

An upstart startup shoots to deliver on early promise

By Carolyn Giardina

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Perhaps you've heard the story of startup cameramaker Red, which is aiming to shake up the world of cinematography in which high-end digital cameras offered by the likes of Panavision, Arri and Sony can list in the six figures.

Red has broken the model with a \$17,500 price tag for a basic camera (without lenses or accessories). It was built by a team led by businessman Jim Jannard, a camera enthusiast and founder of Oakley Sunglasses.

The promise of democratizing filmmaking with a more affordable yet high-end camera has created a dizzying amount of enthusiasm in the industry. It prompted thousands of businesses and filmmakers to put down \$1,000 deposits for the technology long before a working prototype was unveiled.

The first batch of cameras shipped in the fall, and now with an increasing number entering the market, the next chapter for Red is under way.

"A lot of people just received or are about to receive Red cameras," says Rainer Knebel, vp digital intermediate services at Ascent Media Creative Services, the umbrella company behind post entities like Riot. "There are a lot of inquires and a lot of testing going on right now."

Red does have its share of skeptics, who view the early excitement as the result of brilliant marketing and question the company's ability to meet its lofty goals.

Early Red cameras were used on Lakeshore Entertainment's "Game," a futuristic thriller helmed by Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor that is now in postproduction. This effort required a lot of camera tests and the development of a post workflow. Both will be big parts of the dialogue in the next stage of Red's rollout.

With the cameras and related software still in development, director of photography Ekkehartcq Pollack lensed "Game" with seven Red cameras using lenses from Cooke and Zeiss. He recorded to 8 GB flash cards, which could accommodate four minutes of material apiece. The Ascent/Riot team developed a post workflow.

During the process, Red sent out upgrades as the technology advanced. The company has always said that the camera remains in development.

"Red was so supportive," Lakeshore executive James McQuaide says. "We were getting firmware updates on a daily bases. We did testing. ... A lot has happened since we started (in November) and where they are now."

Adds Pollack: "I think we still have to wait to get a bit more (development) from Red, but they did a really great job. They were so flexible and so fast in terms of getting upgraded."

For its part, Ascent is confident with its new Red workflow and plans to offer it going forward.

The big challenges in post, Knebel says, involve the handling of data and data processing. "Post houses are having to face (these challenges) as more filmmakers are coming in with Red cameras," he notes.

For "Game," flash cards were sent from the production across town to Santa Monica-based Riot, where the data was uploaded. Footage was backed up, and HD dailies were created and color corrected. Additionally, files were created for editorial and other post needs. The emptied drives were sent back to production.

To accomplish these various tasks, Riot used a combination of such existing tools as Assimilate's Scratch finishing system, Red's "Redcine" software and proprietary software developed at Ascent.

"We changed what was necessary but kept as much of the traditional workflow as possible," Knebel says.