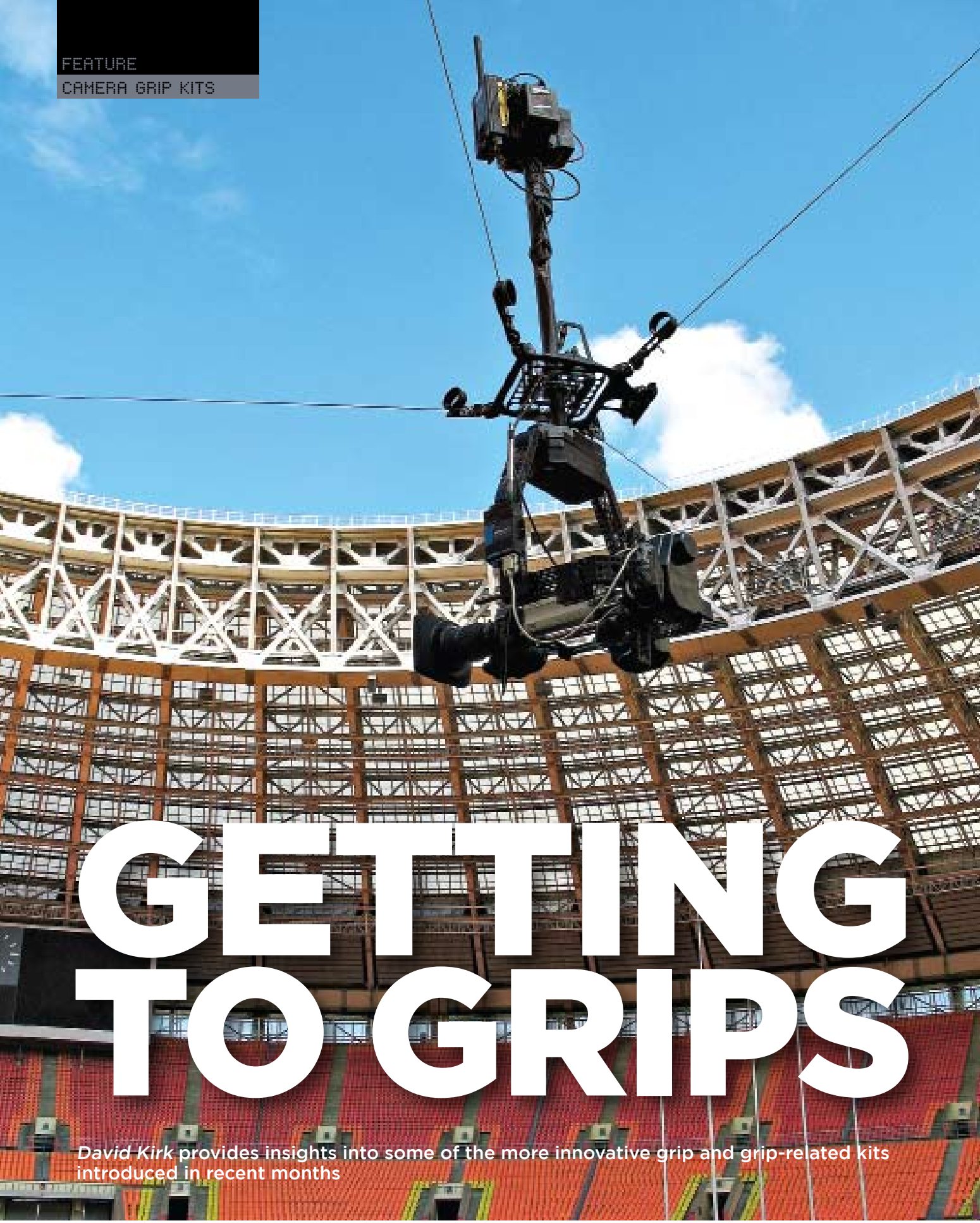

GETTING TO GRIPS

David Kirk provides insights into some of the more innovative grip and grip-related kits introduced in recent months

From the inception of regular electronic television broadcasting services in 1946 until the introduction of integrated circuits and CCD imagers, television cameras were usually supported on a wheeled pedestal or a tripod. This was not just for stability, but because the weight was in the same league as a fortnight-tourist's suitcase. Exterior shots were either taken from the roof of a mobile production vehicle or by a film crew, again using a tripod or similar mount.

The introduction of the portable video cassette formats such as Sony's BVU and Betacam-SP in the early 1980s allowed many cameramen simply to shoot from the shoulder. As each new generation of camcorders became smaller and lighter, the resultant pictures became less steady: wobblycam. This didn't matter much when the average household display screen was a flickery curved-at-the-corners 20 inch cathode ray tube. But today's large fast-refresh flat-panel home displays are much less forgiving. Film-makers, broadcasters and corporate video producers all need stable camera supports, even if the camera weighs no more than an SLR.

