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Novelties are coming!

Interview with Lazar Zalmanov

In 2020, it will be 10 years since the moment when LOMO started the mass production of lenses of the ILLUMINA S35 line. The Decade is a rather substantial period that deserves to be summarized on the eve of this anniversary and tell about the immediate plans. With this, the editorial staff turned to Lazar Zalmanov, LOMO's chief specialist in cinematographic equipment.

MediaVision: Lazar, how does the team involved in the development and production of cinematographic lenses generally feel about the upcoming anniversary?

Lazar Zalmanov: We really love anniversaries. By the way, in 2020 we have two of them: 105 years since the foundation of our company - the first optical factory in Russia - and 10 years since the prototyping of new optics. In short, the results are as follows. Over the past 10 years, we have twice upgraded our lenses, taking into account the proposals of cameramen, improving the quality and performance characteristics of optics. In total, we have supplied almost a thousand of lenses to 31 countries of the world. More than 80 projects of fiction and documentary films, including more than 450 series for television have been already shot with our optics. And these are only Russian projects that we know of. There are many more projects, including foreign ones, about which we have no information. Besides, there are commercials, music videos and corporate movies. The main results of the decade are as follows: firstly, we believe that the market has accepted our optics, and secondly, thanks to close interaction with users, we understand where we should go to further.

MediaVision: What is in production today? Are there any problems?

Lazar Zalmanov: Recently we have completed the production of a pilot batch which includes 12 sets of lenses of the new modernized MK-III series. Sales have begun, we are preparing to enter the European market with this line. Production of another 20 sets has been launched. Assembly of the second batch will begin shortly. Difficulties in production happen at all times and in all places. Fortunately, there are no unsolvable problems. By now, we have successfully completed tests of a new type of coating for the diaphragm blades to make them more matte and black. A good result was achieved thanks to our technologists who managed to find new materials and technologies. So this task will be solved in a new batch of lenses. In the meantime, judging by the feedback from our customers and those who have already tested this optics, they like it.

MediaVision: What about the MK-II line, which has already become widespread and is more budget-friendly in comparison with the new one? Will it still remain in production or will it be discontinued?

Lazar Zalmanov: I will say this: its production is suspended. We prepared for this in advance and made a certain stock of MK-II lenses. So for those who prefer this particular line and want to buy it and save funds a little, there is nothing to worry about.

MediaVision: The MK-III line includes five lenses with a T1.3 aperture. The lenses 14 mm (T1.9) and 135 mm (T1.8) are from the previous series. Will they still be available for purchase?

Lazar Zalmanov: Yes, of course. But for the upcoming CPS-2020 exhibition, we will try to make a prototype of the upgraded 135 mm lens, which has all the advantages of the MK-III series optics. We will show it at the exhibition, carry out tests with operators. And in case of success, we'll soon launch it to a serial production. A 14 mm lens will remain the same, since it does not have the drawbacks inherent in the optics of the previous series.

MediaVision: Will there be any other novelties that LOMO will introduce at CPS-2020?

Lazar Zalmanov: We will demonstrate two more new products. By popular requests of cameramen, our designers have developed a set of heads for professional macro photography with diopter range +0.5, +1, +2 and +3. These heads are compatible with lenses of different manufacturers. The development of a set of split-focus diopter lenses with the same diopters is nearing completion.

MediaVision: Is there any influence of the increase in VAT, the USD exchange rate and other realities of the economy to the sales?

Lazar Zalmanov: Of course, it is. However, we are doing our best to keep our prices at an acceptable level. For more than five years, we have been using a special preferential exchange rate of the US dollar to the Russian rouble, equal to 55 rubles per 1 USD, as a guideline in pricing. For the meantime, we even managed to reduce the USD price of the MK-II line by almost 25% which increases the competitiveness of this optics in foreign markets. We know the limited budgets of our potential customers, especially in the far regions of Russia and use to run promotions, granting additional benefits and discounts. Indeed, the price / quality ratio is one of the main competitive advantages of our lenses.

