

# ACS: How 40 years have flown by!

Regular providers of a truly impressive array of specialist cameras at the most high-profile sporting events around the world, as well as state occasions and other live events, Aerial Camera Systems (ACS) has been in business for more than 40 years. Celebrating its Ruby Anniversary last year, the company has also been a long-term sponsor of the GTC, along the way contributing many interesting Zerb articles and picking up several GTC awards. Former Zerb Managing Editor **Alison Chapman** met up with ACS Sales Director, **Matt Coyde**, and Sales & Marketing Manager, **Antonia Wood**, at the company's High Wycombe base.

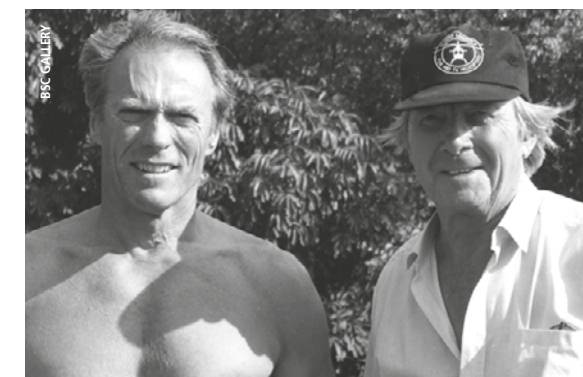


Over the years, literally hundreds of GTC members will have worked alongside ACS equipment and team members. Why? Because their specialist cameras have been in action at every Olympic Games since 1992, tracking the horses at racecourses around the country most weekends for decades, regularly in place behind the goal and other positions at football stadia up and down the land as well as at the major international competitions, capturing close-up action at Wimbledon and on the river for the Oxford–Cambridge Boat Race, providing spectacular aerials for feature films and broadcast events... the list goes on. Or, if you don't work on OBs but have been lucky enough to attend any of these events as a spectator, then you can't have failed to notice, say, the rail cam keeping pace with the sprinters at major athletics meets, or the 4x4 circling the course at the races, or the new Wirecam traversing gently overhead near Court 2 at Wimbledon providing a spectacular overview of the tennis action.

## Aerial roots

The history of the company is reflected in its name: founded in 1979, Aerial Camera Systems (now more commonly referred to as ACS) was started by aerial cinematographer and pioneer of aerial filming techniques, Peter Allwork. Peter's very long IMDb page shows from his credits that he worked his way up through the classic feature film route of focus puller (in the 1940s and 50s), through camera operating on an incredible list of features during the later 50s and 60s, until the first aerial photographer credits start to appear in the 70s. Along the way he worked with some of the world's greatest directors, including Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott and Richard Attenborough. An enthusiast for all things aerial, Peter began to optimise camera mounts such as the Continental Side Mount and early nose-mounted rigs and, over the next 20 years or so, would shoot the aerial sequences for such classics as *Superman* (for which he attached a camera to a Lear jet), *For Your Eyes Only*, *A View to a Kill* and *Out of Africa*, as well as many iconic commercials like the Lloyds Black Horse stallion galloping through the sea.

During the 80s, Peter's son, Matthew, began to join him on shoots, at first as a clapper/loader on *View to a Kill* (not a bad film to cut your teeth on!) and progressing to focus puller on *Out of Africa*, an experience which left such an impression on him he decided to quit university, where he'd been studying law, to work full-time in the film industry. Having learned his craft from his father, Matthew soon became an operator in his own right, going on to shoot the aerial sequences for *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Good Morning Vietnam*, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and *Braveheart*.



Peter Allwork on location with Clint Eastwood



Matthew Allwork (l) and Dave Manton (r) shooting CBS News documentary *Victory in the Pacific*, 1995



The Lillehammer Winter Games was a breakthrough event for ACS moving into innovative ways of covering sport

## Moving on to new terrain

In 1990, Matthew took over as Managing Director of ACS, at the time based at Fair Oaks Airfield in Surrey, and an exciting period of expansion into new areas was unleashed. A keen sportsman himself (while at university he had rowed for his country), Matthew had recognised a growing demand for specialist cameras in televising sport as well as other live/broadcast events. He began work on adapting the gyro-stabilised mounts with which he and his father were so familiar in the aerial setting, to develop innovative new ways of using the stabilised rigs (mostly Wescams at the time) to cover a range of different sports. After some limited involvement at the Barcelona Olympics, a breakthrough event was the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Olympics, when ACS gyro-stabilised cameras were used for the first time by NRK to cover downhill and cross-country skiing, as well as ice hockey.

