

Good hair days during shooting of Dove commercial

The bustling modern city of Milan is, after Rome, the second most important centre of Italian commerce, creativity and culture. Leonardo da Vinci, brilliant 15th century Renaissance painter, sculptor, engineer and inventor, lived and worked in Milan for twenty highly productive years. His famous portrait, the Mona Lisa, is housed in the Louvre, Paris.

The Milan office of film production company Gruppo Cooper S.r.l. is at 7 Via de Togni. There, for several months, the Company's small but gifted staff has also been making portraits. But these portraits are different. And they'll be seen by millions of people who have never set eyes on the Mona Lisa. They are portraits of 'ordinary' girls — with extraordinarily beautiful hair. They are the stars of a massive pan-European Dove shampoo advertising campaign!

Producer Rosemary Bryan said, "Of all the Dove testimonials we've shot over the years, the shampoo is the most demanding. Our testimonials must not only be bright and believable, the girls must have gorgeous hair! This is a vast, year-long, production. We are shooting tailor-made commercials for many European countries. Each country has its own unique commercial, with each commercial containing several genuine testimonials. For this project we are using 35mm film. Why 35mm? To get the maximum quality of light and texture on the hair — I wouldn't want to risk even 16mm on that. We are using a huge amount of film stock, but the results so far have been brilliant!

"We start by street casting in each country to find the right girls. These girls are then taped and during a series of local and international meetings with the client, Lever Fabergé, and Advertising Agency Ogilvy & Mather, we make a selection. The selected girls are then asked to use the Dove shampoo. Eventually we select six girls from each country and bring them to Milan for the filming."

Managing productions of this size and complexity can easily become a nightmare, with one difficult episode

being succeeded by another even worse! But Rosemary Bryan isn't losing much sleep. "There are a million problems to overcome," she said, "but



"There are many ways to light hair."

fortunately we enjoy total team collaboration with both the agency and the client, a rare luxury these days! We enjoy another luxury too; we have the same Director, Carlo Piazza, and the same DP, Barry Brown, from start to finish.

"We build the production plan around groups of countries. So we start with a group of, say, three countries and plan from the casting right through meetings, shooting, processing and editing (as many as 15 off-line edits for one country!) to the final edit and delivery of the master tape. We then make similar plans for the remaining groups of countries, making sure there is no overlapping on any of the processes! The labs play a very important part. Not only must they develop and instantly Telecine the film, but they also have to make VHS timecode

▼ A large black tent in the garden shut out all natural daylight from the studios.



DP Barry Brown

copies. These are then sent to interpreters who transcribe and translate hours of interviews. Our testimonials are unscripted; we edit each film from these interviews. We have our own Avid edit suite, and we edit in-house whenever possible. In Italy, the company that produces the commercial usually does the post-production too, unlike in London, where it is usually done by a post-production house.

"The financial and creative advantages of producing all the films in one place are obvious. But although our Director, Carlo Piazza, is brilliant, he is not fluent in every European language! That means we have to have local agency people and interviewers present on the set during filming and again during the editing. We have been producing European Dove testimonials since 1989 with the launch of Dove soap. Then we produced the Dove deodorant commercials, and now the European launch of the shampoo. Carlo Piazza has directed all these productions. We chose Barry Brown to light the shampoo commercials because he is so brilliant with hair."

Barry Brown took over the telling of this epic.


"We chose a quiet garden location (we are shooting in sound), in a villa outside Milan for our 'studio'. A large black tent, erected in the garden, shuts out all natural daylight from the studio. My lighting set up is 100% tungsten, including the only 'window' light allowed on the set. This way I have total control over the light, designed to give the clean crisp images we need. There are many ways to light hair, but I find hard light gives the most pleasing and natural looking results. I place the lights carefully to avoid an artificial 'lit' look. This can mean moving a lamp just a few centimetres to cut out hard shadows.

"My Gaffer, Massimo Zampolli, and his Electricians, Tonino Maniero and Walter Lombardi, worked hard to preserve our perfect lighting set-up. That was especially true on one of the last shoots before Christmas. Everyone had gone home, leaving the exterior lights out overnight, well

protected, as usual. An hour later a snowstorm blew up with winds up to 120 kph. Panic! We made frantic calls to all the grips and electricians to return as quickly as possible to get all the equipment safely inside. By that time the roads were almost impassable, but the production team (always the last to leave the scene!) and the caretaker helped those who managed to get back gather up all the pieces. Fortunately the storm did no great damage to the lights, and everything went up again in the morning in a beautiful snow-covered scenario!

“I shot mostly on Eastman EXR 100T film 5248 because it gives me richness of quality with good contrast and fine grain, to make the most of skin tones and detail in the hair. The only time I changed stock was when filming our high-speed beauty shots at 50fps. Then I switched to the two-times faster Kodak Vision 200T film 5274. This choice meant there was no need to relight; everything could stay the same and I could keep the girls cool by not increasing the heat temperature coming from the lights.

“You might think that to shoot almost fifty days with the same camera set-up would soon become a chore. Not so. Quite the contrary. It has been a pleasure to get out of bed in the morning to go to the studio! The ‘Dove’ project has, I can honestly say, been one of the most gratifying experiences I’ve had. Everyone — from the director to production — from camera to electricians — enjoys being on the set. We film in a calm and friendly atmosphere which helps the ‘Dove Girls’ to perform in a relaxed and confident manner in front of the camera.

“The production company, Gruppo Cooper, created that atmosphere. They are extremely professional in their attitude, but also a delight to work with. Long may they, and companies like them, survive and thrive in this increasingly difficult industry.” 

Data File

Barry Brown

Director of Photography, Barry Brown, joined Samuelson Film Services straight from school, aged 16, so he could get his Union Card. He was soon clapper-loading in Romania on **Mayerling**, starring Omar Sharif. Barry went freelance in 1971, working up through focus pulling and operating — (2nd Unit and B Camera on **Empire of the Sun**), after which he started lighting. Although his reputation as a ‘Commercials DP’ means he is in constant demand, he wouldn’t mind the offer of an interesting feature now and again!
