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CAPTURING BEOWULF

**HOMEGROWN TV SERIES
SHOOTS IN HDV**



REVIEW: ZBRUSH 3.1

PREY: P2 FILMMAKING CASE STUDY



Tales of comedy and horror

Kath & Kim dominated the Australian ratings in 2007, but it was not the only Aussie sitcom to stand up and be noticed on local television.

Stupid Stupid Man made its debut on Foxtel's TV1. This is a new show about the staff of a fictional men's magazine that is dedicated to "Australia's best chicks, cars and weird shit."

In this month's cover story, Director of Photography Toby Oliver ACS provides a comprehensive profile of the production of the second series, which Foxtel has programmed to run over the summer non-ratings period to attract new subscribers.

The sitcom is one of the toughest of TV formats to succeed in, but one that holds rich rewards if you do.

This list of Australian sitcoms that made it into a second series is not an incredibly long one: think *Kingswood Country*, *Mother and Son*, *Lano & Woodley*,

Judged on this basis, *Stupid Stupid Man* has already done enough to be noteworthy. As this month's profile makes clear, it has also raised the bar for cost-effective HDV production.

After a slow start, Pay TV is beginning to live up to its promise to contribute to Australia's television production industry. New drama has also made its mark on pay TV this year, with the arrival of series such as *Dangerous* and the third season of *Love My Way*, as well as the telemovie *The King and Satisfaction*.

As primetime on free to air television grows to be consumed by ever more reality TV shows and song and dance-offs, the growth of original Australian drama and comedy on subscriber TV is a welcome relief.

At the Digital Media Festival held last month at Sydney's Daring Harbour, Toby Oliver was one of the expert DOPs who contributed to the Digital Cinematography panel session, held during the Digital Video Festival. He shared some of his experiences making *Stupid Stupid Man* with the Canon XL-H1.

Joining Toby on the program for that event was Rodney Bolt, another contributor to this month's edition. Rodney generated a lively discussion of the complexities of tapeless digital workflow after recounting his experiences on the forthcoming Aussie horror film, *Prey*.

I asked Rodney to expand on his presentation at the DMF with a more detailed look at the making of *Prey*, and if you to run to page 16 you will find he has done an admirable job.

Do you have a story about working on an Australian digital production that you would also like to share? Whatever the program format, we are interested to learn about your experiences and share them with other Digital Media World readers. The first step is easy, just email bill@digitalmedia.com.au. We'd love to hear from you.

Bill Dawes is the editor of Digital Media World magazine.



"Stupid Stupid Man 2 was my first major project using the inexpensive 'prosumer' HDV format and I have to say I am impressed the way it's turned out." - DOP Toby Oliver



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Smart shooting with HDV

THE 2ND SERIES OF STUPID STUPID MAN, ABOUT LIFE BEHIND THE SCENES IN A FICTIONAL MEN'S MAGAZINE, WAS SHOT WITH CANON'S GROUNDBREAKING XL-H1 CAMCORDER. DOP TOBY OLIVER ACS OUTLINES HIS EXPERIENCES SHOOTING THE HIT COMEDY SERIES IN HDV.



Justin Brickle, B-camera operator, and DOP Toby Oliver ACS, on location for 'Stupid Stupid Man 2'. All photos by Jimmy Pozarik

I was initially asked to shoot the first series of Stupid Stupid Man in 2006 by producer Nick Murray (Blackjack). He had seen some of my previous TV series work and had this low budget, but very funny comedy series set in the offices of a men's magazine called COQ (French for rooster). The show examines the lives of four blokes on the editorial team and the women who have to work with them.

I had wanted to work with Nick for a while and this project sounded very interesting and probably a bit naughty and politically incorrect, with great comic talent like Wayne Hope and Bob Franklin involved. But I was working in WA on another TV series at the time (Lockie Leonard) and had to say no.

Luckily for me Nick called back next year with the second series of SSM and this time I could say yes please!

The scripts by Tim Pye and the other writers were genuinely very funny and made my decision to be involved an easy one. I met the director Will Usic for the first time on this project and we hit it off straight away.

Will was director for the first eight-episode series of Stupid Stupid Man so he had a good idea of what he wanted to do stylistically with the show, and he didn't want to change anything too radically.

However Will and the producers were very keen on improving the quality of the pictures and the overall 'look' of the show from the first series.

I was given two weeks of official pre-production time before going into an eight-week shoot.

We would shoot one half-hour episode a week, with one rehearsal day and four shoot days each week.

Unlike most TV series, we didn't shoot in blocks of 3 or 4 episodes, with scenes from the various eps mixed up together. We kept each episode as discrete as possible in the schedule.

My main task in pre-production was to see about dramatically improving the pictures from the first series without increasing the budget (too much!).

The first series was shot on HDV with the Sony Z1 cameras, then downconverted to DigiBeta tape for editing. So there was the option to go that way again but I wanted to test as many other achievable alternatives I could.

Rental house Lemac helped out with a test day, supplying a bunch of the current crop of cameras for myself and B camera operator Justin Brickle to check out and compare.

The delivery specs for (cable channel) TV1 required only a standard def finish but I felt it's better in this day and age to shoot HD and downconvert, not only for better looking pictures but to allow the producers the chance to re-conform the show in HD if the need arises later on.

The full size cameras we looked at included the Panasonic SDX-900 DVCPRO50 SD and the Sony F350 XDCAM HD. For handheld HD alternatives we tested the Panasonic HVX-202 P2 camera, the Sony HVR-V1 and my own Canon XH-G1.

Using an evaluation form I drew up we compared those points that really mattered when shooting a scripted TV drama series: resolution specs, compression ratios, intraframe and long-GOP, 4.2.0 vs 4.2.2.

All the other numbers and palava bandied around are important to consider but no substitute for actually sitting down with a good quality big monitor and comparing apples with oranges with your own eyes and experience.

Series One of Stupid Stupid Man was the highest rating locally produced scripted drama on subscription television, and has won a number of local television awards. It is set in and around the offices of a monthly men's publication, Chap's Own Quarterly, (COQ magazine), and was shot in Sydney over spring 2007. The regular cast include (L-R) Matthew Newton, Bob Franklin, Sophie Katanis, Wayne Hope, Chris Leaney and Leah Vandenberg. sphere.

➤ (continued over page)



