficient workflow – and helped Novalis to meet critical deadlines for VW – than was possible before finishing was brought in-house with the purchase of the eQ. Keeping it all within Novalis has also eased security concerns, a particularly sensitive area for motor manufacturers in the launch plans for new models.

The Wolfsburg factory shots provided Peter Dohr with some particularly challenging post production hurdles. Precision global lighting changes were simply achieved with QColor, but its full power really came into its own in providing selective enhancement by creating masks to use in combination with eQ's sophisticated tracker to provide pinpoint colour correction 'on the move'.

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Norbert Vander



Above: The integrated graphic supports the sophisticated, technical-documentary style of the corporate film.

Right: Resolution Co-existence enables eQ to easily work with different formats and resolutions together on the same timeline.



Keeping post on track

eQ's tracker also played a vital role in the transformation from real to 3D car at the beginning of the film. Separating the car from the real background was the first task. eQ's tracker uses brightness as well as chroma and produces highly accurate moving masks in short order – making selective colour correction a breeze. The masks are also cascadable, enabling additional track points to be used to retouch unwanted objects from the image – for example, parts of the road edge.

It was also not possible to clean up the factory enough during the shoot to provide the clean, clinical look demanded by the treatment so considerable retouching was required using eQ's on-board Paintbox, particularly to the floors.

Remote approval

Novalis also took advantage of eQ's ability to export QuickTime files for intermediate and final client approvals via the internet – further smoothing the production workflow, by allowing the customer always to be in touch with progress and to make creative decisions without the need to be present throughout the post production process.

Norbert Vander is convinced that meticulous preparation is the key to success in post production, shortening production timescales and reducing costs while giving the customer the highest quality, no compromise result. Volkswagen clearly agrees; it has already placed further production orders with Novalis through the next year.