

# Give that man a Bell's

Tim Rolston

I have worked on more than one television advertising shoot. I did some fly casting for SsangYong Musso many moons ago with fake mist and a section of the Steenbras reservoir shot to look like a river. I have also done some rock climbing for international campaigns and a little consulting here and there, mostly related to fly fishing but the biggest and, one may suggest, most successful was an advert for Bell's Whisky.

The story goes that in a distant Scottish hostelry the landlord has locked the keys inside the pub and there is a big 'game' on television. I sort of think that it is a rugby game but I am not sure that is actually specified. With the keys on the bar and the door locked they call upon the local fly fisherman to rescue the situation. I suppose that is why it wasn't set in SA. The offer of a few bucks in one of our more crime-prone suburbs and the door would have been jimmed in a matter of moments, but advertising is art and if you ever spent time on set you will realise that it is a complex art at that..

Anyway the local piscator is dragged from the stream with the immortal words. "Dougal it's an emergency", delivered in a panicked gravelly voice by the man dispatched to find our fly-wielding hero.

I say immortal not because you may think of them as such but because I heard them uttered in guttural Scots over and over again for an entire morning while the motor cycle missed its mark, failed to start, failed to stop or ended up with the sun behind it and the shot was retaken. Actually there was considerable synergy between bike and rider, both ancient and both obviously used to high octane fuel.

So with the challenge, "Dougal it's an emergency", our totally absorbed angler forgoes the pleasures of the stream to rush back and save the day. The way the Boks are playing currently I don't think I would give up the chance of a six inch fish or undertake the walk back from Beat six of the Smalblaar to be in time for the kick off - but that is another story. I should point out at this juncture that advertising isn't what it seems. The village really was in Scotland, the keys really were on the bar, the bike was on the back of a truck somewhere on the top of Sir Lowry's Pass, the river was out in Slanghoek and I really was expected to catch those keys with a deft flick of the wrist through an artificially tiny window slit that had been manufactured and required the remodelling of the Post House in Greyton. All good so far. We had practised in the studio and when asked I confidently (overly so as it would turn out) suggested that I could hit the infernal things three times out of ten.

Now for those unfamiliar with advertising shoots you should bear in mind that the number of people involved is quite staggering. Sure the 'angler' was flown in from Scotland and was a bona fide actor (a bona fide fly angler too actually), but despite his importance there was a myriad of other people milling about and the call sheet looked like a telephone directory. Lighting engineers, sound engineers, cooks, caterers, environmental officers and one guy who apparently did bugger all all day but manufacture imitation ice cubes. You can laugh, but these handcrafted pieces of perspex are so realistic that when given some in hand you absolutely cannot but flinch expecting them to be frigid as an ex-wife's reception.



*The Post House in Greyton, scene of our rod-wielding hero's emergency expertise.*



*The false exterior of the imaginary pub set up in a side street. The massive green screen will allow the cutting in of a real Scottish village scene in post production editing.*



*Tim doesn't just hook keys, he is known to catch more than the occasional fish too.*

There are further anomalies as well. For example, you cannot apparently advertise alcohol based on the idea that everyone is desperate for a drink. That would be far too unseemly hence the fiction of the unspecified 'important match'. That is there just so the advertising standards authority can't spit their collective dummies over the idea that there are thirty Scotsmen and women gasping for a 'dop' outside the local pub. It really is rather amusing but, after listening to, "Dougal it's an emergency", three hundred and twenty six times in one morning, I could have downed a bottle of the good stuff on my own, big game or not.

So anyway we do the casting on the river thing - if you are really observant you will note that the first angler in shot is me and casting downstream and the second is the actor casting upstream, such sleights of hand being required by the dying of the light.

It was a miracle that I was able to cast at all having been overcome by the onset of severe hyperglycemia. This was a result of all the free coffee and abundant muffins, refreshments on a film shoot that would make the average royal wedding appear a trifle under-catered, but again I digress.

