

# EASYLOOK SYSTEM MODULA HD CAM

Full-resolution HD in a mini all-in-one camera.



Director of Photography Alexander Palm (left) turned to the Easylook System Modula HD Cam (pictured with a Carl Zeiss high-speed lens) for full HD in a tight space.

**WHEN I WAS ASKED TO BE DP FOR THE NEW LOW-BUDGET** commercial for cooktop manufacturer Ceran, which would be mostly shown on the Internet, it was obvious that I had to shoot video or HD. Film was out of the question.

The commercial would be a parody of a beauty commercial set in a bathroom, and it was essential to give that “beauty” look and feel to make the spot work. One obstacle with the Ceran project was the extremely tight timeframe for the preparation and shoot of the commercial. Two days before the shoot, we still did not have a location. I didn’t even know if it would be possible to light the bathroom from the outside. The rental house was pressuring me for a definite equipment list.

On previous projects, I used Sony HD or Digi Beta cameras with the P+S Technik Pro35 image converter to achieve the desired “beauty” look. I also used Angenieux Optimo 24-290 zoom lenses or the Carl Zeiss f1.3 high-speed lenses. I found this camera and lens combination to be a good alternative for creating a film-like look on a low budget. The disadvantages of using this technology are the loss of less than two f/stops of light and the big, bulky camera setup.

Given the low budget and the organizational circumstances of this project, I decided to use as few lamps as possible. A common Digi Beta or HD camera is rated between 320 ASA and 400 ASA. It became clear that I could not use my favorite setup because with a P+S Pro35

converter, I would only get a sensitivity of little more than 100 ASA. (The P+S adapter is a complex optical system of ground glass and prism. Not all of the light that enters through the lens leaves the adapter, so less than two f/stops of light is lost due to refraction at the prism and ground glass.) In addition, I was afraid the bathroom location would be too small to shoot in with a big camera setup; on the other hand, I did not want to abandon my “35mm-shallow-depth-of-field” look by getting rid of the P+S Pro35 converter.

The answer to all my worries was the Modula HD Cam by Easylook System. The Modula is a full-resolution HD camera that is smaller than a soft-drink can. It comes with an interchangeable lens mount, and it is capable of taking all 16mm and 35mm PL-mount cine lenses. Its sensitivity is rated at just more than 320 ASA. I figured this would be enough for my shoot because there was no need to use the P+S converter anymore.

With the Modula HD Cam, I ordered a very basic camera package, which consisted of just a few lenses (14mm Zeiss t2.0, 18mm Zeiss t1.3, 35mm Zeiss t1.3, 60mm Zeiss macro t3.0, 65mm Zeiss t1.3, and 135mm Zeiss t2.1), a tripod, and a Sachtler 7+7 Studio II fluid head. I also took NDs and some diffusion filters (which I did not use, but because I was aiming for a beauty look, I wanted to be prepared to conceal skin impurities on our female model). The camera comes with a C-mount, with other adapters available. I used the PL-mount for the Angenieux and Zeiss high speeds.

Once at the location, I was really happy that I had chosen the Modula for this shoot: The bathroom was full of nooks and crannies and even smaller than I had expected. For the establishing shots, I was forced in the tiniest corner, which would not have been possible with any other full-HD camera I know of. The work and the handling of the Modula proved to be very quick—similar to a film camera but without the weight and size. When the shoot got a little out of hand time-wise, I just grabbed the Modula and continued shooting handheld. I even did a shot where I held the camera so close

BY ALEXANDER PALM  
Director of Photography and Operating Cameraman

to the water surface of the bathtub that my fingers (but not the camera) were submerged, and I got incredible shots. I would not have dared to do that with a heavier camera.

I used an Astro Systems 6in. monitor, attached onboard with a Noga arm, as a viewfinder, which also allowed me to find the exact exposure using the Astro's built-in waveform capabilities.

I tried to shoot with an open aperture ( $f/1.3$  to  $f/2.1$ ). The crew and I were amazed how close the look and the depth of field resembled the feel of 35mm film. Because the Modula uses one 2/3in. CMOS image sensor, the depth of field should be similar to 16mm film, but strangely enough, it did not feel that way with this lens and camera combination.

The Modula is a pretty basic camera; it has no switches, buttons, or built-in viewfinder. All the menu settings are done via a LAN-connected laptop or PDA computer in a standard web browser. All possible menu options are very basic. It is apparent that the Modula is designed for the cameraman who does

color correction in the post suite rather than on the film set.

It is possible to set the color temperature, gamma curve, gain, frame rate, and saturation. I shot in 25p and used a "flat" gamma curve because, coming from film, I am used to exposing for a rich negative and setting the exact gamma in postproduction. We recorded on a 1TB Fraunhofer IIS Megacine HD uncompressed field recorder via HD-SDI breakout cable in 25p 10-bit 4:2:2. The Megacine also provided a playback similar to a video assist. Unfortunately, it was not possible to trigger the recorder from the camera.

After the shoot, the footage was converted from Megacine recorded progressive frames to progressive segmented frames in HD, then downconverted to SD-PAL using a Ukon universal conversion platform from Snell & Wilcox and edited in Apple Final Cut Pro on a quad-core Mac Pro. Some small visual effects were added later without any problems.

While looking at a magnification of our footage, I noticed distracting distur-

tion artifacts on lines and edges. Because the highest resolution we needed for our commercial was SD-PAL (in which the artifacts were not visible), this was not a problem. I talked to Easylook System about the artifacts, and the company indicated it was aware of the problem.

Because I was shooting with a prototype, the Modula HD Cam I used did not yet have an anti-aliasing filter. Easylook says it has developed a filter for its image sensor and one to block unwanted infrared and UV light. Both filters are now integrated in all Modula HD cameras, and they are removable.

I am very pleased with the look of the Modula HD Cam and, thanks to the absence of endless camera setting menus and switches, the handling feels more like a film camera than a video camera. **mm**

*Alexander Palm is a director of photography in commercials and operating cameraman for features based in Germany. Being accustomed to 16mm and 35mm film, he now appreciates working in HD more and more. You can visit his website at [www.palm-cam.de](http://www.palm-cam.de).*