

CLIP ART CHUCK OZEAS GOES CRUISIN' IN DUBAI FOR TOYOTA

By Kevin H. Martin Photos courtesy Chuck Ozeas

While many recent automobile spots utilize digitally augmented vehicle flythroughs and synthetic landscapes, a new commercial for the 2008 Toyota Land Cruiser takes a different tack. Director Yasushi Matsura, helming the spot for Tokyo's TYO productions, wanted to see the Land Cruiser encounter and successfully traverse a variety of harsh but real environments.

For his director of photography, Matsuura selected Chuck Ozeas, who collaborated with the director on a Panasonic branding feature in November 2006. Ozeas, a 1990 USC grad, spent a decade working his way up through the ranks, logging 200+ music video credits.

"Those jobs can be difficult, even insane, at times," the cinematographer acknowledges, "but they teach you how to think on your feet and adjust quickly. Those factors probably helped with my getting this assignment, since the director knew it would be a difficult shoot, and that getting along together would be important."

Like the Panasonic spot, this was intended as an extended commercial, intended to play out over minutes in its theatrical incarnation and as a series of :30 and :60 spots for television. "The director's style is very narrative-minded," notes Ozeas. "Instead of using a lot of post trickery, he wanted to shoot as

much in-camera as possible, so we'd see the car tame these lands. He thinks outside the box." The spot begins with ample evidence of this approach, as the viewer witnesses desert wildlife becoming aware of a new presence, soon revealed to be the Land Cruiser.

Due to the auto's popularity in the Middle East, shooting took place in Dubai. Both of the production companies operating in that country maintain their own equipment houses, so naturally competition between these factions is intense. Complicating the situation is the employment procedure in-country. "To work longer than two months, crew members have



to be sponsored by one of the production companies," Ozeas explains. "The problem is depth of experience. While the department heads know their stuff and are experienced strong leaders, the rest are just learning. I am sure this will get better as they learn the jobs."

Truly an international production, the spot utilized crew talent drawn from seventeen different countries. "It was amazing to see how well communication worked, given the various languages and cultures. It shows just how universal our job is and how everyone does things in somewhat the same way." One difference in procedure did become clear during prep discussions with the key grip and gaffer. "The country works with the British system of shooting. The gaffer and his sparks handle everything from lights to diffusion frames to reflectors. Grips are considered camera support, dealing with dollies, cranes and supporting the camera department moves. During the shoot, I forgot about this a couple times, but the grips would very kindly pass my instruc-

tions on to the gaffer."

During location scouting, Ozeas realized the sun became very flat very quickly. "Between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., it feels as if the sun is

"WE MUST HAVE GONE THROUGH THIRTY BOTTLES A DAY OF WATER AND SPORTS DRINKS!"

DP CHUCK OZEAS

straight overhead. I realized it would mean a lot of pre-sunrise calls when I looked at my Sunpath chart... straight up, straight over, and straight down! Shooting a white car in the hot desert environment made the use of backlight all the more important. We needed to get to the distant locations early to take advantage of the low-angled light as much as possible. Much time and effort was put into planning and scheduling to keep the car in backlight while creating beautiful compositions within

the landscape." With sunrise coming at 5 a.m. and sunset arriving as late as 7 p.m., the middle of the shooting day would become a siesta of sorts, with two to three hours spent on lunch and prepping for the afternoon shoot.

While the scout had taken place during 110-degree weather, the six-day shoot was surprisingly humid and appreciably warmer, with thermometers hitting the century mark an hour before sunrise and two days topping out over 122 degrees. "We must have gone through thirty bottles a day of water and sports drinks!" Ozeas recalls. "The locals suggested I cover as much as possible. Wearing the right type of long pants and long-sleeve shirts, [which I] picked up at R.E.I. before leaving, was key. The loose-fitting clothes keep your body from dehydrating and the sweat on your skin from evaporating too fast, better than shorts and a T-shirt."

Production obtained its cameras locally. Ozeas used a pair of ARRI 435 Extremes as his

principal cameras and when multi-camera coverage was called for on stunts, he shot with two ARRI-35 as well. He selected Kodak 5201 stock and a set of Zeiss UltraPrime lenses, though 5205 was also used for late afternoon/evening shooting. "Knowing this combination would create a very contrasty image, I wanted to use a diffusion that would soften and smooth the highlights in the car. I enjoy the quality of softening that Mitchell provides, so I decided to use that on my lenses. It was nice old classic softening, which gave it more of a narrative feel than one of totally crisp reality. The results were at times breathtaking!" To control the image in camera, Ozeas also made extensive use of ND grads on landscape vistas.

