

Ready for takeoff extract

In the May issue of *Onfilm* Peter Jackson provided an exclusive update on his various projects. The following is an extract in which he talks about filming short *Crossing the Line* with the prototype RED 4k camera.

In making the WWI-set short that has just screened at NAB, you obviously took the opportunity to put the HD 4K RED camera through its paces – what’s your verdict at this stage of its development?

That literally came out of nowhere. I’d been curious about the **RED 4K camera** for a while, and had pre-ordered five of them, just in case it turned out to be all that was promised. I figured five is the minimum

to the image – none of the “digital” look I’ve seen with some other HD cameras.

I gave them an open invitation that if they ever wanted to field test the camera in a “real world” situation, I’d be happy to help. I was also keen to put the film through a full professional post-production pipeline, just to ensure we could use the data all the way through to release.

Of course, two weeks before NAB,

in a few NZ airshows, where we fly WWI aircraft, and have uniforms, tanks and artillery for the “ground theatre” aspect of the airshows. The RED jet, with two prototype cameras on board, was in the air and heading our way and we had 48 hours to figure something out. I decided to grab all this WWI gear and make a 10 minute war movie. **Caro Cunningham** went into overdrive and pulled a great crew out of thin air. **Dan Hennah** had

if you finish and screen at 4K, the result is like shooting in 65mm, like the old epics used to do. It’s pretty exciting, and will have a major impact on indie filming – but we could see no reason why you couldn’t use these cameras for any type of movie. I’m seriously considering using RED for *The Lovely Bones*.

The interesting by-product was the speed at which we shot. I operated one camera, and Neill Blomkamp



Image: Aerial camera op James Cowley/DCP Richard Bluck



Photo: Jim Jannard

Big RED one/Wings over Wairarapa: (left) Peter Jackson operates the HD 4K RED camera on the set of his WWI short as Sean Kelly and Jarred Land look on (Richard Bluck and Dan Hennah obscured), and (above) a screen capture from the finished film.

number you’d need for a feature, including a second unit. I had a look at some early tests in LA a while ago and they looked great, but their prototype cameras had never been out of the lab.

I liked what they were doing – making a digital camera of the utmost quality, and making it affordable for indie filmmakers. It also looks like film – it has a very attractive quality

Jim Jannard – the founder of RED – calls and says, “Can we come down and shoot something for NAB?” I asked him what exactly, and he said that we could do anything we wanted. With so little time, I immediately thought “Milford ... Queenstown ... Jet boats”, but then I thought, “Stuff it – let’s make a real movie.”

The First War World is something of a hobby for me, and we participate

48 hours to create a battlefield with trenches, etc, I had 48 hours to write a little script, and we suddenly found ourselves shooting – for only two days. We then had to edit, do sound design, push the film through Park Road Post for colour timing, digital finishing at 4K and a sound mix. We had about five days to do that before the finished result was hand carried to NAB for screening.

I should say I have no financial involvement with RED, and received no payment. I’m sure other companies are developing similar products – in a hurry! But I will say the image quality was excellent, and these were prototype cameras. The real thing will have several stops more latitude, variable frame rates and shutter angles which we didn’t have available to us. If you shoot at 4K, but want a “film look”, then you finish at 2K and add some grain. It’s easy. It looks like film. However,

the other. We did aerial dog fights with chopper mounts, and a pretty big battle scene. Over the two days, we probably shot upwards of 100 set ups – a speed that would have been impossible with film. Our crew, many of whom were veterans of the grueling 300-plus day *LOTR* shoot, had big smiles on their faces at the end of the two days. We all shook hands and said, “Why aren’t we making more films like this?” That was the biggest thing I came away with – the desire to get back to that type of fun low budget filmmaking. If I get some RED cameras, that’s one of the things I’ll be using them for, I’m sure.

Does this mean making, say, a sequel to *Bad Taste* during your weekends – as you’ve threatened in the past – is that much more likely then?

Whatever they turn out to be, the RED shoot has really fired me up to make some smaller, quicker films. ●