

3NET

“We just want good 3D”

For 3DTV to become mass-market, 3DTV channels are a must, and 3net is a pioneer in the field. Chris Forrester tracks its development

3NET is a unique 3D channel broadcasting to potentially millions of homes across the US. Backed by Sony, Discovery and IMAX, the channel showcases of 3D material drawn from its three backers, and increasingly commissioned by the channel.

3net launched on February 13 this year and president/CEO Tom Cosgrove says he is delighted with the progress being made for the 24/7 channel. “We’re carrying an increasing number of brand new shows, new to US audiences as well as to the channel,” he says. Shows like Bullproof, a sportumentary which takes viewers into the crazy world of rodeo and extreme man-vs-beast encounters, all shot in native 3D and which, says Cosgrove, “gives a sense of immersion in the action that’s simply not possible with any other video medium”.

Cosgrove says that 3D production costs are higher than 2D, and programme makers recognise that fact. “But the costs are falling. The new professional 3D camcorders make life much easier. Mirror rigs are still being used for close-up work, and simply because there are then two

cameras then extra time has to be allowed for in post production. But as skills grow we are finding that Episode 2 of a shoot is a much easier task than Episode 1, and Episode 3 is easier again. I am very bullish on the future.”

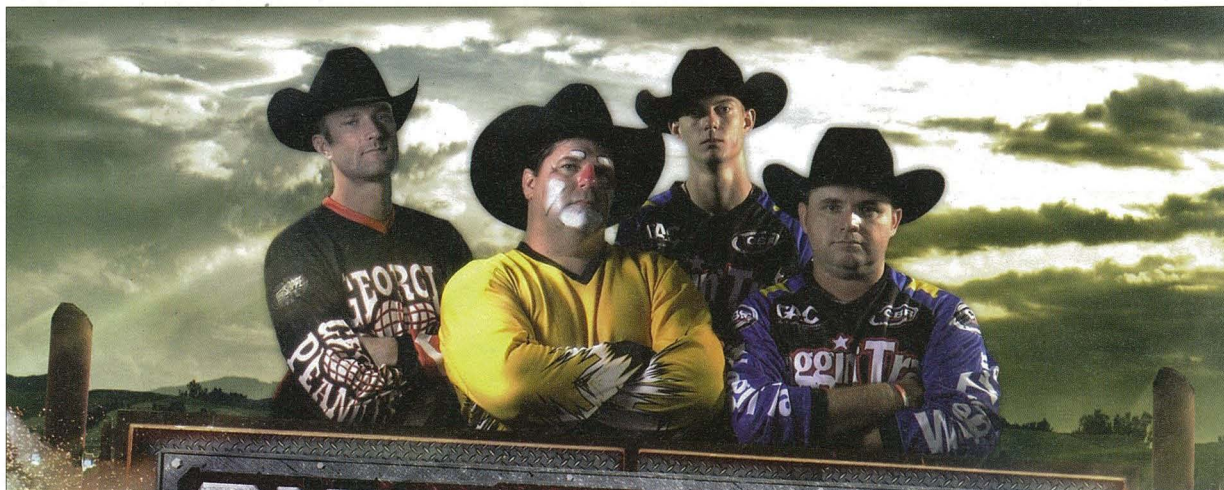
To date the channel has tended to focus on the material that its three backers are best known for, including travelogues and natural history. But it is also now showing plenty of sport. On September 25 it launched its first kids 3D programming block with the world premiere of the all-new animated 3D series Bolts & Blip and Dream Defenders in a prime-time special presentation. More material arrived for kids in the shape of its 3net Three Dee Kids segment on

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Saturdays and Sundays. “It further underscores 3net’s on-going commitment to building on our leadership position in the dynamic and ever-growing in-home 3D entertainment space,” adds Cosgrove. 3net has also announced Skeleton, inc., a show about a family-run business where the object is to turn animals and human bodies into skeletal artworks. Cosgrove says the concept stood out as readily lending itself to a 3D treatment.

Bullproof, a 3D sportumentary





Animated 3D series Bolts & Blip

Asked whether original 3D content for TV was now beginning to flow, he says: "We are at the same point we were a few years back when HDTV launched. There was a shortage of high-quality high-def material, and most people complained about the higher cost of production. Nobody makes that claim now, and in my view the arguments in favour of 3D are moving the same way. Our audience is growing all the time. We are signing new distributors in the US, and actively selling our content outside the US."

3net is currently available to all HDTV subscribers of DirecTV with a 3D-enabled set, and Cosgrove says this equates to a significant potential market, and he is hopeful of adding other distribution outlets before year end. As to 3net's audience, Cosgrove says that currently the channel skews slightly male, but a larger roster of kids programming will help that balance. The channel is much more family-focused than most, he adds.

Despite a recent set-back to the 3D sector when AT&T decided to drop ESPN's 3D

service ("more about money than demand" says Cosgrove) he remains extremely bullish about 3DTV's prospects. "Jumping forward 20 years from now, there will of course be many more HD channels than 3D channels. I think we're going to see distinct 3D channels. Whereas in many ways HD started to replace SD, I don't think 3D is necessarily a replacement for HD. I think it's a different experience."

3net, says Cosgrove, is all about quality, and with Discovery and IMAX as its content partners that thrust will continue. "Everything we do is original. Any commissions or co-productions that we're a part of are all shot in native 3D." He says that policy will continue in order to

get the very highest quality on the screen.

Mark Ringwald is 3net's director of scheduling and acquisitions, and is at MIPCOM to identify new 3D projects as well as meet a few potential buyers. He explains that 3net is just like any other channel. "We are open to most suggestions where the project makes sense. We commission, we co-produce and we partner with the usual mix of rights. We just want good 3D."

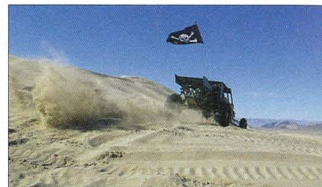
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A look at some of the 3D programming to be seen on 3net

HIGH OCTANE

THE MEN and women featured in High Octane are pushing themselves higher, faster and further just for the feeling of connecting to their sport and their environment. High Octane travels the world searching for some of the most beautiful locations most accomplished athletes – from ice climbing in the mountains of Switzerland to the surfers on the beaches of California.



AFRICAN WILD

THIS show takes a journey into the secret world of Africa's largest and most dangerous animals. In African Wild the viewer can travel with a herd of elephants, go on a guided Big 5 Safari, visit Africa's largest aquarium to learn about sharks, or camp on a beach to investigate growing up in a seal colony.



EXPERIENCE 3D

THIS fast-paced, hour-long, 3D thrill-ride takes viewers on a journey across the US – from the Hudson River, over the New Mexico desert, to the golden coast of Southern California, to the rainforests of Hawaii – in acrobatic small plane and hot air balloons, on vintage clipper ships, surfing Hawaiian waves, riding race cars and scaling sheer rock faces.

