



CASE STUDY

A tragic Liverpool summer

Product(s) supplied: [VariCam LT](#)



Director of Photography for the drama, Adam Gillham, whose previous credits include *Downton Abbey* and *The Halcyon*, came onto the project through Director Paul Whittington (*The Widower*, *Cilla*). "We have a history that goes back about ten years together," he explained. "He called me and talked about the project and we went from there. He worked on *The Moorside* before this, and so it was his initial suggestion, when we talked about a camera, that we should look at the VariCam LT."

"I found the camera well balanced for handheld"

Following series of portrait tests, the VariCam LT was selected as the primary camera, thanks to the detail it was able to pick up in the actors' eyes, and the resulting effect it was able to create in a number of emotionally raw scenes.

"We had about three different tests and I didn't tell [Director Paul Whittington] which portraits had been shot with which camera," explains Adam Gillham. "I asked him to say which portrait he instinctively preferred, and each time he chose the one shot on the VariCam LT."

As well as the portrait testing, Adam Gillham tested the LT's low light performance, experimenting with the dual native ISO functionality and shooting at a base of 5000 ISO with negative gain bringing the ISO to 2500.

The VariCam's powerful low light performance and true-to-life look has seen the camera flourish in hard-hitting TV drama. Past examples include the BBC's most successful series of 2015 *Dr Foster*, and more recently, *The Moorside*, which used the VariCam 35 and was the most-viewed BBC drama debut for 15 years.

Much of the time on set involved working with significant space constraints, and there were a lot of sequences filmed in small rooms and narrow doorways. As a result, the VariCam LT was used exclusively handheld.

"Shooting handheld was partly about having a continuity of styles throughout," elaborated Adam Gillham. "We knew that there were going to be a lot of long travelling shots, and the options were either Steadicam or handheld. A lot of the locations were very small because we were shooting on estates around Liverpool. We had very confined spaces and a lot of filming through small doorways, so we wouldn't have been able to do it with the Steadicam."

"We were really quite close to the area where the events in question took place ... so we didn't want to be putting up cherry pickers and lighting rigs."

"In many ways shooting handheld is more responsive than the Steadicam, so there was that factor as well. We had many cast members who were young and had never acted before. That, and the fact that we often shot without rehearsals, meant a responsive and uncluttered approach was necessary."

The demands of the narrative also meant there were a number of scenes following characters going inside and outside buildings, so it was important that whatever camera was used was highly mobile. Stripped of its accessories, the LT was extremely light and manoeuvrable in the tight space. The shoot made use of two LTs as the main cameras, alongside a rival for a handful of specific scenes.

In the interests of manoeuvrability and weight the lens control and cinetape accessories were removed from the camera and run remotely along a 3 metre cable.

"I found the camera well balanced for handheld, especially once we took the accessories off. It was very light when sitting on the shoulder, which was important because there were a lot of moving shots and we didn't have the space to use a dolly or rig of any kind."

With so much unbroken transition between the low sun of a summer's evening and the comparatively darker house interiors, the variation in the light levels throughout the course of the series was an important concern. "Our lighting package varied enormously," Adam Gillham explained. "I was keen on not shutting out the natural light that we had outside, and instead trying to make use of it, so for sequences inside we kept the windows uncovered. It was important that we were able to control the exposure as we went as well."

Given the series' subject matter and the fact that production was taking place in the local area of where the real life events played out, Adam Gillham was also keen to keep things as inconspicuous as possible. "We were really quite close to the area where the events in question took place; probably only a few miles away, so we didn't want to be putting up cherry pickers and lighting rigs."

"Shooting on the LT was a new experience for me and there was some getting to grips with it and the way it works. Now I know how to get the best out of it I would definitely consider using the VariCam on future projects."

Provision supplied two cameras and a lighting package in conjunction with 35mm Cooke S4i lenses and shot at ProRes 4444, giving a neutral look to the footage that appealed to both Adam Gillham and Paul Whittington. For sequences that made use of VFX, production moved up to 2K and codecs were switched to AVC-Intra444.

The four-part factual drama is set to air on ITV in early May 2017.