Around this time ACS had also started to work with Sam Heaphy and Malcolm Rogers' Camera Tracking Company (initially on the 1991 Paul McCartney tour), a development which importantly brought together the gyro-stabilisation expertise of ACS with Camera Tracking Company's ability to move cameras smoothly over all sorts of ground. This collaboration eventually led in 2000 to the acquisition of Camera Tracking Company (which had started life in the theatre moving sets and evolved into providing camera tracks for music tours etc.) by ACS.

Sales Director Matt Coyde, who started with ACS in the mid-90s (by then relocated to Shepperton Studios), recalls what an exciting time it was: "The early 90s was a major breakthrough time with moving into broadcast and video, and also working with Camera Tracking Company. The arrival of split-block broadcast cameras from Sony was a key factor





ACS Cineflex on track racing alongside Sir Mo Farah at the London Anniversary Games

“

ACS was there at the right time when the huge expansion of channels occurred and coverage of Premier League football really took off... there was a major increase in demand for new angles and camera innovation.

*in the development of the live broadcast side of the company as this form factor enabled the 'net cam' and many different POV shots. ACS was there at the right time when the huge expansion of channels occurred and also coverage of Premier League football really took off. There was a major increase in demand for new angles and camera innovation. Even today much of the work we do in racing and football can be traced back to those days when the demand came for new ways to use cameras, much of it driven by Sky."*

#### On the nose at the races

Matthew Allwork was also responsible, again in the 90s, for revolutionising the way racing is televised, by introducing the tracking vehicle, a specialism which continues, these days in

the form of Land Rover Discoverys kitted out to allow two full stabilised rigs with full broadcast RF. This setup was recognised by the GTC in 2018 with an 'Outstanding Contribution' award for ACS's Nick Murray, who for many years has driven the camera tracking 4x4. While the skill of GTC members such as Paul Baldwin, who regularly operates the camera on the ACS vehicle, is not to be underestimated, Paul freely admits that ultimately the success of these dramatic shots is in large part down to the skill of the driver, who is tasked with keeping the vehicle in the right relationship to the horses, travelling at speeds of up to 40mph, driving over rough terrain, with safety always a priority. As Paul says: "Nick's ability to check his position via the wing mirror, take note of the shot on the dashboard monitor, and assess the track conditions is a credit to his professionalism and dedication."

It was horse racing that tragically resulted in Matthew's death in 2003, aged just 39, when a helicopter from which he was covering the Dubai Endurance Race came down in a dust cloud. Dave Manton, still at the company as Head of the Aerial Unit, was also in the air covering the race but thankfully his helicopter was unaffected. Peter Allwork died a year after his son, aged 76.

#### Innovation, quality and adaptation

The company carried on, of course, and perhaps its greatest tribute to the Allworks has been the way in which it has sustained the passion for innovation and quality the founders inspired. With a core of just 26 loyal staff members, many of whom have been with the company for more than 20 years, ACS draws regularly on a pool of trusted top-quality freelancers and suppliers, maintaining something of a 'family'

feel. The team both rely on and value the specialist skills of the camera professionals with whom they work. As Matt comments: "For camera people these days it's essential they have the skills to operate different types of camera systems beyond just handheld or on the sticks etc. – maybe remote or specialist cameras of some kind. That's becoming more and more commonplace – and technology like stabilisation, which used to be very niche, is everywhere."

Also key to the company's ethos has been its ability to continually adapt to the changing market and environment. While ACS has always had an in-house development team, which has come up with various significant innovations such as the SMARThead™ range, it doesn't try to reinvent the wheel. Matt explains: "We don't like just to copy what other people are doing; we like to bring our own ideas into the



CAMCAT wire system at Royal Ascot



Aerial Unit Head, Dave Manton, rigging at the IAAF World Athletics Championships, Doha, 2019

market – I believe that's what our clients will benefit from most. We also don't necessarily jump in at the deep end; we test the market first and make modifications as necessary." If something that does the trick already exists, they will use that, especially since small-scale manufacturing just isn't cost-effective; however, they frequently find themselves customising third-party products to arrive at the exact solution required for a particular client or project.

