

Test Chest and the Baptism of Fire!



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Picture courtesy Granada Television

Receiving an urgent request from Manchester's Granada Studio Complex to borrow a Test Chest for evaluation, Murraypro were delighted to be able send them a loan demonstration Unit for test, but had no concept of the background story developing at the TV Centre. Mr Steve Craddock picks up the story.....

The Test Chest 3G arrived for evaluation on the first day of a 7 day rig/rehearse for Coronation Street's live 50th Birthday episode. Whilst this potentially provided an excellent opportunity to thoroughly test it, I was also concerned the crew might not have time to try it out thoroughly. I needn't have worried!

The Coronation Street project involved 24 cameras controlled from SiS Outside Broadcast 1 (their flagship scanner) deployed across two Studios, the medical centre building and 'the Lot', comprising the Street itself, alleyways and passages, all littered with prop crashed trams and rubble. Outgoing circuits were 2 HD satellite feeds via SiS, 3 outgoing SD feeds via the internal ITV network, cue feeds to numerous PAL, SD and HD monitors around the studios and the Lot, courtesy feeds to communal areas around the ITV building and via the internal RF 'ring-main', 4 HD record feeds via the studios to our Avid ISIS server for replay later, repeats, ITV player etc. and - if it was commissioned in time - a brand new internal network HD line feed to BT Tower. A tall order! Especially when everything had to be plugged from scratch and any existing facilities over-plugged to allow rehearsals to continue throughout the rig.

My reason for mentioning all this is simply because we used the Test Chest in every area. We found the '**Which-Wire?**' input was invaluable checking individual camera and mixer out feeds back to each Studio, and the embedded audio monitoring with the inbuilt speakers allowed us to identify remote feeds from the scanner without having to call the scanner crew by phone or RT to ask them to 'ident' either sound or vision.continued over

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On the Studio floors and outside on the lot we were able to establish which feeds were PAL, SD or HD simply by plugging them in. Monitors for Cueing on the lot were carefully hidden out of shot, usually in dark corners, 'ginnels' and behind rubble, all under cover of darkness, and it was here we discovered the built in torch and put it to good use. As one of my colleagues remarked with a smile 'Whoever designed this has been down this road before!' It's worth noting that all of this was achieved without any of us referring to the enclosed Handbook or the helpline number provided. We didn't have time and we found the Test Chest very straightforward to use. Similar use was made of the test chest at the scanner tailboard, sorting out a variety of off air and network monitoring feeds and measuring levels in PAL, HD and SD, both with and without embedded audio.



With all that in place our attention turned to the outgoing circuits and so the Test Chest headed off to our Network Control Room. As well as using it as a test signal generator for the SD circuits, with the advantage of being able to check audio/video synchronicity, it found use in commissioning our new HD circuit, spending virtually a whole day generating a variety of level and sync test signals, for measurement at BT Tower. It was at this point that - despite the impressive battery life - we finally conceded to use the mains adaptor.

As the live transmission approached the Test Chest found its way into the hands of the Studio Engineers who put it to good use chasing feeds to projectors, screens and TVs located around the building and distributed from our Central Technical Area.

Over the full week we used the Test Chest extensively, we certainly made more use of it, across more Areas and Users than I expected and with unanimous approval. We used many of the Test Chest's functions but we certainly didn't use all of them (I'm looking forward to achieving that in the New Year!) what we did use we found very useful and never disappointed. By the time I asked my assembled colleagues at the end of the week if we should buy one, the response was predictable..... "One each?"

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