

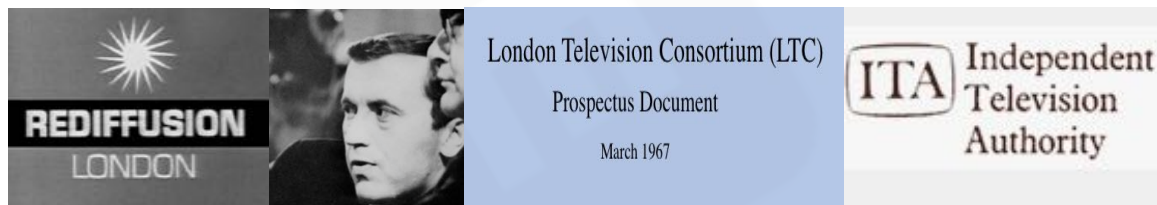
LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION'S PIONEERING TECHNOLOGY

by Phil Nott

ITV in London is 65 years old in 2020, remaining vital throughout a period of external pressures as well as the changing viewing habits of the population. In this article, I look at the birth and evolution of London Weekend Television, and at the role that technology played in developing its sport and drama output.

The biggest change in ITV's history came with the franchise renewal process of 1968. As a result, the franchisees for London were two new companies - Thames Television on weekdays and London Weekend Television at weekends.

LWT was a pioneering and innovative TV company. Many of the changes it introduced still have an impact today, whereas the battle to get there gives us an insight into the politics and business practices of the time.



David Frost photo: via wembleyparkstudios.co.uk

The story starts in 1967. The main ITV franchise holders had enjoyed prosperity since the late 1950s, with constantly increasing advertising revenues driven by the march towards consumerism. 'You've never had it so good' Prime Minister Harold Macmillan claimed at the time.

Rediffusion London, the London weekday ITV company, was the dominant company. Rival ATV was split between the Midlands in the week and London at the weekends. Granada in the North was a weekday franchise that had an amicable commercial relationship with Rediffusion in London. ABC TV was the weekend TV specialist, with the franchise for both the North and the Midlands at the weekend. Its commercial wrangles were mainly with the other weekend franchise contractor ATV in London.

Why did we have these weekend / weekday splits? It was to prevent a seven-day London company overwhelming the entire network. It would have higher advertising revenue, have better access to the 'talent' and would start to commercially affect the other ITV regions. This would have been anathema to the ITA (Independent Television Authority) in the 1960s although it does not worry ITV and the regulators today.

But in 1967, the ITA wanted to simplify the franchise arrangements with more seven-day contracts in the regions so that a single company could focus on the needs of that region exclusively. So, in the new franchise round of 1968, only London was to still have a weekend split.

This led to new franchise opportunities, including seven-day contracts for the Midlands and now a split of the North into two contract regions - Lancashire and Yorkshire. The new proposed franchise holders were to be known as the 'Big 5' with each having a roughly equal share of ITV's advertising revenues.

The lead contender for the weekend franchise in London was the London Television Consortium (LTC), created and led by the television presenter David Frost who, at the time, was also working for the London weekday ITV station Rediffusion. Since the consortium also included a number of former senior BBC staff, it impressed the ITA.

The consortium's application promised a variety of highbrow arts and drama productions, addressing the criticisms in the 1962 Pilkington Report which pinpointed some of the failings of commercial television. The ITA had been worried by press criticism of the ITV network's output, which was seen as downmarket.

The authority saw LTC's plans as equal in quality to the programming output of the BBC. In summer 1967, it was announced that LTC had won the weekend franchise for London. The new company soon renamed itself London Weekend Television, but only after deciding not to use the name Thames Television. That name was soon picked up by ABC TV for its new London weekday operation. It was rumoured that it was David Frost who insisted on having the word 'Weekend' in the station name.

London Weekend Television

LWT's first ident, used in 1968 – 69, was not inspiring. Even before colour TV, some colour in the logo would have helped!

First studio

In its proposal to the ITA, LTC had said it planned to spend £2.2 million on new equipment in readiness for colour broadcasting in November 1969, and another £2.6 million on a new TV Studio complex on the South Bank of the River Thames.

Since there were only 12 months between the award of the contract and going live, and the new studio would not be ready until 1972 (four years away), the broadcaster needed an interim arrangement. This led to wrangling within ITV over who would get which London studio. LWT wanted Teddington Studios but ABC TV was not going to relinquish that site after years of investment and its recent successful experiments there in colour television. The only other realistic alternative for LWT was Wembley Studios. However, Rediffusion, the previous occupier, was still smarting from the loss of its London weekday franchise after a 'shotgun marriage' to ABC TV to form Thames Television. It was not in the mood to be co-operative.

There were outspoken exchanges in the national press, with LWT blaming Rediffusion for being difficult. Eventually the ITA had to mediate; LWT moved into Wembley on 6th May 1968 under a lease arrangement, with less than three months before it began broadcasting.



Wembley Studios in 1968 with hastily erected sign.
Photo: via wembleyparkstudios.co.uk

LWT began broadcasting on Friday August 2nd 1968, only a relatively short time before the official launch of colour on ITV in November 1969. It therefore had the expense and upheaval of converting the Wembley studios to colour, since it could not wait for the 1972 opening of the South Bank studios, which had been designed for colour from the outset.