The following summary looks at some of the more innovative grip and grip-related kits introduced in recent months.

Autocue's iPad Portable Prompter allows an Apple iPad to be used as a portable teleprompter with teleprompting software available for download from the App Store. The iPad slots into a custom-made mounting plate to hold it securely in position beneath the reflective prompter glass. The mount can be fitted in landscape or portrait mode. The remainder of the teleprompter hardware is the same as the Autocue's Master and Professional 8 inch packages, including wide angle hood and fully adjustable mounting plate to work with any camera. Price is £799 (₹56,205).
www.autocue-qtv.com

iPad on Autocue SWA hood

Photo courtesy: Victor Pakhomov at Movicom (pakhomov@movicom.ru)

BandPro has been appointed worldwide distributor for the new Leica Summilux-C line of PL aspheric mount prime lenses for film and digital capture. The company claims these to be superior to any lenses it has yet seen. All Leica Summilux-C lenses share a uniform length, 95 mm threaded lens front, distance focus scales and similar location of focus and iris rings, allowing quick interchange of lenses. Mount and lens barrel are titanium. The lenses weigh between 1.6 and 1.8 kg. Available worldwide from Band Pro, they will initially be offered in focus lengths of 18, 21, 25, 35, 40, 50, 75, and 100 mm. Product delivery is scheduled for Q4. Additional focal lengths will be introduced later.
www.bandpro.de

Camera Corps' new Multi Camera Keypad Control Unit increases from five to 96 the number of remote camera heads that can be operated via the company's Joystick Control or CCU Panel. The keypad can also be used with Camera Corp's Multi Camera Combiner unit to allow up to four Joystick operators and up to four CCU engineers to control the 96 cameras and pan and tilt heads simultaneously using just a single data line. An output is provided to drive many different types of video router, enabling the picture monitor to follow camera selection at any of the eight operator positions. Up to 255 channel numbers and routing-matrix assignment numbers can be selected via the keypad for easy integration of the 96 camera sources with existing camera channel configurations on video matrices with up to 256 inputs.
www.cameracorps.co.uk

Camera Corps multi camera keypad

Canon claims a 'world's first' for its HJ15ex8.5B KRSE-V portable HD zoom lens with optical image stabilisation. An HD alternative to the standard-definition J13x9 KRS VAP, this offers a higher zoom ratio and wider angle. Canon's 'Vari-Angle Prism' provides image stabilisation throughout the whole zoom range from telescopic to wide angle. Four stabilisation modes are accessible to meet a variety of shooting conditions.
www.canon.com

Easyrig's 4 Vario portable camera support is claimed to reduce the static load on neck and shoulder muscles. Transferring the camera weight to a backpack-style support, it is intended for use with lightweight cameras and the heavy camcorders, as well as 35mm film cameras weighing up to 25 kg.
www.easyrig.com

Fujinon announced at IBC four new B4 mount lenses are designed for 3D HD production. The HA23X7.6BEZD-T5DD offers a 23x zoom with a focal length of 7.6 - 175 mm (15.2-350 mm with 2x extender). The HA16X6.3BEZD-T5DD offers a 16x zoom with a focal length of 6.3-101 mm (12.6 - 202 mm with 2x extender). The HA18x7.6BEZD-T5DD incorporates an 18x zoom with a focal length of 7.6 - 137 mm (15.2 - 274 mm with 2x extender). A fourth HD lens, the HAs18X7.6 3BZD-T5DD, is an 18x zoom with a focal length of 7.6 - 137 mm with no 2x extender.

Robycam on sky background

All four lenses include Fujinon's Inner Focus, Zoom Limit, and Quick Zoom features, with an optional 16-bit encoder.
www.fujinon.com

Movicom is a Moscow-based manufacturer of cable-stayed overhead 3D or 2D camera support systems for field sports and related applications. The company's Robycam is a gyro-stabilised three-axis mount allowing overhead coverage of a football match, for example, tracking at up to 8 metres per second. Robycam supports a camera payload of up to 5 kg. The camera can be winched along any chosen vector over an area of up to 200 x 200 metres. The system conforms to the very high safety standards required in Russia for overhead camera systems. The cables are designed to withstand greater than 20 times actual operating stress. Additional safety features include double automatic brakes on each of the four support-cable winches, manual emergency-stop, and high-accuracy boundary adjustment. Full camera remote control is provided.
www.robycam.ru

