



Cinefilm in Space

Atlanta, GA: Cinefilm has been a motion picture pioneer in the field of commercial and feature films for over 30 years and now can add space exploration to their list of credits. The recent launch of the Shuttle Discovery was the third manned mission since October for which Cinefilm has provided film and transfer services. “We are proud to have been selected by the technical analysis team, InDyne, contracted by NASA to support their missions,” notes Cinefilm General Manager Jim Ogburn. “The demands of Hollywood films are very different from NASA, after all this *is* rocket science,” he smiles, “and our entire staff from lab to transfer went through many meetings and test runs to assure them of our attention to detail that they require.”

The InDyne imaging team headed by Kevin Burke had very extensive requirements. “We have dozens of cameras at the launch site and miles down range,” states Burke, “shooting both 16 and 35mm. Our objective is to provide both HD and 35mm prints within 24 hours for detailed image study of any launch debris or equipment aberrations that would affect the mission. Three copies are made for Houston, Huntsville, and the Cape.” Very few labs can provide that level of service.

After launch, Burke’s team consolidates all the negative and flies it direct to a private airfield in Atlanta where the Cinefilm receives it and prepares it for a return flight in 24 hours. “We are one of the few film labs outside of LA and NY that still prints 16 and 35mm film,” boasts lab manager Tony Bifano. “The volume we handle for NASA is not unlike many of our daily feature film runs, but we have to process, make three work prints, then transfer to HD, all within 24 hours of the launch, and often on a weekend. We monitor the news for the exact launch times, then call in our lab teams and adjust our normal run times to meet those deadlines.”

Once Bifano’s lab team completes the film prints, the negative is handed off immediately to the Cinefilm Telecine team. Senior Colorist Ron Anderson transfers all the footage via the Spirit 2K to high def. “We worked with the NASA team to create a color/density look that may not have a ‘commercial’ appeal, but showed the contrast and highlights needed to detect any launch debris or artifacts,” says Anderson. “The footage that records the slow motion ignition of the shuttle’s boosters is a very intense image, and we use special inter-sprocket framing to record technical data from the cameras required by the scientific team.” NASA records HD 23.98, 1080p to a QuVis system, a compressed HD data format that is input to the NASA computer servers to provide the various mission teams with an online digital reference for each 35mm film frame master.

“We had a very ambitious schedule and everyone gave it everything they had to make it happen,” notes Kevin Burke in a recent email. “From a customer perspective, the service that you and your lab provided is really exemplary. Every interaction with your staff was positive enthusiastic response.” Cinefilm has earned it’s ‘wings’ on the last four shuttle launches and several un-manned Delta rocket launches and looks forward to many more missions...into the final frontier.



Cinefilm Lab Manager Tony Bifano discusses density settings with color timer Jason Apple. Critical adjustments on the classic Hazeltine color timing system were required to study the detail of debris created by the Shuttle launch.



Senior Colorist Ron Anderson makes adjustments to Shuttle launch footage on the Spirit 2K Telecine at Cinefilm in Atlanta. HD transfers were input to the QuVis data system at 1080p.



InDyne imaging contractors Kevin Burke (center) and Scott Haun supervised the first HD transfer sessions for the Shuttle Missions in the Spirit Suite at Cinefilm with Colorist Ron Anderson.