

Kinetic Media and Dejero Take on Million-Dollar Triathlon Challenge in the Middle East

Having spent a decade in charge of the live and post-production coverage of Challenge Wanaka, a full iron-distance scenic triathlon race in the Southern Lakes Region of New Zealand, Kinetic Media was the obvious production partner when it came to the launch of the prestigious Triple Crown Triathlon event in the Middle East in 2015.

The Triple Crown offered a mouth-watering million-dollar prize to any athlete who could win three specified races in 2015 and saw Swiss triathlete Daniela Ryf head home with the jackpot. As part of the event, Kinetic Media produced the live coverage of landmark races Challenge Dubai 2015 and Challenge Bahrain 2015 using Dejero's award-winning LIVE+ mobile transmitters to send live video out to local TV stations in both countries.

"Our experience working on Challenge Wanaka taught us that the use of traditional microwave links and helicopters place a huge drain on the budget and limit working time to when the choppers are in the air," explained Richard Sutcliffe, producer at New Zealand-based Kinetic Media. "Having first tested network bonding transmitters at the London 2012 Summer Games and from then on at Challenge Wanaka, we were well established with that technology when promoters in the Middle East came knocking on our door seeking a production company."

A key part of Kinetic Media's success in Dubai and Bahrain were Dejero's LIVE+ mobile transmitters, which were used to stream live HD video from field locations in both countries back to the OB trucks during the televised coverage of the inaugural races. The LIVE+ transmitters offered an alternative to the traditional satellite and microwave truck solutions, as they enabled Kinetic Media to transmit video from places that would simply have been inaccessible using traditional broadcast methods. The company continuously tracked the race action through the swimming, running and cycling courses to capture every moment of both the men and women's events.

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The team was able to use available cellular networks to reliably deliver live HD video all the way back to the production trucks without dropping frames, regardless of the network conditions. The professional-grade rugged LIVE+ transmitter can be used to broadcast HD or SD video over any combination of cellular, Wi-Fi, Ethernet and satellite networks. It comes in a small, rugged briefcase or a camera-mount unit, which can be set up anywhere in seconds to broadcast live or transfer recorded video quickly from the field.

In Bahrain, Kinetic Media worked under the direction of Emmy Award winning Executive Producer Peter Henning, an American sports broadcasting legend. Reporting to the Kinetic team was a team from the Bahrain state television network, who supplied the outside broadcast (OB) facilities and production crew. In Dubai, Kinetic lead the production and worked with Dubai Television and with staff from service provider 7production, who supplied the OB equipment.

“These events were technically challenging to report on from an OB point of view,” explained Sutcliffe. “Thankfully, we specialise in challenging conditions and we often joke that we only do the jobs nobody else wants! Working in blizzards, weeklong road cycling tours in the rain, live coverage of 220 km races, we don’t really shy away from the tricky stuff and we need to work with equipment that can support us.” Our small team of producer, director, technical directors and motacam operators, together with support from Dejero, worked tirelessly to pull the coverage together for this event. Without all of them the production simply wouldn’t have happened. The main challenges the team faced came from the nature of the sport, according to Sutcliffe. Iron-distance racing is a long eight to 12 hour day and in the Middle East, the Triple Crown races were half-distance which sounds much less daunting, until it’s pointed out that participants are still dealing with courses of over 100 km long. While the Dubai course was a ‘clover leaf’ style race, where each of the three stages start and finish from the same point, in Bahrain the race was especially challenging because it was a point-to-point race meaning the start and the swim leg are over 100 km away from the finish line.

“It was a fabulous course, taking in highways, the Formula 1 race tracks and a wildlife park, definitely the most unique race in the world,” enthused Sutcliffe. “Bahrain in particular required us to have a pretty complicated set-up: two OB units linked by satellite truck as well as Dejero’s LIVE+ mobile transmitters for the four mobile cameras.” The team also had to deal with vastly different infrastructures as comparatively, Bahrain has very few of the broadcast infrastructure resources that Dubai could put forward.

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“In Dubai, I gave the producer a production wish list to which he responded: ‘this is your lucky day Mr Richard, none of this is a problem’. Bahrain on the other hand is a much smaller island kingdom without the same infrastructure,” said Sutcliffe. “Additionally, there is no civil aviation in Bahrain, so no helicopters were available to us locally. This made our mobile links from the bikes, supported by the Dejero LIVE+ transmitters, the only coverage we had for this race. Fortunately, the telecoms network was very strong and having Prince Nasser as patron and one of the competitors meant that many doors that would have been closed were very much open.”

