

DV

Digital Video

IN REVIEW
PANASONIC AG-HMC40 CAMCORDER,
NEXTO NVS2500 STORAGE SYSTEM,
CONVERGENT DESIGN NANOFASH

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GREAT OUTDOORS

TRACKER PRODUCTIONS CAPTURES THE ROCKIES WITH LIGHTWEIGHT GEAR PERFECT FOR BACKWOODS PRODUCTION.

BY JAMES CARELESS

Tracker Productions is based in the iconic Rocky Mountain town of Banff, Alberta. So it isn't surprising that company owner/founder and cameraman Les McDonald has produced a "video postcard" DVD entitled *The Canadian Rockies*. The original footage was largely shot on a Canon XL1 over a period of four years. Additional coverage was captured on a JVC GY-HD100 in 720p HDV.

The success of his *Rockies* DVD inspired McDonald to shoot stock video of the mountains for sale through Tracker Productions. It's a nice addition to the money he earns shooting wedding and corporate videos in southern Alberta, including the nearby oil boomtown of Calgary. But since shooting nature and wildlife in the Rockies

requires a lot of hiking, McDonald decided to try something lighter — and tapeless. This is why, during the summer of 2009, he hit the trails near Banff with a JVC GY-HM100 ProHD camcorder. "It takes about 45 to 50 minutes to hike up to Lake Agnes, above Lake Louise near Banff," says McDonald. "The less weight I have to take with me, the further I can go, and the better, more 'wild' video I can shoot."

THE NITTY-GRITTY

Weighing just over 3 lb., the HM100 (reviewed in the November issue of *DV*) looks more like a consumer camcorder than something suitable for professional use. But don't let its small size and fold-out 2.8" LCD screen fool you: The HM100 is a rugged little unit with a professional-quality eyepiece and full HD recording capability. In fact, the HM100 can record to dual SDHC memory cards in 1080p 24/25/30, 1080i, or 720p 60/50/30/25/24. The recording data rate is selectable up to 35Mb/s, and the HM100 records in either native Final Cut Pro or MP4 formats. This means that files stored on the HM100's SDHC memory cards can be transferred directly to an NLE's HDD for immediate editing; no file conversion required.

The HM100 comes with a Fujinon f1.8, 10x, 7-37mm zoom lens with manual and auto modes. It has three 1/4" progressive-scan CCDs, and can push its light gain up to 18dB. Although the HM100 has a built-in mic, it can also accept external inputs.

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THE JOB

Les McDonald does his best to travel light when he's hiking around Banff. "I look like any other hiker wearing a backpack," he says. "The only difference is that mine contains the HM100, two extra batteries, some SDHC cards, microphones with a small mixer, water, and lunch. The only thing that gives me away is the lightweight Manfrotto tripod that I'm carrying across my shoulder."

Wherever possible, McDonald uses the Manfrotto to provide a stable, solid platform for the HM100. "Even though the camcorder is small, it balances nicely on the tripod, allowing me to pan and tilt smoothly," he says. "The result are images that look entirely professional."

PERFORMANCE

McDonald chose the HM100 not just because it is lightweight but also because it can shoot in 1080p, 1080i and 720p. The fact that it

also uses SDHC cards, rather than videotape, was a big factor in his buying the camcorder.

In terms of video quality, "the footage is superb," he says. "You would never know that it's being shot on such a small camera. It's as good — in fact, better, thanks to 1080p — than what I shot on my old JVC." McDonald says the HM100's audio pickup is good. "It has a good onboard shotgun mic, although sometimes I prefer to use a compact Edirol 64-bit sound recorder to better capture sounds like waterfalls, or the wind blowing through the trees."

What McDonald really likes is the HM100's lack of tape drive. "With solid-state, there are no moving parts to give you trouble," he says. "There's also far less power consumption. This means I can get by with just two spare batteries for a day's worth of shooting. That really takes a load off my back."

The HM100 is agnostic when it comes to what brand of SDHC cards it can use. "You can use standard consumer SDHC cards in this camera," McDonald says. "I don't recommend cheap cards, but I have found that I can safely rely on Duracell 16GB cards, which I buy for \$60 apiece. You just have to make sure that you buy Class 6 cards or higher. Each card can hold nearly an hour of 1080p HD video!"

Back at Tracker Productions' office in Banff, McDonald simply plugs his SDHC cards directly in his NLE system, which is running Adobe Premiere Pro CS4. "Since I am running on PC, the fact that the HM100 can record in MP4 as well as Final Cut Pro format is a big timesaver," he says. "I am really able to shoot and edit directly, without losing time and quality in file conversions."

DOWNSIDERS

To date, the only issue McDonald has with the HM100 is its iris and shutter speed control. "On my old JVC HD100, the iris control was right on the lens, which made it easy to get to," he explains. "On the HM100, shutter speed and iris control are both controlled by a little knob on the back of the camera. It takes some getting used to, accessing and using it while you're looking through the eyepiece."

As for ruggedness? McDonald has no problems here. "Actually, I know that this camcorder is tough because I ran over it with my car," he says. "I didn't mean to, of course. The kit fell out of the tent trailer I was hauling, and I backed over it. The camcorder took a good hit: The lens hood was twisted right off and the little turn knob on the shotgun mic got bent. But it still works fine!"

FUTURE PLANS

The JVC GY-HM100 has proven itself working for Tracker Productions this last summer. This is why McDonald plans to buy a second one and use it for his wedding and corporate videos as well as for shooting outdoor footage.

"The HM100 does the job in HD," McDonald concludes. "It is one tough, capable little camcorder." **DV**

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