Gekko Technology's new karesslite 6006-DD is an LED soft light designed for studio and location use. It has twice the number of emitters and hence twice the brightness of the existing karesslite 6006. Available in daylight (5600K), tungsten (3200K) versions, it incorporates a 6 x 12 emitter format in a 300 x 300 mm panel with a front-to-back depth of 165 mm and a weight of 4.8 kg including diffuser. Being LED-based, the karesslite 6006-DD is far more efficient than traditional film or video production lights and emits very little heat. Power consumption is 85 W, allowing more than 90 minutes of continuous operation from a single rear-mountable V-Lock battery.
www.gekkotechnology.com

Manfrotto has added to its PRO tripod series the model 546, available in two versions: 546B with mid-level spreader and 546GB with ground-level spreader. The 546 has an aluminium top casting allowing use with 75 mm diameter professional half-ball video heads. Aluminium twin-strut legs incorporate adjustable locking levers that can be tension-set.
www.manfrotto.com

Polecam Theia MY125M utra-wide-angle lens

Vario Quad Copter on standby

Polecam's HRO 69 (High Resolution Optics) is a high quality C-mount 3.5 mm lens designed specifically for use with latest-generation 1/3 inch miniature 3-CCD HD cameras such as the Toshiba IK-HD1, Iconix RH1, Panasonic GP-US932, Ikegami MKC300. The HRO 69 has 3.5 mm focal length, 69 degree horizontal angle of view and F2.2 to F16 aperture range. Features include back focus, a special bump cover to protect the lens front, and a 40.5mm filter thread adapter option. Stainless steel locking screws for aperture and focus adjustment are provided plus spare lens caps. Weight of the lens is 159 grammes, length is 50 mm and diameter (without filter adapter) is 37 mm. The company has also recently been appointed official broadcast industry distributor of the Theia MY125M ultra-wide-angle effects lens which can capture an entire goal mouth without visible barrel distortion. Designed for use with 1/3 inch single-CCD or CMOS cameras of up to 5 megapixel resolution, the C-mounting MY125M captures a massive 125 degree horizontal field of view with high geometric precision and 10 cm to infinity focal depth. Aperture is manually adjustable between F1.8 and fully closed.
www.polecam.com

A new fluid head specially designed for DSLR moviemakers, Sachtler's Cine DSLR has a payload range of 1 to 5 kg. A counterbalance in ten steps as well as three vertical and horizontal grades of drag is incorporated. The head has a tilt range of +90 to -75 degrees and comes with a camera plate incorporating an anti-twist retainer for HD DSLR cameras.
www.sachtler.com

Panther's 'U-Bangi 2' multipurpose horizontal tracking system is designed for use on dollies, tripods, stands or a flat surface. Features include redesigned end pieces with 80 mm connector, double Euromount and counter weight bar, and compatibility with all Panther accessories.
www.panther.tv

Tiffen's new Steadicam Phantom is body-harness-mounting column holding loads of up to 20 kg. It includes two telescoping posts, an Ultra2 tilting stage and n inertially adjustable sled. The Phantom is supplied with a standard-definition picture monitor and a G70 arm. Among many options is a monitor upgrade to UltraBrite high definition and a motorised stage.
www.tiffen.com

Tiffen Steadicam Phantom

Vinten's new Vector 430 pan and tilt head has a payload capacity of 10 to 43 kg, making it capable of precisely balancing any camera from a lightweight EFP system right up to a mini-box lens set-up. This simplifies the task on outside broadcasts, for example when specifying suitable support equipment; providing a single choice when two heads may have previously been required. The Vector 430 is claimed to offer infinitely-adjustable perfect balance, fluid drag, rapid camera positioning and balance adjustment and ergonomically positioned controls.
www.vinten.com

I have left the most fascinating new product until last, assisted by the self-imposed constraint of alphabetic order. Vario Helicopter's new Quad-Copter addresses the question of how to free-fly a video production camera or solid-state-memory-camcorder without the inevitable noise of a petrol engine. It incorporates four electric motors, each driving a 500 mm diameter propeller mounted at the corner of a carbon-fibre frame. Each motor is powered by a lithium polymer rechargeable battery, all under remote radio control. LWH dimensions are 1400 x 1400 x 750 mm and total weight without payload or batteries is 12 kg. Quad-Copter has a gyro stabilised camera mount with automatic control of tilt, roll and yaw. Vario claims that the camera will remain in the same position even if the helicopter is rotated.
www.vario-helicopter.de

David Kirk edited UK-based magazines 'Studio Sound' (1970-74), 'Video' (1974-86) and 'IBE' (1986-99). He now runs a technical authoring consultancy.