Budget therefore was a huge consideration, as the Kinetic team was relying on the local teams to facilitate the coverage. “Working within the assigned framework and budget is part of the challenge,” added Sutcliffe. “In Bahrain for example, Peter Henning did a recce of the course with a microwave specialist, which ruled out that technology almost immediately in terms of cost. Thankfully, Kinetic was experienced enough to be able to pull off 4G live coverage with the help of the Dejero LIVE+ mobile transmitter.”

In fact, not only were Dejero’s mobile transmitters more affordable to invest in than traditional microwave equipment, but the range and lack of digital artifacts far outperformed the RF links from the chopper on the Challenge Dubai shoot according to Sutcliffe. During the events, the rugged HD transmitters were mounted on motorcycles and boats to stream content back to the OB base for the duration of the event. Back at the OB base, Dejero’s LIVE+ Broadcast Servers were deployed in the trucks to receive the video streams and process them for the live broadcast and the web. Both the Dubai and Bahrain races were multicast productions, which were live streamed to the web and broadcast to local television. A post-produced highlights show was then distributed globally.

“The set-ups for each race involved traditional OB trucks with the usual facilities and crew,” explained Sutcliffe. “Alongside them we had our own live streaming set-up to output the finished show and we had our trusty Dejero mobile transmitters.” The Bahrain race in particular required a six-camera OB truck located at the start of the race, on the swim leg. A second 12-camera OB unit was located 100 km away at the Bahrain Formula 1 racetrack, which is where the bike transition and race finish line were set-up. The Kinetic presenters and hosts were located there with a view on the finish line. A satellite link sent the switched feed from the swim start truck to the main unit, while the mobile Dejero LIVE+ transmitters sent their pictures independently over 4G cellular connections.

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“Our director was in the main unit at the Formula 1 track and for the swim coverage, he cut between the feed from the truck and the Dejero mobile transmitters on the water,” said Sutcliffe. “Once onto the bikes, we had four of the Dejero transmitters sending pictures of the leaders and chase group for both the men’s and women’s races out to the main OB truck 100 km away. These four links meant that we did not need to have multiple helicopters constantly airborne, relaying images through multiple microwave hops. That’s the most amazing aspect of using Dejero’s LIVE+ transmitters, I think.”

Sutcliffe highlights other features that made the LIVE+ transmitters the ideal partner for this job, including the rugged cases that were easy for the team to handle and mount. The compact units were also easy to rig and de-rig from the bikes and boats and Sutcliffe’s team also made great use of the IFB talkback capability. “In the past, the biggest problem we had was getting communications to cover hundreds of kilometers and without them, it’s impossible to direct the cameras,” explained Sutcliffe. “With Dejero’s LIVE+ transmitters, we could access IFB talkback directly through the boxes.” The V-lock battery option also gave the team a reliable source of power, as it couldn’t draw power from the bikes. “And through it all, we retained the frame rate even when the signal would fade,” he added. “I was really impressed with the picture quality, it surpassed anything we have seen while using competing units in my opinion. Another benefit was that the Dejero technology is IT-based hardware, meaning that spares were readily accessible in case of emergencies. “And I can’t say enough about the support we received from Dejero, including the on-site technician that worked with us over a three-day period to make sure everything went smoothly,” he noted.

Ultimately, Sutcliffe feels that Kinetic could not have achieved this coverage at such high quality, within budget, without using Dejero’s LIVE+ platform. “To produce an exciting show, you need to put the camera operators right down in the action and that’s what Dejero enabled us to do,” he concluded.

The original article can be found at: http://www.kineticmedia.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Pure-LIVE-2016-Report_Dejero-LY12.pdf

About Dejero

Driven by our vision of reliable connectivity anywhere, Dejero blends multiple Internet connections to deliver fast and dependable connectivity required for cloud computing, online collaboration, and the secure exchange of video and data.

With our global partners, Dejero supplies the equipment, software, connectivity services, cloud services, and support to provide the uptime and bandwidth critical to the success of today’s organizations.

Headquartered in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, Dejero is trusted for broadcast-quality video transport and high-bandwidth Internet connectivity around the world.