These days much of the company's work is project-based. ACS's long track record of reliable provision of specialist solutions means the company is at the top of most procurement lists whenever the organisers of major events worldwide sit down to make their plans. The range of options ACS can now offer – everything from its tried-and-tested aerial



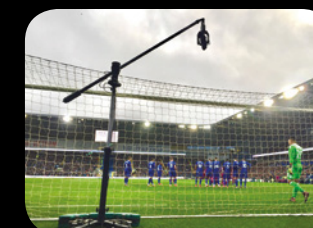
the world's leading specialist  
camera company

## Aerial Camera Systems

4K Aerial Filming



SMARTgrip™



Tracking Vehicles



KartCAM



UAV Filming



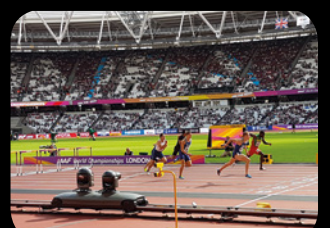
Wire Systems



Remote Heads



Tracking Systems



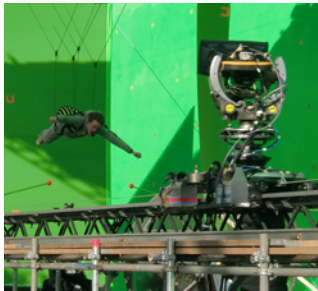
Primetime EMMY and BAFTA award winner  
t: +44 (0)1483 426767 e: enquiries@acsmedia.com w: acsmedia.com







A 'one-stop-solution': ACS specialist cameras include the newly acquired Cineflex Pro and Cinema Pro stabilised mounts, SMARTgrip™, SMARThead™, FanCAM, KartCAM and tracks – seen here in action on everything from football, golf, athletics and Wimbledon to natural history and a green screen shoot for X-Men.



solutions (now including drones, not to mention the famous EyeFlyer blimp), high performance wirecams (like CAMCAT), railcams (vertical and flown as well as horizontal), remote-controlled SMARThead™ systems, high frame-rate Pico POV cameras as integrated into the ACS SMARTgrip™ system, all manner of RF solutions, minicams, as well as quirky extras like KartCAM and fanCAM – mean that the team really can offer a 'one-stop solution', presenting a very attractive package to those looking to minimise the complexity of contracts and number of people involved in putting together a major event.

It's not just sporting occasions they get involved in either. Along with the run-of-the-mill stuff like keeping up with Usain Bolt and cheering on when Andy Murray won his first Wimbledon title(!), the ACS team have also been there to witness the weddings of the Dukes and Duchesses of Cambridge and Sussex, been to the Oscars, flown with Harry Potter and wondered at *Nature's Great Events* with the BBC Natural History Unit.

And the next 40 years?

In 2010, ACS was acquired by Euro Media Group (EMG), which brought it into the same stable as OB company CTV and more recently their neighbours in High Wycombe, Telegenic, as well as Broadcast RF (originally founded in partnership with ACS). The group is very diverse, operating across multiple European countries and comprising everything from studio complexes to playout, OBs, ENG and graphics. So far EMG has been very good in supporting the autonomy of the ACS brand, which means it can continue to work with a range of clients as well as obviously bringing ready connections with a wide range of compatible services. Of course, Brexit may have an impact – but who knows what that might be at this stage!

In keeping with its roots, the company is still very strong in the aerial arena. Already able to shoot up to 8K or UHD with the Shotover F1, the company can now also offer the very latest Cineflex Pro+. As well as extensive pre-event aerals for the Sochi and Rio Olympics, and the FIFA World Cups in Brazil and Russia, they have just finished a major programme of aerial pre-filming ahead of this year's Euros.