It was stated in the 1969 ITA Yearbook that the majority of the promised £2.2 million equipment spend went on 22 EMI 2001 four-tube colour cameras. The split was thought to be twelve 2001s in the studios and ten for OBs. However, I am reliably informed that only six were ever used on OBs, leaving four cameras either unallocated or never purchased.

Unfortunately, the conversion to colour did not go smoothly. From November 1970 to February 1971 there was an industrial dispute by ITV technicians about working in colour as well as issues related to ex-Rediffusion technical staff now having to work weekends as opposed to weekdays!

This 'colour strike' resulted in the brand-new and expensive 2001 colour cameras recording programmes in black and white. Famous LWT programmes affected included *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Budgie*, *Please Sir* and *On the Buses*. They are all still available on various channels.

The new South Bank Television Centre opened in 1972, equipped with the EMI 2001 colour cameras which were trucked over from the Wembley studios. Production for programmes including *Upstairs Downstairs* and *On the Buses* also transferred to the new South Bank studios.



New South Bank Studios under construction in 1971 with iconic tower nearly completed. The 'river ident' introduced in September 1970 was used at the start of programmes and for all branding. Finally, the station had an effective and memorable identity.
Photo: Mike Hartung.

There was a problem with *On the Buses* at the new studios. Obviously, a programme that is set in a bus garage would need to have at least one bus on set at some point. At Wembley Studios it was easy to get double-decker buses into the large studio 5 A and B. But at the South Bank studios no one had told the designers that this would be necessary, and as a result the doors of the new Studio 1 were about a metre too low. The solution was to use a shorn-off double-decker bus with a wooden mock-up that could be lifted and placed on top.

LWT outside broadcast operations

LWT's OB fleet had also been based at Wembley studios (as had Rediffusion's). In February 1971 it moved to a site in nearby Stonebridge Park that had previously been the headquarters of a company called Intertel.

When it awarded the London Weekend franchise, the ITA stipulated that certain contractual commitments had to be honoured that required a substantial level of OB operations. LWT had to provide an hour-long live service of Sunday morning worship from within its own region. It also had to take over the presentation and compilation of the Saturday afternoon five-hour-long live sports programme called *World of Sport*, previously the responsibility of ABC TV at Teddington Studios.

Even though the £2.2 million budget (equivalent to about £33 million today) mainly related to getting ready for colour, it did not stretch to OB operations. LWT inherited just one OB scanner from Rediffusion, plus an articulated tender vehicle and a links vehicle that may have been retained from its involvement with Intertel – oh, and LWT also bought a new Ford Transit van!

The former Rediffusion scanner became LWT's OB Unit 1. It was originally a Marconi OB demonstrator vehicle equipped with up to six Marconi MK V 4.5" monochrome image orthicon cameras. In 1969 the unit was converted to colour by EMI Television which installed four EMI 2001 four-tube colour cameras; another two EMI 2001s were installed in the Transit.



One of Unit 1's EMI 2001 cameras on location.
Photo: Martin Hawkins.

This meant that LWT's OB operations were stretched from the outset, even without the increasing demand to shoot exterior drama scenes on videotape rather than film.

From day one there were grumblings in the ITV network about LWT's abilities, particularly from ATV both in general and specifically concerning OB operations for *World of Sport*.

As ABC TV had the largest OB fleet in ITV and had been a weekend contractor, it provided the lion's share of OB sports programming provision up until 1968. However, as ABC TV had now become London's weekday as Thames Television, the burden fell on ATV in the Midlands and, to a lesser extent, on the newly formed Yorkshire Television which had three OB scanners, disproportionate to their network position at the time.

There were well-documented rows between LWT's David Frost and ATV's Sir Lew "All my shows are great" Grade.

By 1969, a year after it started, LWT was in financial difficulties as projected advertising revenues were not forthcoming and the seven-day ITV companies were keeping their best programmes for weekdays. At the same time the BBC was putting all its big entertainment guns out on a Saturday night including *Dr Who*, *The Generation Game*, *Match of the Day* and *Parky*.

This led to many senior management changes; Rupert Murdoch saved the day by injecting further working capital by buying up all the shares of the departing original LWT management. They were only too glad to sell to the highest bidder.

It was said of Rupert Murdoch at the time, that he was naive about television. A notorious example involved *On the Buses* which was his favourite programme. He liked it so much, he wanted to increase it from 12 episodes a year to 52!



LWT's first OB fleet outside the old Wembley Stadium in 1970 (no one seems to know why two of the vehicles are in a different livery).

Photo: Alex Adams.



Unit 1 at Highbury in 1973 to record an Arsenal home game for *The Big Match*.

Photo: Martin Hawkins.

