

From: Udi Edni <udi@vfxdesign.com>
Subject: **RhinoFX Updates Last Year's Spots With This Year's Models | Film & Video**
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RhinoFX Updates Last Year's Spots With This Year's Models Tracking New CG Cars Into Existing "Snowmobile" Footage

By Bryant Frazer

February 14, 2008 Source: Film & Video

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RhinoFX and Mercedes were both pretty proud of the spots they aired last year, including the eye-catching "Snowmobile", which suspended racing snowmobiles and falling snow in mid-air as a spokesman kneels next to a 2007 Mercedes, frozen in action, and details the advantages of the car's 4Matic all-wheel drive system. This year, RhinoFX used 2D and 3D techniques to place CG versions of 2008-model cars into the spots, replacing the original live-action elements depicting the 2007 models. It was tricky — the spots were not created with the idea that they would be updated from year to year, and it was important that a sense of realism not be compromised. *Film & Video* spoke with Vico Sharabani, creative director and VFX supervisor, about the challenge.



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A frame from the 2007 version of the spot (top),
and one from the 2008 version (above).



Another frame from the 2007 version (above)

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compared to the 2008 version (below).

FILM & VIDEO: Of course I had seen the spots last year. When I saw them this year, I didn't realize they had changed — but I knew there was something that just looked different about them.

VICO SHARABANI: I'm really happy that you say that. It's the response that we constantly get. That's the most remarkable acknowledgement of our work. People know those spots, and there has been a lot of PR on this campaign. Clients and other people say, "We saw this on the air last night, and the cars look much better than I remembered." Our intention was to create a photorealistic CG car. That's not debatable. It seems like the term photorealistic has been abused. We really wanted to get something that looks photorealistic for a spot that wasn't prepared to do that. The second thing is, we wanted to make the cars even more beautiful than live-action shots, without compromising the level of realism.

When you make a CG car work, it's pretty technical. You have to get the model and strip it down, and you have to track it. It either works or doesn't work. You get the model or you don't get the model. You get the tracking or you don't get the tracking. The most creative part comes in texturing, lighting and comping. That's when all the observations are being put together.

That's where you make sure the CG matches the live footage.

We make sure the reflections are true to real life and then augmented, in order to get more pleasing results without compromising realism. We do all the observations that are classic for every photographer, painter, or compositor — every visual artist has to make those distinctions or observations about the way light hits certain surfaces, the way it bounces in the scene, the way the atmosphere or air is impacting the image. All of those little observations and details are being put into consideration by the texture, lighting and comping team.

Whose idea was replacing the cars?

The client wanted to update the spots. It's something we've done in the past for many different shots. It was usually a combination of CG and live-action photography. This particular case called for 100 percent CG cars due to the special lighting or special camera movements. We had to do it in order to get the client to save his dollars and not re-shoot the car. On the other hand, they can update and keep what they like about the spots that already went on air last year.

Would it even have been possible to integrate new live-action footage into these spots?

Probably. If you wanted to, you could 3D-track the car, shoot it with motion control, and then drop it into the scene. It wouldn't be the most cost-effective way to do it or the most flexible way to do it. Given the history, I wouldn't even mention the possibility. It wasn't even a debate. We didn't get to bid it two different ways. The client was 100-percent comfortable with our work, and they knew that if we were saying that we could do it and keep the standards of the work at that level, we can honor our word. We don't take on jobs if we don't know that we're going to deliver a level of quality that we're used to.

So you started with CAD models, and you stripped them down because those models were huge. And then you tracked those stripped-down 3D models into the live action?

Yep. Tracked them into the live action, and made sure the proportions and measurements were true to life, because the measurements of the car have changed a little bit. We had to create all the sheet metal. All the intricate parts of the car were rendered in CG. There were some adjustments to the wheel base because it changed a little bit, and we had to make sure the contact shadows to the ground stayed the same. Luckily, we could use the actual tires from the old spot and therefore keep the interaction with the ground and the environment true to real life. We had the contact shadows, the little bits of snow that got stuck to the rubber tire, and we had the way the snow was brought up from the ground by the wheel motion. That was the only element that we kept from the old footage.

It's been really a wonderful exercise for us to work on. When you look at "Snowmobile," the car has changed, there are 3D particles of snow around the guy, and he has been roto'd out of the original environment. So it's getting closer and closer to a 100-percent CG spot in a very unique way.

You've done this sort of work before, but is this spot an especially good example of the technique?

Certain spots are more forgiving than others. In the five [Mercedes] spots that we changed this year, we have extreme close-ups of cars. We have interaction with a person that is moving around it and needs to be reflected on it. We have beautiful lighting and nothing to hide behind. And I think it's really unique.

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Is this something you'll be doing more often in the future?

Definitely. You can reach an uncompromised level of realism with the control and the extra attention to beauty that 3D supplies. It's inevitable that we'll do more and more of that — most likely even planned this way, as opposed to fixes.

Where you plan the shoot around the idea that every year you can drop in new car models?

Or even, let's shoot the car and replace it. Or, let's get stock footage and put a car on it. There are so many options for people shooting right now. This is just another tool that has matured for car companies.

Credits:

Agency: Merkley + Partners/NY
GCD/Copy(s): Chris Landi, Scott Zacaroli
Group CD/Art Director: David Fox
Agency Producer: Alex Kobak

Production Company: H.S.I./bicoastal
Director: Arni & Kinski
EP: Ellen Jacobsen
Producer: Amanda Clarke

Editorial: Cosmo Street/NY
Editor: Steve Bell
Producer: Karen Henegan
Telecine: Company 3/NY

Post/Effects: rhinofx/NY
CD: Vico Sharabani
Lead Inferno Artist: Julie Mai
Inferno Artist (s): Udi Edni, Dan Kelly
Digital Artist/TD: Bogdan Mihajlovic
TD/Lead Lighter: David Berghoff
Digital Artist/Modeler: Chris Hill
Digital Artist/ Particles: Ivan Guerrero
Managing Director: Rick Wagonheim
Senior EP: Camille Geier
Producer: Linda Gallagher

Music: WickedMusic.com /NY
Producer: Daniel Freedman
Composer: Fer Isella

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A Case Against Color

By Scott Simmons

June 21, 2007 - 12:06 pm



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