

Smith races the clock for NASCAR-themed spots

Jeff Smith had two hours to shoot 30 set-ups for two TV spots featuring six National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) drivers pushing shopping carts painted like racecars around a Food Lion supermarket. The concept was developed by Atlanta-based ad agency Ames Scullin O'Haire. They wanted the commercials to mimic the way television covers NASCAR races with interesting angles and a breathtaking pace.

Smith is a director/cinematographer for Oasis Films in Charlotte, North Carolina. The two-hour window of opportunity was dictated by the availability of the drivers who were on a tight schedule. Because of corporate policy, the Food Lion store wasn't allowed to close. That meant Smith had to work around the customers who were shopping in the store, while finding ways to cope with the ambient fluorescent light.

"Jeff has worked with Food Lion's motor sports group on a number of occasions, so he knew the environment and understood the client's expectations," says Ames Scullin O'Haire senior copywriter Steve Mick. "That saved us a lot of headaches."

Smith elected to shoot with two ARRIFLEX BL 4 cameras mounted with Angenieux 25:250 mm and 17:102 mm zoom lenses.

"The two cameras allowed us to cover every shot from multiple angles," says Smith. "We used the zooms for variable focus, so we didn't have to stop shooting to switch lenses. That saved a lot of time."

One of the cameras was actually mounted on one of the carts. Smith used a custom-made rig that enabled him to mount the camera on either the left or right side, under the cart or from a high angle on top of it. It gives the audience a view from the perspective of the driver pushing the



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cart. The rig was designed in a way that allowed the crew to switch from one cart to another in less than a minute.

"In effect, the driver was the dolly grip and camera operator," says Smith.


Smith took a minimalist approach to lighting without compromising production values. He augmented the overhead ambient illumination with a three-quarter backlight generated by a 4K PAR mounted on a rolling stand. He front-lit the drivers with diffused tungsten light

Vision colour negative 800T 5289 film.

"The agency loved the test footage, and we decided that was the way to go," he says. "The saturation was really rich, the blacks are solid and there is absolutely no grain. The 800-speed film allowed us to work with minimal lighting equipment, and that allowed us to shoot at a fast pace. We pulled the trigger for two hours straight."

Smith says it took precise planning and faultless execution by the crew to make the 30 set-ups in two hours.

"We got in early and blocked every shot out days in advance," he says. "We knew where we were going and knew what we'd be doing two or three scenes down the line."

Knowledge of his talent was also a factor. "These guys don't like sitting around," says Smith. "When they show up on a shoot, they want it to go fast. If you walk in there with an attitude that you're the director and they are the talent that makes them angry. They want you to be ready to go when they get there. They're in a fast-paced sport, and you need to operate the way they operate. When you do that everyone's a hero." 

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from a China Ball mounted on a dolly moving in front of the cart. Smith used green gels on the lamps to match the color temperature of the store's lighting.

The overall level of illumination was low, and Smith wanted to pull deep stops without recording intrusive grain. He tested Kodak