

Discovery goes digital in Asia

Adopts Scientific-Atlanta compression

By Glen Dickson

Discovery Channel has purchased a PowerVu digital video compression system from Scientific-Atlanta to launch digital services in the Asia Pacific region. The new MPEG-2/DVB-compliant system will be installed in the Asia Broadcast Centre in Singapore, where Discovery's Asian offerings originate using S-A's analog B-MAC transmission system.

The six-channel PowerVu system, worth roughly \$650,000, supplants a General Instrument DigiCipher II system that Discovery had ordered in January (BROADCASTING & CABLE, Jan. 29). According to Charlie Humbard, vice president of network distribution and technical operations for Discovery Communications, General Instrument was unable to meet the tight delivery time line that Discovery had mandated in its contract for the Singapore installation.

Discovery is now using a DigiCipher II system to distribute four MPEG-2 feeds in Latin America. Humbard says the system is working well after some initial bugs. General



Discovery is equipping its Asia Broadcast Centre with S-A's PowerVu compression system.

Instrument did not return phone calls.

"We had deadlines that had to be met," says Humbard. "We've been evaluating multiple companies, and we felt, like some other programmers, that our infrastructure was stretched too tight to take DigiCipher II for both Latin America and Asia. And with PowerVu, the quality is as good as or better [than that of DigiCipher II]."

Humbard says that PanAmSat's deci-

sion to use PowerVu systems to provide compression for its worldwide satellite network played a role in its decision; Discovery uses PAS-2 and PAS-4 to deliver programming to Asia Pacific and India, respectively.

Discovery expects to receive the PowerVu system in early August, after which it will use the system to deliver six channels to the Asia Pacific region: an Australian/New Zealand

feed; a Taiwan feed; a Southeast Asia feed; a Philippines feed; a noncommercial feed for Malaysia, and a possible sixth feed for planned services in Japan.

"We'll be providing advertisers with a targeted pathway," says Humbard.

Discovery also originates an analog feed to India off PAS-4. That will remain analog, says Humbard, pending favorable changes in the Indian cable climate. ■

WGN-TV sends Skycam 9 aloft

New chopper to work morning beat

By Glen Dickson

Chicago superstation WGN-TV has launched its first full-time news helicopter, Skycam 9, and will use the chopper for extensive traffic coverage during its morning news show.

The WB affiliate is leasing a complete aerial coverage package, including pilot and camera operator, from West Coast Helicopter of Van Nuys, Calif. The Astar 350-B2 chopper is equipped with a customized UltraMedia gyro-stabilized camera unit from FLIR Systems of Portland, Ore. Skycam 9's UltraMedia uses a Sony BVP-T70 camera and Canon J33x15 lens with 2x extender, which allows the lens to extend to more than 1,000 mm for an effective 66:1 zoom ratio.

The chopper also has an interior Sony

DXC-950 camera with a Canon lens, and a provision for a hand-held camera.

"The DXC-950 is a very high resolution, multi-purpose POV [point-of-view] camera that also forms the nucleus of our remote pan-and-tilt traffic cameras," says Marc Drazin, WGN-TV director of engineering.

Skycam 9 will bring live reports from traffic reporter Robin Baumgarten between 7 and 9 a.m. (Monday-Friday) on the *WGN Morning News*. The chopper also will lend support to the noon and 9 p.m. newscasts for breaking stories.



For traffic coverage, WGN-TV already maintains weatherproof remote cameras atop the John Hancock Building and the Sears Tower (both of which are ENG receive sites), atop a hotel at O'Hare Airport and, downtown, atop the Field Museum. The superstation also will be installing one at its new ENG receive site in suburban Oak Brook, built primarily with the helicopter in mind.

"It's a dual investment," says Drazin.