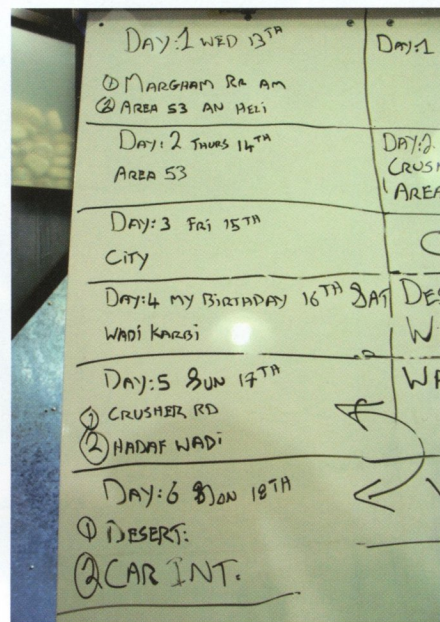
Unlike most auto shoots, this spot had to rely on a single vehicle. "We usually have back-

The fourth day of shooting took place at Wadi Carbi, a dry riverbed located more than two hours away, at the base of a rocky canyon. Ozeas found the location to be worth the extra time due to its extraordinary-looking black rock terrain. "The key grip explained they are black because the sun has burned them. I turned some rocks over, and sure enough, they were a regular brown color underneath." This section of the spot, with the Land Cruiser briefly at rest, is the cinematographer's personal favorite. "The piece can breathe for a moment, and the black rock really pops the car out, letting us show off its lines.

"We did some long-lens dollys, putting the car into an exotic space, compressed against this beautiful mountain background. The lateral dolly ran about two hundred feet to get from the side of the car to the front, and

the lands it had traveled.

The final day's work revolved in large part around capturing various animals, and mandated an extra-early call time of 3:15 a.m. "Falcons will only fly before the heat gets too high," Ozeas reveals. "The morning's work was finished when we had falcons hopping around the sand, too hot and tired to fly anymore." During the location scout, Ozeas had photographed a camel standing beside a tree, causing the director to add the image to his shot list. When returning with camel and wrangler to shoot the tree, they found competition for the area's 'garden spot'—eight other camels were already in position. In keeping with the director's preference for in-camera work, close-up views of various desert critters were captured not via greenscreen and plate work, but instead with Schneider split-diopters



ups, especially if there are stunts or aggressive driving," Ozeas says. "But this was the first one off the production line; it went straight to Dubai in June when we shot, and fortunately it held up just fine through all the driving."

The Land Cruiser is introduced with a bold maneuver, sailing into view as it crests a dune amid a flurry of sand blasts (courtesy of eight buried air cannons.) "For the reveal, I had the Extremes rolling at 150 frames per second, while the 35 were at 120." Extensive camera car work was employed throughout, with shooting on a dry lakebed aided via the use of a stabilized Flight Head imported from London. "The camera car was bumping all over the place," recalls the cinematographer. "Everyone was bracing so as not to be knocked over, but the head performed beautifully and the footage looked great.

took all of the straight dolly track in the country—we emptied the two production houses." Even with the dolly track set atop 120-degree rocks, the crew was able to move and reset in fifteen minutes, allowing Ozeas to shoot a tricky ninety-foot dolly-counterzoom move in under an hour. The shot, which effectively 'warps' the perspective while maintaining a similar composition, helps create a building sense of tension, which is released when the car surges forward once more.

The Land Cruiser resumes its race across the landscape, surfing a river [shot high-speed and with deflectors to shield the lenses] and emerging near civilization on the Palace Road outside Dubai. The spot's conclusion featured a push-in accomplished via 30-foot Technocrane while two Ritter fans blasted sand over the vehicle as a kind of 'sense memory' of

that placed the wildlife within their environment. Greenscreen work was limited to car interiors, which were shot in half-a-day at the water location.

Chuck Ozeas sums up the shoot as being an "incredible experience," and reports the Dubai film industry, like the country itself, is developing speedily. But with such accelerated progress come certain "growing pains. Getting into Oman was really something else. During the hour-plus drive from Dubai, our driver's phone beeped to let him know we'd crossed the border, and he told us all crew drivers work for CID [Central Intelligence Division], like our CIA. I am still not sure if this made me feel more secure, or more paranoid! Though it was frustrating at times, the Dubai shoot gave me a new perspective on working in the States ... and how much I should appreciate it!"