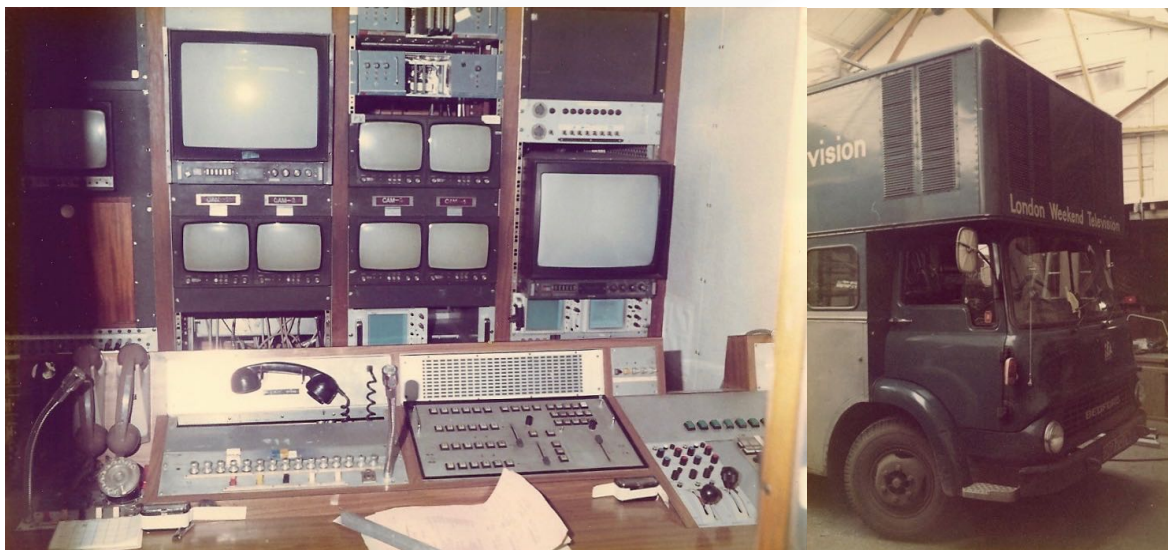
By 1975 LWT was in a much healthier position. Programming in the early 70s was popular, particularly situation comedies *Doctor At Large*, *On the Buses*, and *Please Sir*. Also popular were dramas *Upstairs Downstairs*, *New Scotland Yard* and *Budgie*. Ratings had improved so ad revenues had increased.

As a result, it was time to expand the LWT OB fleet. A new smaller scanner, MCR Unit 2 (ORD707M) was bought and equipped with two Philips LDK 13 mobile colour cameras. It was later fitted with two IVC 7000p cameras and then two Sony 330s. The unit was mainly used for drama and occasionally current affairs.

However, these early portable video cameras had a tendency to lose focus and exhibit a blue tinge near the edge of the picture. This was more down to the optics than the camera electronics. The technical quality of such material was noticeably inferior when compared to studio content from EMI 2001s. This was readily apparent in LWT's *Upstairs Downstairs*.



Unit 2 on location with sister mobile recording unit.
Photo: Dave Baldwin.



Interior and front exterior views of Unit 2 before leaving service.
Photos: Richard Harris.

Unit 3 was a Ford Transit (HLT417K, replaced by XPD322Y in 1980) single camera unit used as an add-on to Unit 1. It worked mainly in current affairs but also did more ad hoc work, such as being the in-shot gallery camera used in LWT's 1970s famous children's pop programme *Supersonic*. Mike Mansfield directed and presented the programme in Studio 1 at the South Bank studios. Unit 3 carried an IVC 7000p colour camera.



Unit 3 on location with a Ford D series links vehicle.
Photo: Mike Hartung.

LWT also bought new tender vehicles in the late 1970s. Tender 1 VLY756S (cables) and Tender 3 VLY755S (cameras and sound) were large Ford D Series 'furniture van' style vehicles that carried vision and sound cables, cameras and other ancillary equipment for OB Unit 1.



Tender Units 1 and 2 at an OB location in the 1980s.
Photo: Alex Adams.



Tender Units 1 and 2 outside Stonebridge Park OB garage showing lockers for the IVC 7000 colour cameras.

Photos: Alex Adams.

As the original Units 1 and 2 had no on-board VT, LWT also bought a mobile recording unit with 2" Ampex video recording equipment. Before it bought this vehicle, LWT had relied on other ITV companies or independent facility providers for mobile recording units, particularly for drama production.



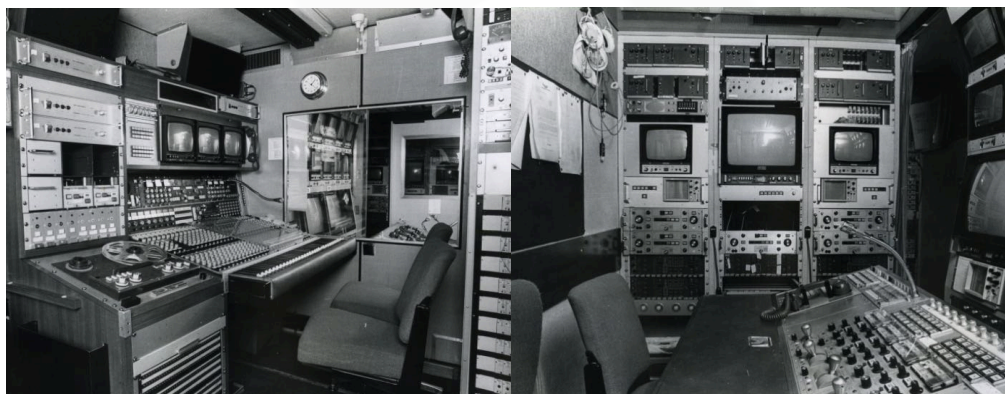
The MRU being prepped for an OB outside its garage at Stonebridge Park.

