



new and unique piece of kit, which was produced and based nearby to me in Kempston, near Bedford. I decided to give them a call and go and see one. I was very impressed with the design and build and ability to set it up without the use of tools in such a short time - around 10 minutes

I had been a cameraman in the UK for some 15 years, and over that time had been fortunate enough to have travelled extensively and filmed on a huge range of TV projects. On some shoots I would be working alongside large remote camera jibs and, after having a brief 'play' with one, found that it was an area that I'd like to explore and work in.

I liked the shots that jibs and cranes were able to achieve as they escaped the normal two-dimensional properties of a camera on a tripod to a three-dimensional dynamic one. It was clear that adding crane shots to virtually any project really raised production values.

I first read of Polecam when browsing through an audio/visual magazine - a quite

if you've had the training. For such a small camera the picture quality was excellent and I was amazed to find it was a 3-chip camera. Back then, in 1999, minicams only came as single chip. Some directors and cameramen today are still amazed that 3 chip minicams exist!

I decided to buy my own Polecam. I had just embarked on a freelance career and the rig would be a very complementary piece of equipment that I would be able to pack in my car alongside my Digibeta kit, and use as and when I needed it.

As time went on I began using my Polecam rig much more than my Digibeta, and I've found its popularity continually growing

amongst directors. I've also benefited from the technology progress in minicams, which has improved immensely in recent years. The pictures from the newer cameras that I own now are full broadcast quality - superb. Polecam (the company) aren't tied to any particular camera manufacturer but use the best camera available that will fit and run on the pole. It has to have a small profile chiphead, be lightweight, and produce broadcast quality pictures. These cameras are nearly always two-piece, with a separate processing unit that mounts on the back of the Polecam.



The current standard Polecam camera is the Toshiba TU61/JK63. This is found on nearly all Polecams today. It's now possible to mount an Ikegami HDL-20P 1080i high definition camera on the rig for HD work.

One problem I have found is the 'fishing' jokes I receive when working around the public. If I hear "You won't catch anything with that" one more time...

Thankfully Steffan Hewitt, designer of Polecam and the man who owns the company, had a sticker made up for the side of the pole section which says 'No fishing jokes please' and this has worked perfectly - not a single comment since, even on a Sky Sports fishing programme surrounded by a watching crowd of fishing enthusiasts!

Five years in, and I haven't looked back since buying a rig, so when an opportunity arose for me to buy a rarely available second-hand Polecam I went for it. I use it on jobs where I would have been double-booked; I then book a reliable operator to use it. Polecam, like any specialist piece of equipment, needs a skilled operator to get the most out of it. It is a unique piece of kit, which shares obvious similarities with a larger,





I decided to put my 'head for heights' ability to use and with the aid of some rope and karabiners, I manhandled the Polecam up into the trees to a waiting rope bridge to get some great bridge crossing shots. Try that with a Jimmy Jib!

In Search of Style: Getting the first and probably only jib possible into the apex roof of the famous Gherkin skyscraper in London for a magnificent skyline view with a twist. There is only a narrow spiral staircase up to the apex so no large objects could fit.

heavier Jimmy-Jib, but in my view it should be approached and used differently.

Unlike most larger jibs I personally like to get right up close to the subject, get some good foreground in shot, and do reveals using the boom to swing out, instead of relying on a zoom lens. This is normally not advised with bigger jibs as the larger camera makes for a considerable hazard when moving quickly, and there is a danger of collision with props or people. Once mastered, Polecam delivers not only wonderful jib and crane shots, but also a range of new and different shots and angles that will always impress. You can transport the rig anywhere you can carry the two flight bags, and you can set it up and use it virtually anywhere, including large or small boats, on the back of a jeep or even a motor bike, on top of a mountain – limited only by your imagination!

Some productions of note where only a Polecam could go are:

Trial and Retribution: Using Polecam's unique ability to go underwater and out again to shoot an eerie sequence involving a diver and a severed hand.

There are two options for taking Polecam's head underwater, the DiveBag, which allows the pole to dip just below the water surface, and the new FishFace, which allows the head to go deeper down.

Don't Look Down: Blue Peter spin-off shooting a high-wire adventure playground.



Johnny Holiday concert for TF1: Using Polecam in the harness on a very short length on the stage I was able to get those normal minicam shots but with a difference. You know the ones, the shots of the drummers foot on the footpedal, or the keyboardist's hands, but this time with a camera that was able to move up and over or around – much cooler!

Life and death in Rome: Using the huge depth of field offered on the fixed lens I was able to 'fly' the camera through and over a miniature scale model of ancient Rome, shot on location in Italy. After some postproduction we ended up with amazing life-like flying shots over the city, which had a more realistic edge than normal computer generated images.

