



A few years ago a friend and myself attended an early demonstration of the first Sony CineAlta camera. The footage was shown on a cinema screen and was targeted at film-makers as an alternative to shooting on 35mm film. After the event we spent some time talking to the Sony Reps who asked what we thought could be improved. At the time we told them that, for us to consider it as a serious replacement for film, it needed much higher dynamic range and resolution as well as a 35mm depth-of-field. The reps said this was a view they were hearing a lot and were feeding back to the developers. As we walked away, I cynically commented to my colleague that Sony's idea of development was to "fit the same features and standards inside a smaller package".

Wind forward to 2005 and, in the latter part of the year, I was shooting a short film. Thanks to the generosity of Arri Media we had a lot of expensive kit on a very tight budget. And when the studio we were scheduled to use fell through, they offered to let us shoot on their premises in London (in the loading bay; we only needed a quiet set and a dark room). Then came an offer I couldn't refuse – would we like to try out the Arriflex D20, their new Digital Cinema Camera? It was a fantastic opportunity (which I didn't pass up) and a chance to get an early look at a camera that promised to fix a lot of the concerns that I'd had with the CineAlta. It had a full s35mm sized CMOS sensor, so the depth-of-field was the same as 35mm film and the dynamic range was much higher (a feature sadly redundant in my film as the sequences we used it for were b/w!). The output was still 1080p, but downsampled from a 3018×2200 Bayer Pattern (the CineAlta we'd seen upsampled to 1080psf). In practice, it looked much closer to something that I'd consider an alternative to film. For my little production, it was an awesome tool to be able to use.

The only problem was that, without the goodwill of Arri, it's not the kind of camera that filmmakers with my limited resources would readily be able to afford. In fact, with all the post-considerations, normally it'd still be cheaper to shoot on film and, as it happened, on my film I had to post in Standard Def for financial and practical reasons anyway. My friend and I (still the same one) discussed what an ideal digital-instead-of-film camera would be like, and how feasible it would be given available technologies. DI's for film workflows were starting to be done in 4k, and tapeless systems suggested it may be possible to replace expensive edit decks with much cheaper drive-arrays (not to mention quicker). At the start of 2006 I started looking around on the internet at what cameras were in development, which is when I came across this.

At the time there was a lot of scepticism concerning the claims of Jim Jannard with regards to his Red Digital Cinema Camera project. Essentially a (well funded) garage start-up that was promising a lot, with a “secret” team headed by a guy known for making expensive sunglasses. The concept alone generated a lot of buzz, but there were also a lot of doubters – ranging from people who thought it impossible to those who thought it an outright scam. But a lot of what was being said by Jim at the time resonated with me – I’d thought for a while the technology must exist to create a much better camera than what was available, and the idea that the big companies were essentially holding that technology back and keeping prices high on their product lines made a lot of sense.

Then info started to appear on who the other members of the team were. What convinced me that this was a genuine product (and gave me confidence that it was feasible) was the “leak” that Graeme Nattress was onboard. I knew of Graeme from his excellent Final Cut Pro plugins and his participation on the Apple Discussions forums, where he was a major source of information for FCP related queries. The announcement just before NAB in March that Ted Schilowitz of AJA was also onboard gave even more credence to the project.

The details that were released at NAB were impressive – a camera with a bespoke CMOS sensor that could output multiple resolutions from 4k+ down to 720p, a modular and upgradeable design, tapeless recording options, PL mount for 35mm-film lenses and (best of all) a price of \$17500 for the camera body. Essentially it was a camera with higher specs than CineAlta, Varicam, Genesis, Viper etc., but was priced in the same bracket as Sony’s new XDCAM range. To put it in some perspective, the only other camera available with similar specs is the Dalsa Origin – which rents for \$3000 a day!

For me this camera potentially offers what I’d hoped for back when I’d seen that first CineAlta demo. The information that has trickled out of Red Central at various times has enthused me even more (a masterpiece of viral marketing!) as each time new features and enhancements are announced/confirmed they hit exactly the right notes. It’s also obvious that Red are using the various forums to canvas opinions and are genuinely taking note of what people are saying to them. The potential of this camera opens up an exciting future for the industry, whether film or TV or any other application you can think of, and one that I have become convinced of the merits and imminent reality of.

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