Photo: Dave Baldwin.

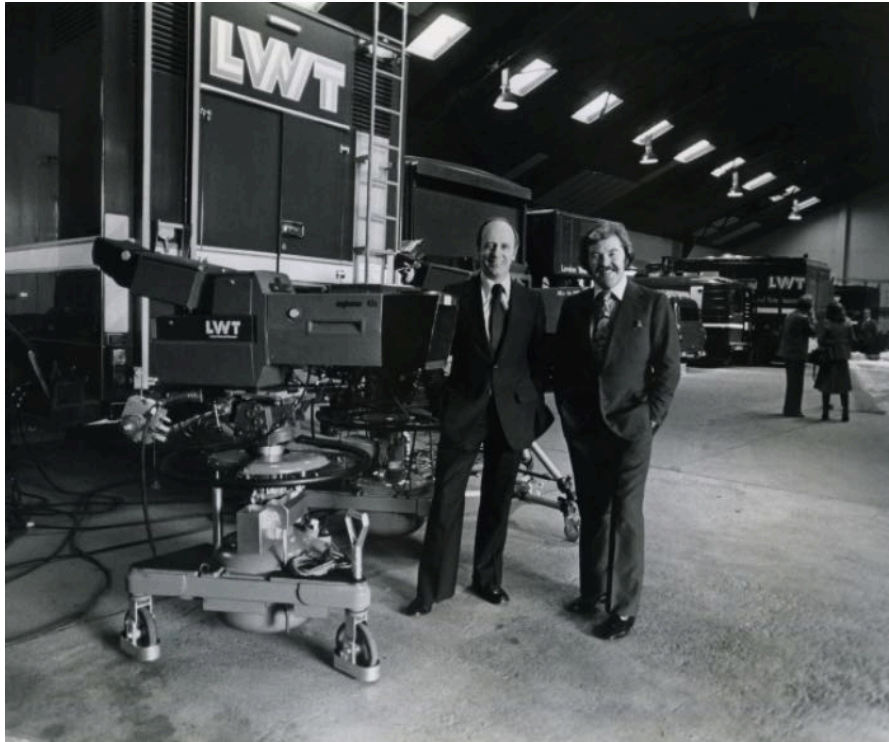
As the 1970s drew to a close, LWT's financial position continued to improve. This allowed it to buy a larger brand-new OB scanner, the new Unit 1 VLL582S that replaced the original Unit 1 inherited from Rediffusion. It was equipped with five IVC 7000s colour cameras, on-board VT, and mains or generator power options.



Newly received Unit 1 parked in the garage at Stonebridge Park awaiting its first job.
Photo: Alex Adams.

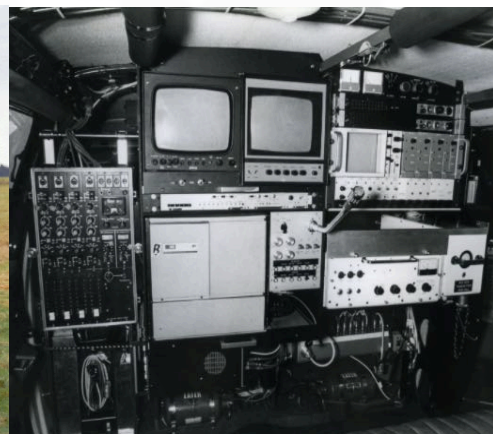


Interior and exterior views of the new Unit 1.
Photos: Alex Adams.



Who are these two likely lads standing by the new Unit 1? Perhaps budding TV cameramen waiting to get their hands on the newly arrived IVC 7000s colour cameras sitting beside Unit 1.
Photo: Alex Adams.

Further expansion of the OB Fleet continued with Unit 4, the 'Roving Eye' BLD158S. It was equipped with an IVC 7000p colour camera plus on-board VT, auxiliary power and a powered aerial mast. It was used mainly for live horse racing and occasionally for drama. The base vehicle was a Chevrolet Blazer 4WD with a V8 engine. Broadspeed Engineering of Birmingham built it to LWT's specification. It had a detachable rear canopy and the camera could be positioned on the roof, at the rear or mounted on the side. The V8 engine allowed it to accelerate away from the starting gates at the same speed as the horses – ITV's racing coverage was never the same again!



(Left) Unit 4 at Lingfield Racecourse in the 1980s; (right) internal view with all the equipment crammed inside.
Photos: Geoff Plumb.



The entire new LWT OB fleet in its Stonebridge Park garage in the 1980s. From furthest away: Unit 1; Unit 2 and tender followed by the smaller single camera units and links vehicles.
Photo: Dave Currie.

