

Striking a perfect balance

Production Opinion

By Phil Hastie, Shoot2Edit

I have been a freelance cameraman for almost 20 years, and in that time I have worked on some great jobs at home and abroad, with clients including BBC, Sky and APTN. I work mainly on news and current affairs, although I also get involved in music, documentaries, sport and even game shows.

Obviously the camera is my most important tool, but I cannot over-emphasise the importance of a good tripod and head. You need to know that it is going to support you – literally – whatever you do and wherever you want to shoot.

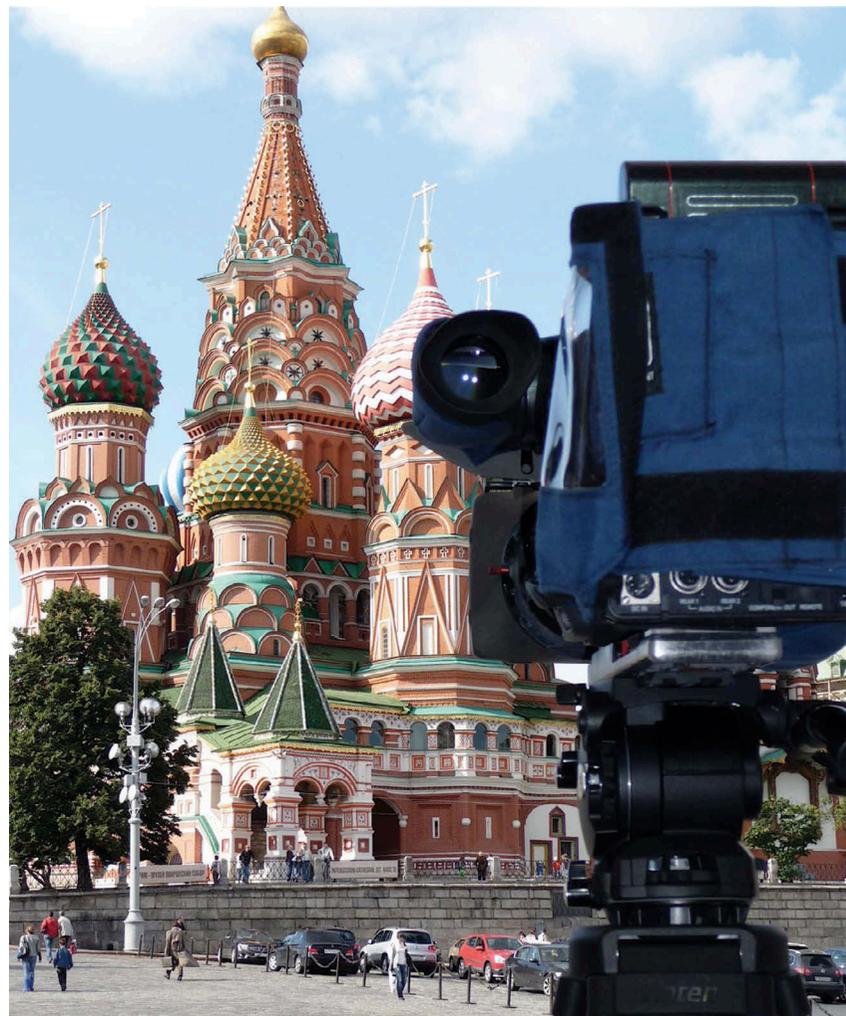
When I was a student at Ravensbourne I got used to Vinten tripods and heads, so when I was finally able to buy my own new gear it was a Vinten. The company is helpful and I got to know the team there well – not least when I was in Kosovo in 1999 and they talked me through some emergency repairs while I was in the middle of the war zone – and they asked me to try one of the original Vision 100 heads before they were launched. They were much better than anything that came before.

Now I have had the opportunity to try the latest head from Vinten, the Vision AS series, and my first impressions are that it is another major step forward. It looks distinctly different, with largely black styling, new recessed knobs and blue lights. But to me what it looks like is not important, so long as it performs. The Vision AS head does perform very well indeed: it moves extremely smoothly, and it is easy to set up – if you have any experience in using a tripod you will know intuitively what it does.

That said, in my travels around the world I have been amazed at the number of people who claim to be experts who do not know how to set up a head. They put the baseplate on the tripod and think that is it.

If you want the head to support you, not fight you, then you need to take the time to make a couple of adjustments. First, you need to set the head level using the new high contrast blue LED lit bubble – get this wrong and the camera will not even stay in the horizontal.

Then you need to set the counterbalance. Once this is right, you get what Vinten calls 'Perfect Balance': the camera will stay wherever you point it, at any angle of tilt. It will also be stable, so if you



Having a head work with you, become almost a part of you, is really important, so you can forget about it and concentrate on the image in the viewfinder

knock it the camera does not bounce but stays in the new position. You know you can trust it not to get in the way of what you are trying to shoot – you do not need to hold the pan bar every time you take the brake off.

With the levelling and counterbalance done, then you can dial in the pan and tilt friction that suits you and the shoot you are on. The tough test I always give a new head is a diagonal camera move, which needs the pan and tilt frictions to be matched.

My experience of the Vinten Vision AS so far is that it does all this very well. The controls are in the right place so with a little experience your hand falls onto the dial you need. One big change in this new design is that all these controls are recessed. That may seem cosmetic but on the old Vision head it was surprisingly easy to knock a knob off: my guess is that it will be tough to damage these.

I have not yet had the chance to test it in a really tough environment, but it looks as though it would be very hard for dirt and dust to get in and cause problems. It is well built and well sealed. I like the idea of adding a couple of secret compartments to the head, too, to keep spare screws and a battery for the levelling light.

In use, I have to say it is stunning. Vinten talks about 'Perfect Balance' and



it does seem to me to have exactly that – perfect balance. It gives me smooth movement wherever I am going with the camera, and I never feel that I am fighting it. Having a head work with you, become almost a part of you, is really important, so you can forget about it and concentrate on the image in the viewfinder.