

Giant step for SABC's Air Time

The SABC's TV outside broadcasting division Air Time, is poised to make a giant leap into the world of digital broadcasting, with the commissioning of its new state-of-the-art OB unit, valued at R46-million.

"The contract to build the unit to Air Time specifications was signed early this month and is currently in its planning stage," says Air Time manager: marketing, Cliff Graham. "The building of the coach, by a USA/UK consortium should be finished by the end of December and the completed van will be shipped to South Africa around mid-2002."

The fully digital, 13-camera OB unit, being built by Sony Broadcast & Professional Europe, stationed in Hampshire in the United Kingdom, is in fact a compact mobile production unit and has been custom-built for Air Time.

The massive trailer boasts:

- Motorised double expandable sides, allowing a comfortable roomy, production area not usually found in OB units, while the chassis can be lowered to enhance this comfort.
- Seven of the 13 Sony 950 cameras will have big lenses, while two of the smaller cameras boast wide-angle lenses.
- In addition to these, there are another two super slow-motion (high-speed) cameras.
- The 32 input vision mixing desk is more of a production unit boasting a built-in DVE and StillStore facility.
- There are two character generators which are used for computer title generation.
- Two sets of disc recorders are built into the unit – one for on-the-spot highlight packages, while the other can be used for live slow-motion replays and ISO feeds.
- The unit will be wired to accommodate 16 cameras.

At first glance the van looks much the same as those currently in use by Air Time – but once deployed, it takes on a whole new life.

At the touch of a button, a massive hydraulic-like machine swoops into action, causing both sides to expand, creating at least one-third more space inside. Steps appear for the crew to gain access to their compact production unit and the entire set-up is achieved within minutes - compared to the current arduous task of setting up an OB unit, which can take hours.

"This action increases the space inside the van, so it can accommodate more crew. Our clients are very discerning and demand the very best. This fully digital unit from Sony will provide the best quality available in the world," adds Graham.

And while at first glance, the unit may look like the inside of a rocket ship to Mars, it is in fact very user-friendly and has been designed to ensure OB crews move into the digital era with absolute ease. One team will be chosen for training, and they in turn will teach the rest until every crew member is au fait with its applications.

"Air Time engineers have searched world-wide for the very best equipment available. This flag-ship unit is that – and more. It is a top of the range digital OB unit, adaptable to all types of productions from live sport to major musical concerts," he notes.

Sony Broadcast & Professional General Manager Jess Goedhals comments: "It is reassuring that Air Time has chosen Sony as its partner in supplying this 21st century technology that will put its TV outside broadcasts where they belong – as world leaders in the best technology available."

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