

It's Carnage



Mad Max meets Top Gear as thirty teams from the UK and Ireland come to the Tankwa Karoo in South Africa to battle it out in their custom-made armoured vehicles with homemade weapons like flame throwers, saw blades, paintball guns and monster ploughs – all in the quest to be the ultimate winner of Carnage, a new show on Sky One, produced by Primal Media and Motion Content Group.



UK Producers and Primal Media founders, Mat Steiner and Adam Wood, contacted South African producer, Darren Lindsay from Getaway Productions, to facilitate the show. In turn, Peter Rieck from Rieck's Lighting & Event Lighting was contracted to supply and design the lighting requirements. Armed with a grandMA dot2 and a truck full of equipment, he and his team welcomed the challenge of working in the harsh desert environment for two months where temperatures reached well over 50 degrees.



Some 85 cubic tons of earth was removed to create the three arenas where the warfare took place. The mammoth task of designing the arenas was commissioned to Patrick Watson, a UK based Production Designer, who with the help of his trusted art director, Keith Botha from Catch22Media, and set builder, Sean Hoey from Dream Sets, turned the design into reality.



Bradley Leech and Sean Hoey from Dream Sets with Peter Rieck from Rieck's Lighting.



Keith Botha from Catch22Media (Art Director)
with Sean Hoey from Dream Sets

"This was an amazing project to work on, from the barren landscape with incredible sun rises and sun sets, to the frequent and unpredictable dust storms, the extreme temperatures and ultimately a small village of dedicated people who brought the concept to life," said Hoey. "The camaraderie on the set was fantastic and we all walked away having made new friends for life. We look forward to Season 2!"



Peter Rieck agrees, "My crew were absolutely amazing and the rock of the lighting department. I could not have done it without them. It was an honour working with all the various department, each bringing their own expertise, without whom the show would not have been possible."



Rieck's Lighting team: Mpho Mosholi, Musa Mahuhuxi, Johan Graham, Gift Lushaba, Peter Rieck, Eli Mahuhuxi, Alex Farmer, Patrick Lushaba

The competition kicked off in Arena One, a 150m triangular area surrounded by a 2,5m deep mote. Nine islands within, onto which scaffold was erected, created the impression of an abandoned city. Here the contestants would not only face each other, but also a barrage of special effects consisting of flame throwers, dust bombs and dust cannons. To top it off a mutant vehicle, The Pusher, was released to take contestants out and push them into the mote.



The Desert Race was the next leg, where the four remaining contestants raced against each other to determine who they would be up against in Arena Two.

Arena Two, a 70m circular arena, was a living scrapyard. In the centre, raised on a platform, proudly stood another mutant vehicle, The Shredder, who was ready to eliminate teams. Contestants had to battle each other and try to activate triggers, through a series of hazard elements such as huge saw blades and The Thrasher, to release The Shredder who would assist them in taking out their opponent.





The combat came to a grand finale in Arena Three, the night time showground, where the remaining drivers had to deal with hazardous elements such as the centre pit that would drop 2,5m, and the armadillos that would shoot up underneath a vehicle to try and flip them over. The last man standing was deemed the winner!

Stringent safety protocols ensured not a single injury despite the car wrecks. The arenas had lights that changed colour, working as a traffic light. Flashing amber lights indicated “weapons hot” in the arena, and once the green lights went on, it was battle time.





There was a need to communicate with the drivers inside the vehicles while the game was active. Rieck was asked to put lights inside each vehicle that would change colour to indicate to the driver the status of the game: white – weapons down; flashing amber – weapons hot; green – game starts; and red – all stop.

Rieck explains, “The drivers’ visibility in these armoured vehicles was very limited and between Bruce Riley from DWR Distribution and I, over a couple of beers, we came up with a solution to use a 500mm RGB LED strip that would connect to a LED controller, hooked up to a wireless LumenRadio, that would be powered by a small battery and then strapped into each vehicle.” So, in unison with the arena, the LED strip changed colours.



"I had a chat to the director," said Rieck. "He said if it were not for those lights, there would probably not have been a show because of the safety regulations."

In terms of the lighting design, Rieck used Vectorworks and Cinema 4D for his drawings and presented a 3D model to his client on what the show would look like. "We had a stressful five months from the day we started the rekkie to putting everything together," he says.

MA Lighting's dot 2 was in control. "Who says you need a big desk?" said Rieck. He sat stationery in one control box and ran fibre cables to the three different arenas. "It was easy enough. When you shoot one arena you are not running the other two. But at the end of the day, we ran just under five universes full. It worked."



In terms of daylight lighting, the initial thought was to use 2.5k HMIs to light up presenters Freddie Flintoff, Lethal Bizzle and Vick Hope, who would carry out interviews in the arena and also chat to the engineers and mechanics at three onscreen garages. After considering the price of the long-term rental of the HMI fixtures, Rieck opted instead to invest in 12 Robe Spiiders purchased from DWR Distribution. "I had to illuminate the presenters' faces and the Spiiders worked perfectly. The most difficult part was the 360 degree arena. If you don't have the correct shot, you can't find your bearings as the presenters moved about depending on where the action takes place. Once I had my white shot, though, I could quickly focus the lights. Thanks to their intensity, I was able to shine the Spiiders from one side of the arena to the other, some 50m away."

For Arena Three, a further 12 Robe Spikies (six per side) were positioned at each entrance. The Spikies created a statement and a hero moment as each car entered, with beams shooting up in the air. Four SGM Q7 fixtures lit the actual vehicle. "The Spikies used in Arena 3 really brought the set to life and could be seen from miles away across the desert landscape," added Hoey.



The claw structures in Arena 3 were 12m, 8m and 5m high. Dream Sets made step ladders on the claws for the crew to climb up, making it easier to rig the lighting fixtures. For the 12m high tower cherry pickers were used. Rieck used two Martin Viper Spots on either entrance positioned on a 3m totem for back light on each vehicle. Four Viper Spots were also used to highlight the hazard elements in the main stadium like the armadillos and pit. A further 12 Viper Washes highlighted the centre of the arena in white light, and then 24 Martin Quantum Washes were used for the claws.



Creating a striking six way prism shape in the centre, and producing sweeping looks across the battlefield, were 12 Robe Pointes. In addition, 96 LED Parcans were used for uplighting and SGM Q7s to highlight the outside and insider perimeter.



Big smiles from Mpho Mosholi

Custom-made lids were placed over the moving fixtures, not so much to protect them from the rain as to shield the ballasts from cooking in the sun. The sheer dust worked as the best possible smoke machine!

While the technical crew have gone home, the desert has kept the set, after all, Carnage Season Two is bound to follow!





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