In line with most companies, the ACS team are only too aware of their responsibility to improve their carbon footprint in whatever ways possible. At Group level they have consulted with the BAFTA

albert initiative and are now actively looking at how best to introduce environmentally responsible practices, including carbon offsetting, reviewing fuel sources and being strict on recycling wherever possible. Matt is pleased that this is happening: "At the moment, there's no quick solution to emissions from helicopters unfortunately. Currently the best we can do is carbon offsetting until new solutions come along. We now offer all clients the option to offset their helicopter aerals through a number of carbon offsetting schemes we've identified. This is no longer something you can ignore (not that we want to) because clients are demanding change and writing it into contracts – which is great. It's no longer an add-on but something really crucial. Soon if you don't tick all the boxes you won't get the contract. It's something I've been interested in for a while and it's great that everyone is beginning to take it more seriously."

A good friend to the GTC

ACS has been a valued GTC sponsor company since 2008, over the years contributing a range of informative Zerby articles – on the specialist cameras used on horse racing, the cameras used at the Pope's 2010 Birmingham visit, the Royal Jubilee river pageant and Prince William's marriage to Kate Middleton, the Oxford–Cambridge boat race and the 2018 IAAF World Championships. The company also hosted a popular 'hands on' workshop at its then Godalming base in 2011, when GTC members were able to try out different vehicle rigs and remotely operating the (at the time) new SMARThead™. It is hoped ACS will be able to stage a similar workshop in the not too distant future when members will once again be able to catch up with the latest developments – but not until the team is through the next crazy-busy period with back-to-back major events including the multi-country Euros and Summer Olympics in Japan, on top of all the regulars like the Boat Race, Wimbledon, Open Golf and multiple horse racing events.

As ACS kick off a very busy 41st year, the GTC looks forward to working with them over the next 40 years – and to witnessing yet more camera innovation in the fields of sport and live events, where the company will no doubt continue to be leaders in the race!

### Fact File

GTC sponsor **Aerial Camera Systems (ACS)** is widely recognised as a world leader in the provision of specialist camera systems as well as aerial filming in the UK and around the world. The company has a unique inventory of facilities available for rental with specialist crew, from high-performance compact robotic heads to minicams, stabilised mounts, aerial drones, railcams, wirecams, tracking vehicles, aerial filming coordination services, and the sponsor-funded EyeFlyer blimp.

ACS is part of Euro Media Group (EMG) and is based in High Wycombe, UK. Tel: +44 (0) 1483 426767; website: [www.acsmedia.com](http://www.acsmedia.com)

With thanks to the ACS team for the photos.

