



CASE STUDY

Terra X views the world through the lens of the VariCam LT

Client: Oliver Roetz

Location: Euskirchen, Germany

Challenge

The camera has to produce excellent images even in extreme environmental conditions

Solution

The Panasonic VariCam LT and the service from Panasonic partner, Mediatec fulfilled the requirements whilst delivering the best value for money of any camera on the market.

"The VariCam LT is perfect for what I need and has even risen to the challenge of replacing a more expensive camera. It is also much nicer than the previous solution I had which sadly always produced synthetic-looking tones. The VariCam is small and compact yet very sturdy, which I love "

Oliver Roetz

Camerman and Photographer



Terra X: Fascinating World - Japan

Terra X is a successful documentary series in Germany, regularly wowing audiences with its visually impressive history, archaeology and science films. Over 40 new episodes of Terra X are produced a year and broadcast in the Sunday 7:30 prime time slot on ZDF. Each episode is then also repeated several times throughout the week on its sister channels ZDFneo and ZDFinfo.

Panasonic and partners work together to provide outstanding service

Roetz has been working with Mediatec, a systems vendor based in Cologne, for many years. Mediatec works with various camera manufacturers and offers different service models in cooperation with them. Before Roetz started filming with the VariCam LT, he was using a camera from a Japanese competitor.

However, the manufacturer's service had limitations: "When issues are particularly complex, i.e. when they enter Prime Support level territory, even a highly professional systems vendor such as Mediatec naturally needs support from the manufacturer", says Roetz, describing the division of responsibilities. "Communications with the manufacturer of the camera that I had prior to the LT were unfortunately poor. They actually went through Mediatec but their responses and suggested solutions unfortunately weren't useful." After receiving an urgent job, Roetz needed an alternative, and fast.

"Mediatec and Panasonic's joint response was sensational", says a thrilled Roetz. "I was able to purchase a VariCam LT in next to no time and, when I received it, it was already all set up which meant that I could start filming again straight away."

Mediatec helped Roetz to familiarise himself with the camera as part of the set-up process. In addition to the basics, such as a check to ensure it had all the latest firmware and tests to ensure all the plugs and cables were functioning properly, the camera was also quickly adapted and configured to meet all his specific requirements. In particular, Roetz's lenses were added and calibrated with the camera.

The calibration process was carried out in special test rooms with unique measurement charts. Mediatec ensured that the lenses provided the right depiction, checked that no vignetting was present and that they didn't exhibit any fringes in the colour gradients. Roetz has also had nothing but positive experiences when subsequently working with Mediatec and Panasonic.



“It is clear that the partnership between Panasonic and Mediatec is excellent”, says Roetz. “No matter what requirements were set on our side, a solution was always provided extremely quickly.”

Impressive image quality - even in poor lighting conditions

As a cameraman, Roetz naturally lists image quality as one of his top priorities when deciding on a camera. The VariCam LT quickly impressed him in this area. “The image quality and the dynamic range are exceptional”, says Roetz. What's more, thanks to the dual-native ISO sensor settings of 800 and 5000, spectacular images can be captured even in poor lighting conditions. When shooting in Japan, there were two moments where the VariCam LT was able to demonstrate this particular strength. One of them was the shoot in G-CANS, the world's largest underground discharge channel. Tokyo is regularly hit with heavy rainfall when the rain clouds of typhoons from the Pacific Ocean release their moisture over the mountains surrounding Tokyo. G-CANS, a temple-like underground system with no less than 60 kilometres of tunnels under the metropolitan area of Tokyo, takes the gargantuan amounts of water and diverts them in order to prevent flooding.

“For camera technology, it is tense as the amount of light down there is very limited”, says Roetz. “Thanks to the dual native ISO, we were able to create some great images with the VariCam LT with ISO 5000 without losing quality.”

The second situation in Japan in which Roetz really benefited from the VariCam LT's high degree of light sensitivity was when shooting the cherry blossom festival. In Japan, the cherry blossom festival is a deeply rooted cultural event that lasts for weeks.

“The cherry blossom of course also flourishes during the day and there are lots of people walking around, but during the evening there is another, completely different atmosphere.”

An unforgettable atmosphere is created during the evening with lighting. The trees are illuminated and adorned with small hanging lanterns.

“It is no problem for the human eye of course but for a camera it is essentially a pitch-black setting. Yet even here the VariCam came into its own - we were able to work with ISO 5000 without any noise.”

Easy to use and extremely reliable

Roetz is also reliant on the VariCam LT's impressive handling, ease of use, sophisticated user interface and intuitive menu navigation. "I need extremely swift access, especially during the many nature shoots that I do for Terra X", says Roetz, explaining his specific requirements.

"It's often the case that I have little or no time at all to plan something. I might have an idea but, in terms of the details, when it comes down to it, I just have to be quick to respond. The VariCam really helps me in that regard."

Roetz's VariCam LT is exposed to all sorts of hazards and adverse conditions during shoots: "We're talking about high humidity, extreme heat, extreme cold and ridiculous amounts of dust, dirt, mud and salt water", says Roetz. "We go to places no one would ever want to take a camera and expose it to such elements, because you are constantly worried that when you wake up the next morning it will no longer be working. We're right in the thick of it in these kinds of environments." The importance of sturdiness and reliability for Roetz therefore cannot be underestimated. "The VariCam LT is way ahead of the competition", says Roetz.

Great value for money

Roetz places the VariCam LT in the mid-price category but is more than happy with it in terms of image quality. "In view of the price bracket that the VariCam is in, the image quality is truly exceptional - it looks amazing", say Roetz. As Roetz often films for public broadcasters, budget is an important factor as costs have to be justified. "If I were to opt for a significantly more expensive camera, I would of course have to pass on the higher costs to the broadcaster."

Expectations fulfilled

The Panasonic VariCam LT has completely fulfilled Oliver Roetz's expectations: "The VariCam LT is perfect for what I need and has even risen to the challenge of replacing a more expensive camera", says Roetz.

"It is also much nicer than the previous solution I had which sadly always produced synthetic-looking tones. The VariCam is small and compact yet very sturdy, which I love. I've been using the LT for two years now and it has performed like a true workhorse. We have literally been through the mud with it and it has never malfunctioned. The LT only ever goes in for servicing for a clean", says Roetz, summing up the many assignments he has used his VariCam LT for.