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HD in production

A PRODUCER'S GUIDE

Familiarity is key

Picture quality and familiarity of operation were important when Martin Hawkins shot *Parents of the Band*

Parents of the Band is a BBC1 six-part comedy series starring Jimmy Nail as a former eighties pop musician and separated father of a teenage drummer in a band. The series focuses on the parents who live vicariously through their teenage children as they experience the ups and downs of being in a band. The programme is a joint venture between BBC Vision Productions and Serious Entertainment Productions, which is owned by the series co-creators Jimmy Nail and Tarquin Gotch.

Cameraman Martin Hawkins used the HDW-790P, which he hired from AFL Television, to shoot the series. Cameras such

as the HDCAM HDW-790P complement projects like *Parents of the Band*, being a particularly suitable choice for drama and feature film, partly due to the add-ons that are available such as lenses and longer viewfinders. "The quality of the new HDV and XDCAM EX cameras that have come out recently are great for observational documentaries, where you need speed and a lightweight camera. A model like the HDW-790P really holds its own on productions such as *Parents of the Band*," says Hawkins.

"The series is a single camera sitcom that was shot on location rather than in front of an audience. We had four weeks filming the

Parents of the Band was shot at 25p and there was also an insert that was shot at 50i so being able to switch was valuable for the production. "With today's technology it is paramount you can choose between filming 50i or 25p. The camera would be half as good if it was only capable of doing one format," says Hawkins. He would also consider using other formats from Sony's camera ranges but often the decision of format isn't up to the cameraman, as the broadcaster or production company makes this choice. "Once I get the call to the job I am often told it is high definition and a tape format and then it is up to me to decide what I do. Obviously the budget also has a big part in that too."

Hawkins enjoys working with the tape format of HDCAM and feels that taking out a piece of hardware with the day's rushes on doesn't quite have the same emotion for him. "I like it as it is familiar to me and I really enjoy having the discipline of a length of tape. I am sure that eventually everything will be on hard drives but I don't think that it should affect my actions. I like physically handling a tape and saying there are three scenes I am really proud of on there," he says.

Hawkins, who has always been a fan of Sony's build of cameras, particularly liked the design of the HDW-790P. "I like the fact it looks like a Sony camera and that it balances really well. It feels like I have been using it for years because I have been brought up with Sony cameras. I love the picture quality that comes from it and the latitude and tonal range," says Hawkins.

On top of this, Hawkins also found the menu on the HDW-790P was very easy to understand and enhanced the filming of the series. On *Parents of the Band* Hawkins tweaked the gamma curves to give a bit more latitude. "It is great that you can tweak the gamma curves and menus to give the project a look that is not far away from what will be done in the final grade. This means that when people are viewing the monitors on the floor they can see the route that you are going down in terms of the look," he says.



DoP Martin Hawkins made use of the menus of the HDW-790P to tweak gamma curves

Martin Hawkins, DoP Why the HDW-790P?



"I love the picture quality that comes from it and the latitude and tonal range"

series on location and two weeks at Pinewood filming in the studios," says Hawkins.

He has always used models from Sony's range of cameras. "I like to know exactly where things are on the camera. I just want to be able to pick it up, turn it on and know where the switches are for me to be able to shoot straight away. As schedules are now getting much more precious a cameraman's time shooting is paramount so you need to be able to get the best out of the camera. What you don't want to be doing is messing around with kit while you are filming a production," says Hawkins.

He believes even though the HDW-790P is a newer piece of kit, Sony has "cleverly dressed it up like a camera that everyone is used to, so it is a natural progression". Hawkins has also seen that in terms of picture quality it has moved forward but in camera operation it is very familiar. "That's what you need as the camera feels like an old friend," he says.

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MARTIN HAWKINS, DOP