LWT and ITV sport

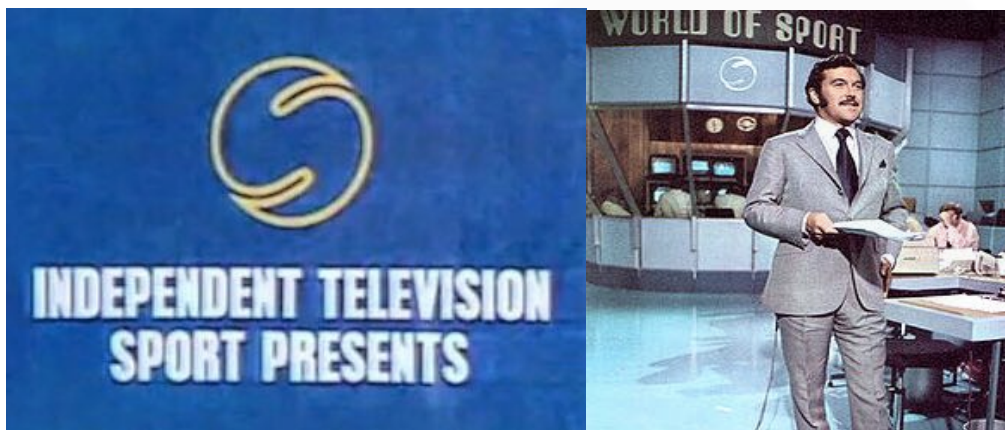


Photo: Independent Television Publications Ltd.

LWT became responsible for *World of Sport* in 1968. Starting in 1965, it was produced and compiled by ABC TV at its Teddington Studios with Eamon Andrews as the first single link presenter. Prior to that, it had been a less co-ordinated effort under the banner *Saturday Sport*.

LWT introduced a new look for *World of Sport* for the forthcoming colour era with a different studio set, logo and type face. The 'S' logo became a branding device for ITV sport in general, not just for *World of Sport*. ITV OB crews were even issued with an 'ITV sport tie' with the 'S' logo emblazoned on it.

In common with all ITV sport, *World of Sport* was a down-market affair that didn't take itself too seriously. It was presented by the smartly turned out Dickie Davies. The programme was quite different from the BBC competition, namely *Grandstand*, although this was largely because the BBC held most of the key sports contracts. ITV had to make do with the lesser sports, such as horse racing and, famously, wrestling. As a result, at times *World of Sport* was padded out with some rather obscure sports like banger racing from Wimbledon Stadium. The figure-of-eight demolition derby was a particular highlight on a Saturday afternoon.

Motor sport in general became popular with the introduction of *Rally Cross* in which Mini Coopers and Lotus Cortinas flew around in the mud on a winter's afternoon. It was great fun and is still shown on ITV4.

World of Sport also enjoyed its brush with the world of celebrities, especially on FA Cup Final Day, where the extended programme included such celebrities as Rod Stewart and Elton John, who were ensconced in the 'Celebrity Bar' in a hotel across the road from Wembley Stadium, hosted by Jimmy Tarbuck. Another great World of Sport celebrity regular was Eric Morecambe, who was a great personal friend of Dickie Davies.



Eric Morecambe with Dickie Davies and Brian Moore in rehearsals at the 1978 FA Cup Final Arsenal v Ipswich.

Photo: John Crews.

In contrast to the BBC, which showed a token three races from Ascot, racing became the centrepiece of *World of Sport*. It was an institution in working men's clubs, with the introduction of the *ITV Seven*, which would feature four races from the day's principal meeting and three races from a minor course such as Haydock.

The *ITV Seven* accumulator bet, where punters could win several thousands of pounds, was popular feature throughout the '70s and is still with us today, since ITV Sport won back horse racing coverage from Channel 4 in 2017. Therefore, once again ITV Sport branded OB trucks (actually NEP's but we won't quibble!) adorn racetracks across the land.

LWT goes big on football



Photos: via *History of sport on TV*

At first ITV sports coverage of football was regionalised, with each ITV area filming a particular match in their region. The big five franchises were Granada TV (covering the North-West), ATV (Midlands) Yorkshire TV (Yorkshire) and Thames and London Weekend Television (London). Smaller ITV stations (Southern TV, Anglia TV and Tyne Tees) covered matches in their region and also took games from other ITV regions. ATV launched *Star Soccer* in October 1965; Southern Television had *Southern Soccer* and ABC TV had *World of Soccer* until it lost its franchise in 1968.

Soccer coverage really began to increase on ITV when LWT launched *The Big Match* in 1968. Eventually, the entire ITV network's football coverage would be broadcast under this title. The main presenters and commentators were Brian Moore (1968-1983) and Jimmy Hill (1968-1973). The programme covered a London match, followed by highlights of two selected matches from the different ITV regions. Brian Moore had to credit verbally every regional highlight with, for example, 'Pictures from ATV'.

Punch up!

The 1969 FA Cup Final was between Manchester City and Leicester City. The battle on the pitch was nothing compared to what was happening off it, between the BBC and ITV OB staff and technicians. This was LWT's first Cup Final and as the new kid on the block it wanted to prove itself against the established BBC TV sports department.

For ITV, the FA Cup Final was an opportunity to hold an audience for a whole afternoon. although by the mid 1970s the programme start had become earlier and earlier, ending up with a start time of 11.00am. This required additional content, particularly relating to the two opposing teams.

The first opportunity to see the teams officially was when they walked onto the Wembley turf. A furious row ensued between ITV and the BBC as to who would be first to interview the

players. Brian Moore famously recalled that “Fists began to fly” as one of the ITV floor managers had a tooth knocked out and both broadcast teams went away badly bruised. All this was played out in front of the guest of honour Princess Anne. The Football Association was livid, calling both broadcasters into a meeting at its Lancaster Gate headquarters.



