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Neutrik | opticalCON® MTP®24 passes stress test on the Tour de Suisse

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The cyclists on the Tour de Suisse pick up the pace. More and more people are gathering on the side of the road. The participants seem tense. They go faster and faster. Soon there are just a few meters to go before the finish line. Now is not the time to show any weakness. Find whatever strength is left. The spectators cheer. Nerves are on edge. Just a few centimeters separate the cyclists. Who will emerge victorious? Cut. The winner throws his hands in the air. The camera records the competitors' joy and relief. From the front. From behind. From different perspectives. In slow motion. The combined force of the emotions reaches millions of viewers at home in front of their TV screens. This is all made possible by tpc switzerland ag – the leading broadcast service provider in Switzerland – equipped with the latest Neutrik technology.



"The opticalCON® fiber optic connector system was subjected to an extreme stress test during the Tour de Suisse", says Martin Sturzenegger, the man responsible for technology in tpc's broadcasting van. The broadcasting service provider is a subsidiary of SRG SSR. tpc stands for professional production, provided through long-standing know-how and innovative technologies. Sturzenegger is supporting the complex outside production for the ninth time and is impressed by the robustness of the optic connector system. Because what viewers in front of their screens do not see is the work that goes into the professional images behind the scenes. Unlike in a studio, where cables are carefully laid, tied, packed and tidied away in air conditioned areas, outside production involves extreme conditions.



Challenge: Broadcast



Over the course of nine days, the cyclists wind their way across the whole of Switzerland, cross two national borders, climb mountains up to 2,400 meters and test their strength in beautiful valleys. Whether in glorious sunshine and temperatures well above 30 degrees, in driving rain or in snowy conditions: The team and the technology always have to work. Without a break, every single day. This demands tremendous mobility and flexibility, not just from the team, but from the technology as well. Martin Sturzenegger appreciates the many years of cooperation with Neutrik and the high quality of the plug connections: "You have to trust the connections, then you can trust that the technology works." For Frank Studer, product manager and responsible for fiber optic systems at Neutrik, this is very encouraging. "Our customers' trust is particularly important to us. Neutriks opticalCON® offers a standard that you can rely on."

To ensure technical flexibility, Martin Sturzenegger came up with a trick for the Tour de Suisse. He found a strategically good point and placed a hub there, so that he could transmit the signals and save cable. Sturzenegger wasn't always sure that the plan would really work. Nevertheless, after a few test runs he decided to use the opticalCON® MTP®24 as the single cable between the broadcasting van and the assembly point. "For me, that was the most important cable in the production of the Tour de Suisse, because we only had this one cable from the hub to the broadcasting van."



Organized chaos as usual

For the fiber optic specialists' team, a cycling broadcast means maximum possible effort. He started planning three months before the start of the fourth largest cycle race in the world. He went through the individual stage ends, checked the local conditions, assessed the situation and created the vehicle plan. He is always open to new technology and is keen on to try them out for himself first. Two days before the start, he was confident and in good spirits ready for the race.

Seven production vehicles started the Tour de Suisse and had to be taken to a new stage end every day for nine days long, brought into full working order and then dismantled again. In the interim period, they produced TV signals for license holders around the world as well as Swiss television. Every day around 4.5 kilometers of cable was unrolled. In Sölden, two cameras connected to each other with seven kilometres of cable even provided live images from inside a tunnel.

Live broadcasting starts just before 4 p.m. and continues for two to three hours. This means that two hours after the racers cross the finish line, the entire team including its equipment must be ready to leave. His team always has to function, every minute counts. The conditions on site reflect this. The broadcasting vans are lined up at the finish line. Cables run from all of the broadcasting vans, with no regard for the fragile technology, always looking for the quickest route. Only the architects of these constructions know what is going on. Individual cables join together in junction boxes, others get lost along the race route against a blank backdrop. Grass, podium, asphalt or gravel – if that is the shortest route, that is where the cable will go. If there is a puddle or the cable is in the sun, that doesn't matter. The temperature and the weather do not get in the way here, they are ignored.

Repacking all the technical equipment means real stress for the sensitive system: Cables are coiled by using force, across fields, through mud, dust and rubble without regard to any obstacles. Sturzenegger trusts that connectors are not left behind and are not damaged. The team has no time for repairs. This is center stage for one of the most professional broadcast productions in Switzerland. And this is completely normal, it is not an exception.



Reaching the finish line with quality in mind

“The proven opticalCON® fiber optic connector systems from Neutrik are designed to support our customers in such extreme conditions”, says Frank Studer. The opticalCON® MTP® cable connector is characterized by the robust metal casing and heavy-duty strain relief. The innovative spherical dust cover protects the fiber optics from dirt and minimizes maintenance costs. These characteristics are particularly important for use outside. “Broadcast is extreme and requires resistant and reliable solutions”, says Sturzenegger. Frank Studer gladly accepts this challenge: “We work closely together with our customers and try to offer solutions to prevent problems.”

The connectors between the largest broadcasting vans use opticalCON® MTP®12. Safety was the top priority: In order to stay flexible in case of a fault, the failure risk was divided between two MTP®12 systems. One transferred the mobile signal from the aircraft, helicopter and four motorcycles, the other transferred the signals of all cameras from the finishing area. Neutrik is familiar with the challenges of the interaction between audio and video technology and knows what is important for a production like the Tour de Suisse. “opticalCON® fiber optic connector systems give our customers maximum flexibility. This allows risks to be precisely distributed as necessary.”

Both the fact that the opticalCON® MTP® 24 worked perfectly across the entire Tour de Suisse and did not suffer any damage, as well as the fact that since the opticalCON® MTP® 24 has been used in tough broadcasting, no cleaning has been necessary, are reasons for Martin Sturzenegger to smile. Robust and less fragile cables mean less work and more time for him – but also lower maintenance expenses and manageable costs. The precise fit of the connectors allows easy use of the opticalCON® fiber optic connector system: “The fact that the push-pull connector modules fit perfectly is one of our core competences.”

The Tour de Suisse 2017 is now over for Martin Sturzenegger. Once again, he has successfully met all of the challenges over the course of the nine days. There was no complete failure, his team was always able to provide an excellent image selection and everything went according to plan for the tpc experts. He will be involved with the Tour de Suisse in 2018 again. Getting his equipment ready. Connecting the broadcasting van. Capturing the combined force of the emotions. And amazing millions of people watching.



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Company Info:

The Neutrik Group, headquartered in Schaan/Liechtenstein, is the leading supplier of professional entertainment connector products like audio, video, fiber optic and industrial connectors, interconnect systems and digital wireless solutions. Neutrik manufactures a wide array of XLR connectors and receptacles, jacks and plugs, fiber optic connector systems, and accessories for a broad range of customers ranging from rock bands to lighting design and industrial equipment to broadcast solutions.

The Neutrik Group consists of strategically placed subsidiaries in the United States of America, Great Britain, France, Japan, China, Hong Kong, India and Germany. A network of exclusive distributors in more than 80 countries worldwide provides global sales, technical support and distribution.

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