We eventually got the shots required and headed in convoy back through endless dirt roads from Slanghoek to Greyton for the morrow's shoot. The fact that we were late, all covered in dust and darned near ran over a horse on the way is really little more than window dressing. Pragmatism rules on a film set. Get the job done even if you are shaking dust from your undies and have to beat out the horse-shaped dent in the front of the car's bonnet. It is all just grist to the mill.

Day three and we are set for the arrival of Dougal and his voice-challenged 'driver' outside the pub. There was more coffee, breakfast and, of course, the apparently ubiquitous muffins. Our heroic pair arrives, looking to all intents and purposes like Wallace and Grommet. The outside of the 'pub' was in fact pre-fab and balanced on a side road. The door however had been fitted to the Post House, then removed and fitted to the set, (the real door had too modern a look for photographic authenticity). It would be fitted back there again later. They are sticklers for detail these ad executives.

Then the big scene, with locals balanced outside on scaffold, numerous lights, green screens and reflectors we were ready for the, dare I say, 'piece de resistance', the hooking of the keys.

All too quickly we discovered that the bar was smaller than expected providing inadequate room to swing even an anorexic cat let alone a fly rod. But, remember that pragmatic approach thing? I promptly sawed up rods, (one already broken by the film crew) and manufactured with gaffer tape, spit and super glue a fishing rod of tiny dimension and with this I set forth to get those keys.

The 'extras' were balanced outside the window against a green screen, (the real village scene was to be edited in later). They were instructed by the art director to "Mmmm!" and "Ahhh!" as I made cast after cast, each close call requiring more animation from the voyeurs outside. Remember they were desperate for a drink; sorry they were desperate to see the kick off and were supposed to be suitably excited.

Nobody actually expected me to hit the keys. We had already captured the close-up shots, the depth of field of the camera precluding us from doing it all in one take, even if it was possible.

So there I was, balanced on a precarious perch, hand through the prefabricated window and ready to go when "Cut" and a quick check - I wasn't wearing a wedding ring, was the actor wearing one? Ok panic over, apparently both of us are either confirmed bachelors or at least wise to the needs of continuity and we are off again.

Hang on, I can't see diddly through the reflection in the glass, call in lighting engineer, call in reflector and we are set.

I make a cast, beautiful to behold I have to admit, but not terribly close to those keys. The 'rent a crowd' in front of the green screen "Ooooh" and "Aaah" on command. Then again, murmurs of approval, excitement, the screen flutters in the slight breeze, anticipation is mounting...

Another throw, and as luck would have it the fly alights on the bar and snags the key ring. "F\*\*k he's got them!" shout rent-a-crowd. "Cut! Cut! Cut!" shouts the art director. "Well hell we didn't actually expect you to hook the bloody things. Let's try again, try not to actually hook them this time OK?"

And there it was, my moment of fame destined for the cutting room floor. Success is fickle it would seem.

Put together, the advert is really slick, and has been showing, particularly during rugby matches for over a year by now. I don't have DSTV and generally watch the rugby, both province and Springbok games at the local Westlake Arms. On rugby days there are many similarly afflicted, that is to say DSTV-less, patrons, and we all know one another. Not by name, but by face and supporting style. There are the drinkers, the shouters and the wits, but we are something of a crew, anonymous but at the same time bound by passion for rugby. I however have now been elevated in status, the word is out and during every game the 'Give that man a Bell's advert comes on, a call goes up in the Westlake Arms: "That's his hand, that's his hand". I am beginning to understand the problems that David Beckham must face when going out for a quiet pint. The pressure is enormous; I now have cut my nails before going to watch the rugby.

So there it is, the story of my moment of glory, I do still receive the odd accolade in the pub, and I have learned not to mention anything about whether we really did hook those keys or not, choosing rather to simply bathe in the limelight and flash my newly manicured digits to the appreciative masses.

*"The fly which is infallible today may be an abject failure tomorrow, and the solved mysteries of one season, may become the unsolved mysteries of the next season", David Jacques, Fisherman's Fly, 1965.*