Robe in the Driving Seat for 2021 DAKAR Rally Opening & Closing Ceremonies

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Jeddah in Saudi Arabia provided the start and finish lines for the 2021 Dakar Rally, while its King Abdullah Sports City Stadium – 30 kilometres north of the bustling port city – was the venue for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies which included a special show complete with soundtracks by Daft Punk, other cultural performance segments and a host of media events and live broadcasts including the winner presentations. Each of the two events comprised around 10 hours of consecutive airtime in total.

French creative lighting practice Concept K was invited by Paris-based Leap Creative Studio and Blink Experience’s Dubai office to create a production lighting design for the two ceremonies. Their brief also included direction of lighting for the cameras and integration of the set and scenic

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elements and video screens into a single visual picture for the events which were attended by a live audience of VIPs. (General attendance was not possible due to Covid restrictions)

Aldo (CEO & art director of Concept K) included 124 x Robe moving lights on the lighting plot – a mix of BMFL Blades, Spiiders and MegaPointes – which were supplied by the event's lighting contractor, Media Pro together with the production's audio and video.

These Robe luminaires were positioned across a large ground support system built around the stage to provide lighting positions and structural infrastructure for the set designed by Leap Creative Studio, which included LED screens and an impressive 3D scenic model of the striking Dakar 'head' logo.

The 24 x BMFL Blades were rigged on the front and sides of the structure and used for key lighting, with the 36 x Spiiders deployed on the sides and rear, utilised for general washes and a mix of rich and delicate colouring palettes for different areas of the large stage as needed.

The 64 MegaPointes were all positioned at the back creating multiple diverse effects and looks that looked great on camera.

In addition to specifying these Robe fixtures for the evening parts of the broadcasts, key and fill lighting was also essential to get the facial tones and presenter looks perfect on camera during the daylight sections.

In addition to this, The Concept K team needed to ensure that the set pieces and the voids in between were correctly lit and sculpted with the right treatment to create a good sense of depth, especially for the wide shots, drone footage and crane camera sweeps.

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Concept K also managed all the timecoding and laser effects under the artistic direction of Julian Pateau for Leap Creative Studio and Blink Experience. The technical director for the whole event was Tony Beijani from Blink Experience, and the Media Pro lighting crew chief was Desmond “Dez” Quadros.

Lighting was programmed by Concept K’s senior programmer Theo Broche Cannone using a grandMA2 console. Lasers were programmed by Jerry John from Dubai on a Pangolin controller under the control of Aldo, with timecode and soundtracks played through a Logic Pro machine managed by Concept K.

Challenges included dealing with travel arrangements for an international team complicated by the pandemic and shifting regulations on quarantine, so some of the vital final decisions on the event production were made only 15 days before Concept K team departed from Paris for Saudi.

Once there, they were working with a completely new technical crew and providers – although all of them are regulars with Leap & Blink, and they also had to deal, design-wise, with equipment that was already available as the timescale was very tight to facilitate any extras, “So we were delighted to see that these Robe lights were available from Media Pro and we based our design around them!” declared Aldo.

The Opening and Closing ceremonies took place without a general audience – also due to Covid restrictions – but with a few lucky VIP spectators who added enthusiastically to the atmosphere.

Aldo and Theo “thoroughly enjoyed” the great collaboration with Leap Creative Studio, Blink Experience and Media Pro, and appreciated the chance to be working on such a high-profile global event and especially at the height of the pandemic!

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The 2021 Dakar Rally was the 43rd edition of the rally raid and took place over 14 days all in Saudi Arabia, the second time the country had hosted the event, with support from the Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation. The race saw competitors tearing through the spectacular desert scenery and steaming alongside the Red Sea.

A total of 322 vehicles in six categories started the race with 206 finishing the 12 stage (plus one prologue) race.

Winners were Stéphane Peterhansel from France (cars); Kevin Benavides (bikes) and Manuel Andújar (quads) both from Argentina; Josef Macháček from the Czech Republic (light prototypes); Francisco “Chaleco” López from Chile (UTVs – Utility Terrain Vehicles); Dmitry Sergeyvich Sotnikov from Russia won the truck category in his KAMAZ and Marc Douton, also from France, won the Classic section.

Photos: Concept K

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