Gearhouse in Top Gear for MPH Show

Story Courtesy Louise Stickland

Gearhouse South Africa supplied technical production – including rigging, lighting, projection/media and audio, plus seating via Havaseat to the 2009 MPH Prestige & Performance Motor Show in Johannesburg.

Hosted by Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and Sasha Martinengo, MPH's Top Gear Live 'Ultimate Performance Arena' featured a high-speed vehicular action show staged in a quartered off section of the city's Dome venue, with the main MPH exhibition taking place in the other three quarters. The 4 day event saw ten of the 90 minute Top Gear Live shows, featuring hair-raising stunts and gravity defying car-obatic sequences, pushing the hot-rodded vehicles and their drivers to their limits.

The project was managed for GHSA by Jesse Wang, who co-ordinated a crew of up to 48 and 36 locals. Fourteen tonnes of lighting, audio, drapes, set and AV kit was suspended on a total of 172 points – comprising 56 bridles and 60 dead hangs – in the Dome's roof, in an operation overseen by Kendall Dixon of Gearhouse Rigging.

GHSA is also the house rigging contractor, so knowledge and experience of the roof contributed both creatively and practically to facilitating the show's production.

Lighting

Top Gear Live's lighting was designed by Steve Sinclair, and programmed and operated by GHSA's Sean Rosig using a grandMA full size console.

Six horseshoe shaped trusses were installed above the arena for lighting, ranging between 10 and 12 metres in diameter above the arena floor. There was also a long U – shaped truss spanning the FOH perimeter of the arena.

Over 100 moving lights were utilised, rigged all over the trusses – a mix of Robe ColorSpot 2500E ATs, ColorSpot and ColorWash 700E ATs, Martin Professional MAC 2K Profiles and High End Studio Colors.

Other lighting effects included 5 Atomic strobes, 26 bars of ACLs and 24 loose PARs used to up-light the set in the centre of the arena. Thirty-two linear 4-lite Moles were used to highlight the audience grandstands, and 4 Strong 1.2K truss spots were used for the presenters and guests.

Traditionally these car show environments are very dark and voraciously absorb however many lumens are thrown at them, however the Dome's shiny light grey floor was a great advantage in helping reflect and bounce light around the space.

Rosig spent two days ahead of the get-in, programming the show on the grandMA's 3D Visualiser, saving more time, with the final edits and tweaking completed once on site.

Projection & media

Gearhouse AV supplied two 16:9 aspect ratio projection screens, each measuring 8 by 4.5 metres, which were front projected onto by Christie 16K machines fed via fibre optic cables.

A Barco Encore multi-screen presentation system operated by Wayne Susman was used to process and manage sending all the content to the screens. This included VT play-ins, graphics, adverts, etc., and also a TX feed from the IMAG camera mix.

Marcel Wijnberger of Gearhouse Media programmed special content onto 2 grandMA Video media servers linked to an Image Pro machine. Most of these graphics and VT clips were supplied by Steve Sinclair and the Top Gear team.

Audio

Sound was supplied by Gearhouse Audio and mixed by Revil Baselga. The challenge was to get the volume of the vocal mics clear and audible across the two 45 metre wide by 28 deep seating stands in a very loud environment, and above the screeching engines and skidding tyres of hurtling cars.

They used 6 L-Acoustics VDOSC elements in two hangs, running on LA8 amps, with a Yamaha M7 console at FOH, mixed by Baselga.

The presenters wore Countryman E6 low profile headset mics, and there were also various playback inputs from CD, DVD and PCs. Six channels of Sennheiser G2 Evolution in-ear monitors were supplied to allow drivers to hear the choreographer call some of the sequences, along with 40 stations of wireless and wired comms for the production team.

Each of the 10 shows was enjoyed by 4,700 performance car enthusiasts. This is the third consecutive year that G, which continues to grow in popularity and profile.