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The new Mondeo on video



Labour of love: a generic car model is lifted into Piccadilly Circus, left, before floating above Eros, courtesy of helium balloons

Wheels over London

Erin Baker spends a morning with the makers of the new Mondeo TV commercial

This can't be right, I think, as the cabbie pulls up in an East End street of monotonous terraced houses in the drizzle: there's not a soul in sight. Suddenly, as if on cue, a caravan of cars, minibuses and Transits swings around the corner and fills the road. Out jump men in high-vis jackets, who start knocking feverishly on doors up and down the street, asking the bemused occupants if they mind moving their cars. One van swings round the corner too quickly and accidentally rears into a minibus that has just drawn up and disgorged a flurry of people in parkas with furry hoods, women in puffas with clipboards and men with big black umbrellas and industrial lighting rigs.

There's a sudden burst of colour as one group gathers around a helium gas cylinder that's been trundled on to the

pavement and starts blowing up balloons.

We are here, outside a nondescript residential garage in Bow, for the shooting of a scene in the new Ford Mondeo TV advert, coming to a screen near you from May 23, when it receives its first airing on ITV during the Champions League, which Ford sponsors.

I take shelter from the chilly rain in a steamed-up minibus with Greg Burke, European creative director at Ogilvy, Ford's ad agency. His brief for the new Mondeo, he says, "is to communicate the car's instant desirability. It's the first really desirable Ford for a while." Few would disagree.

The 90-second commercial will start with cars floating upwards on helium balloons, presumably towards car heaven. Our protagonist emerges from his garage to watch the cars rising skywards, and as he does so, a new Mondeo drives past.

Captivated by the Ford, he too ties balloons to his car and lets it go. London was chosen to provide the backdrop, Burke explains, because of its "amazing skyline, universally known, and because the unfamiliar happening is made more iconic by the landscape around it. At the moment, London has a kind of coolness going for it." In the commercial, you will therefore see familiar landmarks such as Big Ben, Piccadilly Circus and the Thames.

All of the capital had to be captured in just 10 days of filming, Burke reckons. London crews are the best to work with and, sure enough, when I caught up with them in Bow, they were there and gone within a couple of hours, sweeping like whirling dervishes on to the next location in another east London garage before the day's final scene in a riverside park, where a car was

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positioned halfway up a tree. The next morning it was Piccadilly Circus at 7.30am.

The whole shoot involves 70 people, plus 30-40 extras at any one time, all supported by two double-decker catering buses, cranes to pull the cars into the air, lighting guys, a camera crew, director, assistant director, people to build the rigs, focus pullers and so on.

To get the floating-car visuals, the crew used carbon-fibre moulds, taken from real cars but modified to give them a generic look, which weigh 40kg each and are lifted by weather balloons. There's also a special one-off that has been developed by Effekt Technik and weighs just 4kg; when filled with helium it floats on its own.

"It's one of the bigger, more complicated car ads being shot this year," says Burke. Unlike Honda's *Cog* advert, in which one piece of machinery

set off another, there would be virtually no time for post-production fiddling, so the Mondeo shoot had to go well.

The car advertising world is a crowded one these days, with ever-more ambitious, stylish and popular productions; think of Honda's *Impossible Dreams* campaign, Citroën's dancing robot or Audi's Nasa patents ad. "There are so many car briefs and everyone is trying to do original things. It's not easy to do a fresh and original idea. Chances are someone will duplicate the brief," says Burke. Cars also provide a creative director with more complications than any other product. "There's a greater degree of investment in car ads than other categories because making a car look good on the road is logistically and financially challenging," he says. And the biggest problem for the Ford ad? "The 'boring' perception – a result

of the brand's success in the UK. Fiat has a similar problem in Italy," he declares.

Just as someone yells "Keep it locked up!" meaning keep the location closed to the public, a local resident trundles by in his car. Fortunately, it's a Focus, but it still won't do, so the camera must roll again. The unscripted break allows a moment for the oil patch on the garage floor, signifying one of the cars that has floated away, to be renewed; the "oil" is actually a mixture of tea and treacle. What a strange world.

THE SHOOT IN NUMBERS

- ✦ 7 nationalities
- ✦ 30 locations
- ✦ 300-400 people
- ✦ 600 cubic metres of helium
- ✦ 1,400 balloons
- ✦ 76,000 feet of film