LWT early portable colour cameras on the pitch at Wembley, going for that important close-up interview.

Photo: Dave Currie.

After this, the two broadcasters grudgingly worked side by side and TV coverage arrangements were discussed before each Cup Final. This included access to players and cameras on the pitch, all closely monitored by the Football Association. Both broadcast The Cup Final simultaneously until 1989.

Leading the way in TV sport

LWT's competitive streak in its early days helped push innovation in football coverage. ITV had already been the first to successfully use slow-motion replays, but further breakthroughs were on the way.

ITV's sports director and producer Bob Gardam placed a camera behind the goal, for the first time capturing the unique footage that this camera angle afforded. But his most important breakthrough came when he received permission from Wembley to dig a hole just outside the pitch by-line. A camera could be placed in this on a normal tripod, positioned at a lower level for more interesting action shots. It became known as the 'Gardam Pit'. The BBC was not pleased.

ITV was also the first broadcaster to put a live TV camera on a Cup Final team coach making its way to Wembley. After much persuasion, Bob Stokoe, manager of Sunderland, allowed ITV cameras on the team coach for the entire journey from the team hotel to Wembley for its 1973 Cup Final against Leeds United.



Bob Gardam with a cameraman in the 'Gardam Pit' at Wembley. The camera is an IVC 7000s which replaced an EMI 2001 that was originally in the pit.
Photo: The estate of Bob Gardam

Another ITV innovation in 1970 was the introduction of a new-fangled computer that would predict the result for the Leeds v Chelsea Cup Final every 15 minutes as the game progressed. Rumours abound about how much 'computing' was actually involved; perhaps there was rather more 'typing'.



A young Fred Dinenage in the *World of Sport* studio at Wembley, trying to understand the results that the computer has just produced. An *ITV Sport* branded EMI 2001 tries to focus on the teleprinter, that's meant to be printing out the eagerly anticipated results.
Photo: ITV Studios

Working together

ITV companies competed for advertisement revenue and audience ratings, particularly LWT and Thames as the only two companies to share the same geographic region, but co-operation in OBs was more convivial.

The management of OB resources on a network basis related mainly to sport but also occasionally to light entertainment and to royal and state occasions. Financial arrangements were on a *quid pro quo* basis.

John Bromley, controller of ITV Sport, was a key co-ordinator. Although he was officially employed by LWT, his remit was across the entire network. For *World of Sport* on Saturday afternoons, more than five OB units could be working at any one time, covering horse racing, football, wrestling, motor racing and, less frequently, athletics, tennis and cricket.

As a result, OB Units from ATV, Yorkshire, Granada and LWT would be in regular operation (ATV and Yorkshire had two OB scanners each but Granada and LWT only had one until the mid 1970s). Other ITV companies could be called on as well, in particular Southern, HTV, Tyne Tees, Anglia and STV which had one scanner each.

Thames TV had the largest OB fleet in ITV but, since it was a weekday-only company, it mainly used its OBs to cover royal and state occasions, as well as light entertainment specials e.g. *Miss World* and factual programming e.g. *Wish You Were Here* and *Drive In*. They only assisted with live networked sport if the event straddled weekdays and a weekend. Examples include the Derby or occasions when the FA Cup Final had a weekday replay. In that case, Thames TV OBs would cover the replay even though LWT's OBs had covered the previous Saturday's match.

This demarcation even extended to studios. For example, if *World of Sport* was on a Bank Holiday Monday, the presentation would switch from the Wembley / South Bank studios to Thames TV's Euston Road studios (with 'Dickie' still presenting, even though he was an LWT employee).



LWT's old Unit 1 scanner at Newmarket Racecourse in 1973 for *World of Sport*'s 'ITV Seven', with links provided by ATV (the equipment on test in the foreground is a Peto Scott Monitor).
Photo: Dave Currie.



An array of OB vehicles assembled for the Epsom Derby for ITV Sport in the 1980s. LWT and Thames OB vehicles intermingle near the finishing post. Many tender vehicles carry the vast lengths of camera and sound cables required to cover the mile and a half course.

Photo: Martin Hawkins.



Live coverage of *World of Sport*'s 'ITV Seven' at Newmarket Races in 1974; LWT links vehicle (ARD144K) supporting Thames TV's OB Unit 1 with its Bedford TK tender behind.

Photo: Pete Mason.

