

TALKBACK THAMES

Arresting Performance from HD Cameras

CUSTOMER:

Talkback Thames, UK

www.talkbackthames.tv**APPLICATION:**Production of *The Bill* for ITV using Grass Valley LDK 8000 Elite cameras with sport back.**CLIENTS:**

ITV



Center to production of *The Bill* are Grass Valley LDK 8000 Elite studio cameras used on location.

BACKGROUND

The Bill is a long-running and very popular police procedural drama produced by Talkback Thames for the UK's ITV network. Early in 2009 the decision was made to change the requirement to a weekly, one hour high-definition drama for a 9:00 pm/21.00 timeslot.

That called for Talkback Thames to re-equip its production capabilities to upgrade to HD, and as part of that they looked at new cameras.

PRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

One of the characteristics of the way *The Bill* worked in SD was that Talkback Thames used system cameras recording to separate devices, rather than the camcorders that might typically be used for drama. Having looked carefully at all the options available as they moved to HD, Talkback Thames decided to maintain the same approach, and placed an order for five Grass Valley™ LDK 8000 Elite cameras, which record onto the Panasonic P2 format.

There are two main reasons behind the choice of this way of working:

First is that, with a system camera, production staff have an excellent level of control over the iris and color

temperature of the camera, and can make changes on-the-fly. The style of the show requires that the action regularly moves from the inside of a police car to an external—such as inside a house—in a single flowing shot.

With a system camera they can make adjustments on-the-fly and get consistently good results. It means that Talkback Thames can deliver a well-matched, technically excellent one hour program.

The second reason is that *The Bill* is often shot in confined spaces. The defining characteristic of the show is that it tells the story from the viewpoint of the police—a police officer is in every scene. That means often shooting inside a police car, for example.

The back of a British police car is not huge—and the new generation of police cars are about to get is even smaller—so there would not physically be room for a top quality HD camcorder. These inside car shots are an integral part of the program, so using a lower quality, smaller camcorder was not an option.

“Producing an hour of high-quality television drama each week is a challenge, and the five LDK 8000 Elite cameras are used either singly or as two camera units as the locations require. It is very flexible.”

Martin Williams, Technical Operations Manager
Talkback Thames



With the way production on *The Bill* works, the production staff needs long distances between the camera and the recorder, so a third-party fiber system is used as they have to be able to run all the equipment from batteries. We use the LDK 8000 Elite camera with its "sport back," which gives them an HD-SDI output, but makes the physical camera very short: it looks more like a Grass Valley Viper Filmstream™ digital cinematography camera than a studio system camera.

On occasion, production will call for operation using a camcorder. The drama often needs shots in public areas like markets, where trailing wires would be a safety hazard. In those cases a portable Panasonic P2 recorder is added onto the back of the LDK 8000 Elite camera. That gives matching quality, although it does need more grading in post.

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When we made our choices, the goal was to maintain the highest quality throughout. They record using AVC-Intra, which Talkback Thames' Avids can edit natively. The whole system is file-based throughout, up to the moment when they write the finished program to tape for delivery.

"Most importantly, the Grass Valley cameras create excellent image quality at the start of the process, as well as giving us the control and flexibility we need."

Martin Williams, Technical Operations Manager
Talkback Thames

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