## MEMBER DISCOUNTS

	25%	All Kit Hire (subject to availability) Contact: <b>Mark Wilson</b> +44 (0)20 7436 3060 <a href="mailto:info@alishire.co.uk">info@alishire.co.uk</a>
	20%	All Kit Hire (subject to availability) Contact: <b>Shaun Wilton</b> +44 (0)20 8941 1000 <a href="mailto:shaun.wilton@annavalley.co.uk">shaun.wilton@annavalley.co.uk</a>
	20%	Contact: <b>Peter Scrutton</b> +44 (0)1932 570001 <a href="mailto:peter@broadcast-services.co.uk">peter@broadcast-services.co.uk</a>
	15%	Editing Facilities (Avid 7) Online editor with 20 years TV experience Contact: <b>Dewi Evans</b> ; +44 (0)29 2131 0131 <a href="mailto:DEvans@CrackingProductions.com">DEvans@CrackingProductions.com</a>
	two months free	Accountancy Package Full accountancy package: £95 + VAT per month Contact: <b>Jaime Thorpe</b> ; +44 (0)1442 795100 <a href="mailto:jaime.thorpe@dolanaccountancy.com">jaime.thorpe@dolanaccountancy.com</a>
	up to 45%	Up to 45% on all kit hire Subject to availability. Please ring for details Contact: <b>Paula Connor</b> +44 (0)20 8232 8899; <a href="mailto:paula@electra-tv.com">paula@electra-tv.com</a>
	15%	Applies to all purchases from the website: <a href="http://www.formatt-hitech.com">www.formatt-hitech.com</a> Apply <b>GTC1515</b> at checkout Contact: <b>David Lutwyche</b> ; +44 (0)1685 870979
	5%	Contact: <b>Andrew Morgan</b> +44 (0)20 7111 1643 Apply <b>GTC19</b> at checkout <a href="mailto:andrew@hardsoft.co.uk">andrew@hardsoft.co.uk</a>
	20%	Outdoor Clothing 20% off at <a href="http://www.keela.co.uk">www.keela.co.uk</a> (exc. promotions) Enter the code <b>GTCKEE20</b> at checkout <a href="mailto:enquiries@keela.co.uk">enquiries@keela.co.uk</a>
	10%	Sticky Labels for Equipment/Boxes etc Contact: <b>Gary Deller</b> ; +44 (0)1923 263777 <a href="mailto:info@langleylabels.com">info@langleylabels.com</a>
	20%	North-West Based Kit Hire Contact: <b>Steve Spence</b> ; +44 (0)161 425 0071 <a href="mailto:hire@lensflaretv.com">hire@lensflaretv.com</a>
	20%	Kit Hire Contact: <b>Brad Day</b> ; +44 (0)20 8549 9966 <a href="mailto:hire@newdaypictures.com">hire@newdaypictures.com</a>
	30%	Waterproof Bags Enter <b>GTC30</b> at checkout Contact: <b>Luke Staniland</b> ; +44 (0)1784 473848 <a href="mailto:luke@overboard.com">luke@overboard.com</a> <a href="http://www.overboard.com">www.overboard.com</a>
	25%	Contact: <b>Russell Martin</b> +44 (0)20 8226 4073 <a href="mailto:mail@overexposed.tv">mail@overexposed.tv</a>
	20% + 5% points	Outdoor Clothing Join the Image Professional Scheme for discount Contact: <b>Jeni How</b> ; +44 (0)1892 786445 <a href="mailto:pro.sales@paramo.co.uk">pro.sales@paramo.co.uk</a> <a href="http://www.paramo.co.uk">www.paramo.co.uk</a>
	£26 (Freelance) £45 (Ltd. Co.)	Public Liability Insurance £10,000,000 cover. Policy runs May–April. Contact: <b>Michael Wood</b> ; +44 (0)20 8256 4931 <a href="mailto:michael.wood@performance-insurance.tv">michael.wood@performance-insurance.tv</a>
	20%	Photon Beard Web Shop Enter <b>GTC</b> at checkout Contact: <b>Mike Perry</b> ; +44 (0)1525 850942 <a href="http://www.photonbeard.com/shop.html">www.photonbeard.com/shop.html</a>
	10%	SWIT, E-Image & LS Lighting Use code: <b>GTC10</b> Contact: <b>Nick Millen</b> ; +44 (0)1442 292937 <a href="mailto:nick@proav.co.uk">nick@proav.co.uk</a>
	10%	Contact: <b>Sharon Howells</b> +44 (0)1792 720880 <a href="mailto:Sharon.howells@quicklink.tv">Sharon.howells@quicklink.tv</a>
	up to £5,500	£5,500 on Sprinter; £3,500 on Vito Contact: <b>Martin Gearing</b> . Conditions apply. Rossetts Commercial Mercedes-Benz +44 (0)1903 223400; <a href="mailto:martin.gearing@rossetts.co.uk">martin.gearing@rossetts.co.uk</a>
	25%	Studio Hire Contact: <b>Jason Dollery</b> ; +44 (0)20 7127 4664 <a href="mailto:jason.dollery@sandstormfilms.com">jason.dollery@sandstormfilms.com</a>
	10%	10% off ViewBack Contact: <b>Robert Webb</b> <a href="mailto:robert.webb@vislink.com">robert.webb@vislink.com</a> ; +44 (0)1787 226217
	10%	Camera Courses Enter <b>VMI</b> when booking online Contact: <b>Barry Bassett</b> ; +44 (0)20 8922 1222 <a href="mailto:bb@vmi.tv">bb@vmi.tv</a>
	20%	New VW Vans plus fitting out Cordwallis Van Centre, Bedford Contact: <b>GTC Admin for eligibility code</b> 0300 111 4123, <a href="mailto:administration@gtc.org.uk">administration@gtc.org.uk</a>
	up to 29%	Free 12 months membership, business rates & £60 credit Contact: <b>Matt Farrelly</b> +44 (0)20 3004 7816; <a href="mailto:mfarrelly@zipcar.co.uk">mfarrelly@zipcar.co.uk</a>

These discounts are not transferable.

Be prepared to quote your membership number.

Contact the company directly, not the GTC.