Drama on location

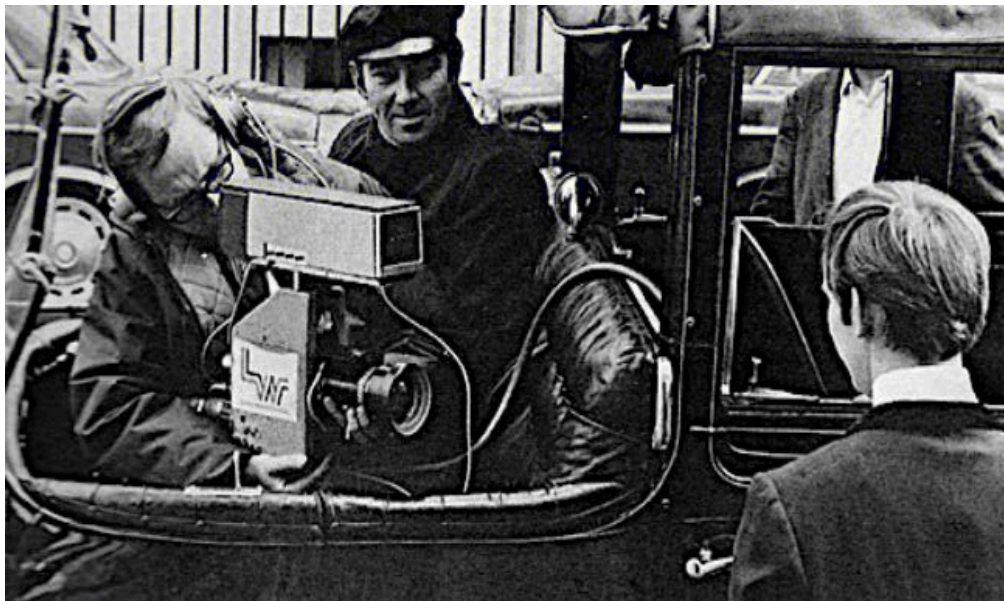
LWT's first colour drama recorded on VT on location was the critically acclaimed series *Manhunt*, recorded in the summer of 1969 and aired on ITV in 1970. Internal and external scenes were all recorded on VT, requiring a colour OB unit for location shooting. As a result, OB Unit 1 was drafted in. The portable LDK 13 cameras we're not yet available, so the only colour cameras available were the rather large EMI 2001s which were not exactly 'portable' for drama location shooting.



Rex Firkin, LWT's head of drama, views a shot from a brand-new EMI 2001 on location for *Manhunt* in Burnham Beeches, Bucks in 1969.

Photo: Ian Stanley

The next major drama serial for LWT was the Emmy award winning *Upstairs Downstairs*, which launched in 1971 and ran for five series. By 1973, more lightweight portable colour cameras were available, notably the Philips LDK 13. These allowed more flexibility when recording exterior scenes. Use of the EMI 2001s was now confined to the studio for drama.



A brand-new Philips LDK 13 portable colour camera on a location shoot for *Upstairs Downstairs* in 1973 at 65 Eaton Place, London (165 Eaton Place in the series).

Photo: www.updown.org.uk



Upstairs Downstairs series 2 being recorded in Studio 2 at the South Bank Studios using EMI 2001 cameras in 1973. Gordon Jackson plays Mr Hudson; a few years later he starred as George Cowley in *The Professionals*.

Photo: www.updown.org.uk

Other notable drama productions in the 1970s included the award nominated *Love for Lydia*. The LWT drama department took on the difficult adaptation into a 13-part serial of this H E Bates short novel about a jazz-age flapper and the men who loved her. The author had approved a television treatment before his death in 1974, and his son Richard, a freelance writer and producer, who regarded it as his father's best work, had spent seven years expanding it. He also produced the first three episodes for LWT. The series, shot entirely on VT, was broadcast on the ITV Network in 1977 and became a critical hit.

Weekend drama remained popular. LWT's contribution continued successfully during the 1970s and 80s, with notable productions including *Within these Walls*, *Lillie*, *Enemy at the Door*, *Thomas and Sarah*, *Bouquet of Barbed Wire*, *The Charmer* and *The Gentle Touch*.

There were also filmed dramas shot on location using 16mm film to give a characteristic gritty look. This technique was pioneered by Euston Films for shows such as *The Sweeney*. Other series included the long-running *The Professionals*, *Dempsey and Makepeace* and *London's Burning*.



A rare occasion where Thames TV's Unit 1 assisted in an LWT drama production, *Love for Lydia*, in 1976. It acted as a mobile VT truck alongside LWT's Unit 2, providing pictures from its two LDK 13s parked down a side road in Horsted Keynes, Sussex.
Photos: Dave Baldwin.

Exclusive and live

World of Sport, which LWT's managing director Brian Tesler had invented 20 years before at ABC TV, was laid to rest in 1985. The older down-market audience profile was not what the new-look ITV Network required. Also, by this time horse racing, the main live component of *World of Sport*, had moved to Channel 4, ending the popular betting favourite the 'ITV Seven'.

John Birt, LWT's director of programmes, wanted sport that was live and exclusive, rather than recorded and shared with other broadcasters. Although partly driven by demand from advertisers, this was mainly a response to the exclusive sports programming on the then fledgling satellite channels.

Athletics and football became the focus of LWT's sports programming. In 1985, the broadcaster recognised the increasing popularity of running and athletics and bid successfully against the BBC for the contract to cover British athletics. The contract was for

three years. During this time LWT, on behalf of ITV Sport, covered the AAA Championships, the Westminster Mile and the World Cross Country Championships.



LWT's new Units 1 and 2 providing live coverage of an athletics meeting at Harringay in 1983 with support from TVS and Central TV OB units.
Photo: Steve Daish.

Exclusive live football was much harder to secure than athletics. There were arguments between LWT and the ITV Network. Shortage of OB capacity was no longer a problem for LWT as, by the mid 1980s, its OB fleet had grown to be one of the largest in ITV. This time, the issue was the cost of broadcast rights!