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«I have been familiar with ILLUMINA optics since 2017, when we received the new MK-II kit for the filming of the television movie "Presumption of Innocence". Since then till now, I have been taking part in the projects of the Look Film studio where these lenses are used and I technically supervise them.

The optics has a plasticity, it is soft (sometimes too much), with a pleasant coloring of the flare. The "breathing" when changing the focus is noticeable, but not annoying. The only significant problem is chromatic aberration. For example, it would not be able to obtain an image of a person against a bright window without a purple fringe. But it almost does not appear in less contrasting scenes.

The MK-II also had problems with the design: installing a matte box on the lens resulted in the jammed focus ring. At the sub-zero environment, one has to apply more force to turn the rings than with the counterparts of other manufacturers.

Therefore, ILLUMINA MK-II had to be abandoned, but I wanted to maintain a good Illumina visual style. So, it was decided to switch to the new ILLUMINA MK-III line. We even got the first serial kit of this optics.

The differences are global and obvious. The new design provides the much-needed opportunity to use mounted matte boxes of any weight. Grease also does not thicken anymore; there were no complaints about optics in the sub-zero environments.

But the headline is the improved standards of the production and the assembly quality of new lenses. There are noticeable improvements in optical characteristics, the mounting screws do not loosen all the time anymore, which was so annoying in MK-II.

We are especially happy about the 18 mm lens: completely new, much better than its predecessor. In particular, the problem of the sharpness deterioration over the frame field has been eliminated. Unfortunately, there were shiny diaphragm blades of goldish colour. I hope this will be fixed

afterwards.

A forcible argument in favor of ILLUMINA is the manufacturer's customer-oriented approach. He is always in touch, ready to carry out repairs with the provision of replacement lenses for the repair time. I do not know any other manufacturer with a similar customer service.

With the MK-II line, the Look Film studio shot multi-part television films: "The Presumption of Innocence" and "Just between us girls-2", and with the MK-III – "Bezsonov" and "The City of Secrets"»

Maxim Mosin, Director of Photography

«Due to the limited budget, I was not able to use s5i lenses and Cooke Optics anamorphotes for the "The Crow" television series. They advised the optics of LOMO ILLUMINA S35 MK-II, which I treated with caution, in view of the problems with the first-generation line, but I did the tests and was pleasantly surprised by the results. The lenses proved themselves in open apertures, at aperture value 2 they positively tolerated backlighting, perfectly and very intelligently conveyed skin tones in portraits and did not lift up the contrast and saturation of the image, as it happens for example with Ultra Prime.

With this line, I took 78 shifts, I used all the lenses except the 14 mm - there was no need. They have their own highly artistic pattern and refer to the most outstanding examples of photo optics from the time of the USSR. The exception is 135 mm, giving a noticeably more "warm" color rendition, which is fixable by color correction. By the way, the colorist Viktor Mishchenko-Starkin, C.S.I., praised the filmed material, noting that due to the plasticity and fine halftone rendering LOMO lenses retain much more information in the frame than competing lenses in the same price category when using similar cameras and lighting conditions.

As for the MK-III series, the more modern housing design has made these lenses more convenient to work with accessories and with the Movi and Ronin electronic stabilization systems»

Evgeny Koroptsov, Director of Photography

«Having looked at the material of the film under the working title "Durov's Bullet" shot by the ILLUMINA S35 MK-III, I saw an image that felt what is commonly called the magic of films. The films shot before the digital video, which are sensual, emotional. The one in which the drama of the image was present.

And on the color correction of an already shot film, I again received great pleasure from the "correct" movie image. In military scenes, the image was tough; in modern scenes portraits became delicate and beautiful. It seemed the lenses were hearing the operator. The LOMO ILLUMINA S35 MK-III optics turned out to be very cinematic, it became "manageable".

It must be trusted»

Radik Askarov, Director of Photography

Picture captions:

- F18 mm surprises: Lazar Zalmanov (at the left) demonstrates the new 18-mm lens of the MK-III series ILLUMINA MK-III line

- Isn't that heavy ...

- ILLUMINA MK-III lens with branded anamorphic head