Robot Wars: Prior to this, I had been booked for the series Robot Wars, shot around a scale model at Pinewood Studios. The small camera head and prime lens makes it possible to see the streets and buildings from a believable 'on the street' vantage point, as well as smooth flying shots around the buildings

and skyline, or even traveling along a street.

Las Vegas, the annual Gumball Car Rally: 3000 miles across America. Polecam takes me all over the world shooting now. Here I am, surrounded by some local marketing assistants. I seem to look pretty happy in my work! There were cars too...honest!

Woburn Abbey: The Flying Picnic (Also called Mrs Beeton's Flying Picnic). This was a recent joint production for ITV and Sky Travel. A series of ten programmes, shot around the Norfolk area, culminating in a picnic for 40 people in the grounds of Woburn Abbey, all based on the original listing and descriptions of the necessary food as laid down by Mrs Beeton in her Book of Household Management 150 years ago. Presenter Annabel Croft was flown around the area in a vintage aircraft visiting the different farms, mills and individuals who were supplying the original type of food, or as close to it as was possible. I was there with my rig, getting jib shots in places



where no other crane could go, or be set up so quickly, such as right inside a restored windmill. The minicam was also removed and used as a standalone minicam on the plane for some of the aerial shots. This is another Polecam bonus.



Duxford Air Museum, near Cambridge:

This was for a documentary - City at War, produced by Colonial Pictures, the same company that produced Flying Picnic. It featured veteran U.S. broadcaster Walter Cronkite, and was transmitted as part of the



Remembrance Day broadcasts. Walter and minders arrived in a large black limo, and time was very limited. The pressure was there to get the required tracking shot, with second chances unlikely. Walter took his place

without the unique elbow section, which can be used to get up and over obstacles.

Polecam provides innovative and unique shots where often other cranes could not go. Polecam enhances production values for virtually any type of programme.

Polecam came into being when extreme sports cameraman/director Steffan Hewitt was directing a series of windsurfing kit commercials in Hawaii and found it impossible using conventional equipment to get a shot of the windsurfer, at



and the opening and closing ceremonies. Four Polecams were fitted with the DiveBag, a moulded rubber bag which fits over the camera and pan & tilt head to allow operation just under the water surface, and also allow transition shots air-water-air, as seen on the diving at the Olympics.

FishFace has now been launched, a fully submersible head option for Polecam, allowing a depth of around 4m on the rig, or of up to around 10m if off the pole.

A professional Polecam operator can earn anywhere between £650 & £1000 per day; suddenly the asking price of £19,300 doesn't seem quite so bad.

UK Manufacturer: Polecam Ltd
Price: £19,300 plus VAT. Includes: camera, lens, remote head, joy stick, interface, monitor, bags, covers, case. Need to buy batteries and tripod and recording deck.
Contact: Mel Noonan
Polecam Ltd, U.K.
Tel: 01234 855222
mel@polecam.com
www.polecam.com



beside the restored B17. I have to admit I was nervous, but we got the shot, and it looked great.

Further information:

Polecam is a lightweight, portable jib-arm and broadcast camera system with a 1.5 to 6-metre (five to 20 foot) reach, weighing a maximum of 20 kg (44 pounds), which packs away into two bags with a carrying weight of around 35 kg (77 pounds). It can be rigged and de-rigged quickly - average rig time is just 10 minutes and de-rig 5 minutes - and is unique in that it requires no setup tools. Smooth, floating crane shots can be made quickly and efficiently with fast relocation.

The boom is rigged from lightweight carbon fibre tubes, which slot easily together. It can be rigged using from one to five tubes, with or

speed, shot from the front with a wide angle lens. He experimented with a minicam fitted to the end of a soundman's boom pole. This was not a new idea, but it worked extremely well, and he got the shots he needed. Steffan realised there was a need for a Polecam product, but it would have to be a lightweight, go-anywhere rig with a remote, joystick-controlled pan & tilt head. He returned to the UK, and designed and built the prototype. The first production model of the Polecam came out in 1998 and was sent to Disney in Spain. Polecam now sells successfully around the world, a UK product, hand-built at their base near Bedford.

Six Polecams were used to great effect at the Olympic Games in Athens, for coverage of aquatic events including swimming and diving, as well as cycling and the triathlon

Polecam operator John Gillan is a highly accredited cameraman for the broadcast and corporate television industry. A PSC cameraman since 1985, he has covered almost every aspect of camera work from news and features stories to holiday and lifestyle entertainment programmes such as 'Countryfile', 'Home Front' and GMTV. John is a highly experienced Polecam operator He is one of only a handful of Polecam owner/operators in the UK with several years of operating experience behind him working on high profile programmes. John is also an experienced sound recordist. See Johns web site: www.jgbroadcast.tv