By the mid 1980s, both the BBC and LWT had realised that the popularity of recorded football was waning. They therefore wanted to restore the excitement by televising live games. After much wrangling, LWT secured non-exclusive live contract rights from the Football League. The first live match under the new banner *The Big Match Live* was broadcast in September 1983 with Tottenham v Notts Forest. It was apparently not the most thrilling of matches (Tottenham won 2-1) but no matter - it was live!

In fact, ITV (ABC TV) had also broadcast the first ever televised football match on a Saturday evening in 1960 under the banner *The Big Game* (four years before *Match of the Day*) when Blackpool played Bolton Wanderers at Bloomfield Road. The match kicked off at 6:50 pm, but the actual broadcast didn't start until 7:30 pm to allow fans who had attended the 3.00 pm kick-off match earlier in the day, to arrive home to view the game.

As live football coverage progressed in the 1980s LWT's new managing director, Greg Dyke, wanted it shot in a new way with lots of low-angle and close-up shots, using a more multi camera approach. This required multiple cameras and worked fine if the match was in London and an LWT crew was providing OB facilities. In the regions, where OB facilities were by one of the ITV franchise contractors, less control could be exerted over the presentation and direction of the live programme.

This conflict was captured in the two hour television documentary *One Day in the Life of Television*. This behind-the-scenes look at the production, reception and marketing of British TV used multiple film crews to record real-life programming decisions across the BBC and ITV. The film was made by Yorkshire Television.

In one scene, Greg Dyke was talking to John Bromley, LWT's controller of sport after a live Manchester Derby from Old Trafford. Dyke complained that all the camera angles were wrong and that the OB crew did not adhere to the new way of presenting live football. Bromley replied that it was Granada's OB crew's fault: "I told them what we wanted, but they never listened".

Ironically, despite his complaints about the company, John Bromley chose Granada's Elton Welsby to present ITV's new live football coverage under the banner *The Match*. He must have thought Granada's presentation abilities were better than its pictures.

ITV's football coverage continued to expand through the 1980s, particularly after ITV won exclusive Football League rights in 1988, paying £44 million in what the press dubbed 'Snatch of the Day'. Until then ITV and the BBC had shared the rights, and ITV's desire for exclusivity had greatly inflated the price. At this point, the broadcaster renamed *The Big Match* to simply *The Match*.

The issue highlighted in the documentary, and several other similar instances, led to the decision to use the same OB crew for all live matches, regardless of ITV region. With the acquisition of exclusive rights, it was time to outsource OB production of *The Match* to achieve better technical and presentation consistency.

ITV Sport prepared a tender document for the provision of live coverage of *The Match*. This included 21 Football League matches to be broadcast live on ITV on a Sunday afternoon. It sent the tender to OB companies thought capable of providing the required coverage. This included VTR, slow motion, pitch-side cameras and three interview cameras in a purpose-built studio in the stadium gantry.

Thames Television won the tender and broadcast its first live match on October 29th 1989 where Liverpool won 2-1 against Tottenham at Anfield. Its OB team then spent the next three years travelling around the country.

For Thames Television the timing of the tender document had been a good one. Although the OB market had been more or less de-regulated, with open market tendering, in 1989 the fledgling independent OB sector still lacked the full capability needed to win the bid. Thames Television still had the largest OB fleet in the UK outside the BBC. Its willingness to reconfigure some of its OB trucks at great expense to meet the requirements of the tender played a key part in the successful bid.



A Thames Television Philips LDK 5 at Anfield for the first live *The Match*; end credits for the first *The Match*.

Photos: via The Association of Retired Thames Staff.

In 1992, after three years, ITV lost the rights to the newly formed Premier League to British Sky Broadcasting and the BBC.

Goodbye to OBs

By the early 1990s, the television industry consisted increasingly of independent production companies, fuelled in the beginning by the launch of Channel 4 as a 'publisher broadcaster' with no studio or OB facilities of its own. Then in 1992 Carlton TV won the London weekday ITV franchise as a 'publisher broadcaster', displacing Thames TV. LWT saw this as an opportunity to move into facilities hire, marketing its South Bank studios as an independent TV production facility, subsequently renamed The London Studios.

Competition was greater for OBs. Thames TV had a large fleet, which subsequently included Anglia TV's OB fleet. This was now available for hire under the Teddington Mobiles banner. Carlton, which already had a small OB fleet, soon took over Central TV with its large OB fleet, merging the two fleets to form O21 Mobiles. Government rules also favoured the independent sector, requiring all major sporting events to be put out to tender. As a result, LWT decided to sell its OB fleet to Arena Mobiles.

Arena Mobiles was a new OB operation started in 1989 by Richard Yeowart. It was originally based near Gatwick, Sussex and is now at Redhill in Surrey. Arena bought some of LWT's OB fleet, mainly the Unit 1 Scanner and other support vehicles. It had a semi-formal arrangement that LWT would use Arena for its drama and sport OB requirements.

And finally...



LWT's Derby entry.
Photo: Martin Hawkins.

LWT decided to enter a racehorse into the Derby itself – by the look of it, on quite a restricted budget! Although, it could still afford to paint a white arrow on the side of the vehicle, to show the horse where to get in and out. In reality this was an item of LWT OB equipment that carried auxiliary equipment, mainly additional camera cables, for the old Unit 2 OB Vehicle.

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Restoring TV's past for the future