



# The next level

Luke White looks at going beyond DSLR film-making to a different beast that's fast, good, and cheap(ish)

An interviewer once asked photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson about his complete lack of involvement with editing, exhibitions, and book projects. "Once the picture is in the box, I'm not all that interested in what happens next," he said. "Hunters, after all, aren't cooks." For the majority of photographers considering bringing video into their practice, the idea of editing, grading, and general post-production represents a major roadblock. As a photographer shooting video you will need to pick up some editing skills. Even if you'll be working with professional post-production teams, it is very important to have an understanding of the process. If you have to do post work, it is in your interest to shoot in a way that produces the most beautiful footage possible and requires minimal work. To people who have not used them before, the Canon Cinema range of cameras (C100, C300, and C500) can seem quite formidable. But Canon paid close attention to the film-makers shooting on 5D Mark IIs, and implemented a lot of fantastic features with the operator and editor in mind to make shooting and editing much easier.

Since its release, the Canon EOS C300 has proven to be one of the most versatile, high-quality, simple systems available, becoming one of the most popular production cameras on the market. The C300 found the perfect niche for productions where a camera such as an Arri Alexa would blow the budget but a 5D Mark III would be limiting.

The Canon Cinema cameras have been embraced by film-makers including Martin Scorsese (*The Wolf of Wall Street*), Spike Jonze (*Her*), and Ron Howard (*Rush*), for specific scenes or whole features.

Documentaries suit the cameras perfectly, and they are widely used by the likes of Morgan Spurlock and the Vice News team. The great battery life and ability to shoot four hours of footage on a 64Gb CF card mean operators are not burdened by extra batteries and media.

It's easy to think of the C300 as an improved, video-specific version of a 5D Mark III, but that isn't true — the C300 is a whole different beast, from the sensor up. The cinema camera is a dedicated tool for film-making, rather than a stills camera that also shoots great video. Unlike DSLRs, the C300 is specifically designed for cinematography — its ergonomic design incorporates a monitor as well as handles and physical buttons (rather than controls being in an LCD menu). In use, there are a variety of other intuitive and very useful features. Peaking

is a focus-assist, indicating on the screen with a red line the in-focus areas of the image. Zebra indicates blown-out areas of the image with black and white stripes. Seasoned DSLR film-makers will be delighted to know issues such as rolling shutter and moiré are simply not a problem when using the C300.

On paper, the Canon C300 doesn't look very special at all, but its appeal can't be explained by looking at the stats. The cinematic 'look' of

of field is similar to how our eyes perceive the world. With the very big sensor of the 5D Mark III though, the depth of field at large apertures could become so narrow as to make it very difficult to pull focus. The Super 35-sized sensor of the C300 means there will be a slightly greater depth of field, giving more leniency when keeping focus and retaining the pleasant looking bokeh. Of course, the camera operator is not so limited by high ISO selection, so has the option to use more moderate apertures such as f/5.6 rather than shooting with the aperture wide open.

Small form factor means it is popular for use with car or helicopter rigs, as well as being the perfect camera for 'run-and-gun' documentary projects, especially when paired with an Image Stabilized zoom like the 24–105mm IS L. The built-in neutral-density (ND) filters are a great touch, meaning the camera operator can maintain a uniform aperture in changing light conditions. The maximum ND is six stops, and, as they are internal rather than screw-on or fitted to a matte box, there is no chance of them getting scratched or dirty. The C300 is also very capable on big productions at the heart of a more complex rig.

Canon Log is for recording very 'flat', low contrast-looking footage with the widest range of tones and detail, so there is more information available when editing the footage (see illustration at left). This is so that the editor can make selections about grading the footage in post, and it also ensures a uniform look if using multiple cameras (an Arri Alexa for example) on a project. Canon Log is similar to shooting RAW as a

photographer, but without the huge file sizes. For people who plan to do no, or minimal, post processing or colour correction, there are picture settings to ensure you'll get great-looking footage straight out of the camera — like shooting JPEG with a predefined picture style as a stills photographer.

Of course, it's important to remember that a camera is simply a tool. In the right hands, any video camera can produce a masterpiece, but, when working commercially, reliability, usability, and quality are all vital factors. In the C300, Canon has produced a tool that is very fast and intuitive; outputs beautiful, no-fuss footage; and is relatively affordable. I say relatively, as \$17K for the body is quite an investment. Fortunately, the \$300 per rental day rate falls comfortably within the budget of many productions.



Canon EOS C300 with Vocss rig



Canon Log illustration

the footage straight out of the camera is the big deal with the C300. Skin tones are particularly excellent. The huge 12 stops of dynamic range mean there is more detail in the highlights, and the blacks are not crushed. There is a lot of talk about resolution, but, in practice, dynamic range is as, if not more, important.

The footage is effectively recorded on a 4k sensor downsampled to 1080, making for a very clean, sharp output. Low-light performance is another big feature on these cameras. The native ISO is 850 (this is the optimum setting, meaning it will have the broadest dynamic range), and it records well right up to 20,000 ISO. At the higher ISOs, there is noise, but it has an organic, filmic quality to it.

People have grown to love the look of video shot with large-sensor DSLRs, as the depth