

# How Jeffrey Karoff renders commercials in a unique way

Jeffrey Karoff is a commercial director for Coppo Films in Los Angeles. His recent credits include two three-and-a-half minute short films designed to introduce futuristic GMC vehicles. One film focuses on a multi-purpose vehicle that transforms from a SUV to a pick-up truck at the push of a button. It's the first impression of a vehicle slated for delivery in 2004. The second film introduces a concept for an upscale hybrid car. Both films will be re-cut as TV spots.

Karoff had two days to shoot the first film, which included 15 storyboarded scenarios at practical locations in and around Los Angeles. The goal was to illustrate the flexibility and style of the vehicle while creating a visual texture suggesting a specific lifestyle without actually doing a lifestyle piece. One day they shot in downtown Los Angeles and the second day in Palmdale, California.

"We wanted impressionistic and layered images with elements in the foreground, middle and background," he says. "The focus on the actors is just a little bit off so they never grab attention."

"I chose cinematographer Anghel Deccato, because he works fast and has a soft touch that was right for this film," Karoff says. "He also thinks broader than just cinematography. He's a co-filmmaker. We scheduled each scenario based on where the sun was going to be. Because of the schedule, we didn't always shoot everything in ideal light, but that was part of the reality of this look."

Some of the story was told from the perspective of a Technocrane on a ShotMaker. Karoff felt that was the right aesthetic.

"We had these beautiful shots of this shiny, silver, reflective vehicle driving through downtown and the countryside. The backgrounds are kind of impressionistically blurred," he says. "We filmed a dreamlike rain sequence in front of a theatre in Los Angeles. We couldn't shoot after sunset, so we made that shot at 120 fps when the sun was behind the



**Jeffrey Karoff** (above) studied filmmaking at the University of California-Los Angeles and theater at the University of California-Berkeley. He continued his education in the directors program at the American Film Institute and later co-founded Paradox Works, a workshop for directors and actors. At the dawn of his career, Karoff wrote software that synchronized images, narration and music for *Genocide*, an Oscar-winning documentary. He has compiled an impressive list of TV commercials and short film credits for blue chip sponsors.

building and backlit the rain with 10K and 20K HMIs on scaffolding."

The second film focuses on a hybrid vehicle still in the conceptual pipeline. The agency wanted to integrate a lot of natural elements, including water, fog and sunlight into the fabric of the story to communicate the idea that this vehicle is fueled by nature. There was only a day to shoot and Karoff was asked to record as many effects as possible on the original negative to reduce the costly post effects. There was only a single, champagne colored conceptual model of the hybrid car, and it was only capable of driving about 10 miles an hour. To create a sense of motion, Karoff and



*Scenes from the GMC commercial.*

the art director constructed a stage on a turntable with a reflective black surface and used rear projection for backgrounds.

Karoff shot tests with a scale model in his living room, and decided to also use a front projector to put some color on the car. During the actual shoot, he projected waterfalls, clouds and other natural elements on the rear screen. Some of the images are reflections in a pool and on the surface of the turntable. He also projected onto a dry ice curtain to create a watery screen. The combined dynamics of the turntable, shooting from a Technocrane and the images projected on the screen created a tactile sense of motion, while the mist from the melting dry ice added to the dimensionality of the look. Karoff chose Scott Butfield to shoot this film.

"I noticed his car shoots have kind of an edgy look, and he is very technically inclined," says Karoff. "That was the right combination for this film. We were balancing the luminance on the vehicle and projection screen, and choreographing the movements of the Technocrane and turntables with the projected images. Our timing had to be perfect." 