



# AUTOMAGIC FOR THE PEOPLE

**Top directors, big stars - oh, and cars. BMW launches a new season of short films that aren't really adverts**

**F**ans of BMW's innovative online-only series of short films *The Hire* will lap up the arrival of a new batch rolling onto the [bmwfilms.com](http://bmwfilms.com) website. For the uninitiated, last year the German automakers blurred the advertising/film lines even further than James 'Product Placement' Bond with their internet-based flicks of a mysterious unnamed driver (played by Clive Owen) putting a succession of sleek cars through chases, attacks, explosions and other various road rage-inducing incidents.

As a marketing concept it was worth test-driving, but what sent BMW cruising past its competition was the talent brought in to kick start the whole project. Assembling the cream of world cinema, Season 1 of *The Hire* was executive produced by David Fincher with the individual films directed by Ang Lee, John Frankenheimer, Guy Ritchie, Hong Kong auteur Wong Kar Wai and *Amores Perros*' Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu. What's more, each director was given stacks of cash and complete

creative control, something that even Hollywood heavyweights this big aren't regularly guaranteed.

Short films on the Web are nothing new, but BMW's twist was effectively to make its site an online DVD. Stuffed full of trailers, behind-the-scenes footage, stunt features, director's commentaries, a cryptic

'subplot' that links the films together and, of course, info on the cars, the ad men were drooling over a reported 13 million-plus viewings registered. Oh, and making some kickass short films. "We're entertainment that just happens to have a BMW in the script," said Jim McDowell, vice president of marketing for BMW North America. Right, and the script where Owen's Z4 Roadster stalls, leaving him outrun by the Audi-driving bad guys, is in the pipeline.

Forget sales figures though - what about the films? Season 3's offerings were a mixed bag, ranging from Inarritu's explosive *Powder Keg* and Ang Lee's playful *Chaser* - with cheeky

nods to his upcoming *Hulk* movie - to Ritchie's embarrassing *Star*, where his missus Madonna proves once again that on-screen at least, she isn't one. With Ridley and Tony Scott taking over executive producer duties, Season 2's films are more unapologetically Hollywood. Much to our surprise (and in no way hoping for a brand-new Series 7 turning up outside the office), they're even better.

Current flavour-of-the-month after *Narc*, Joe Carnahan's *Ticker* literally delivers heart-pounding drama, with Don Cheadle joining Owen in the passenger seat, along with unbilled cameos from Robert Patrick and Ray Liotta. John Woo's race-against-time *Hostage* is far better than most of his American full-length movies. Amazingly, best of all is Tony Scott's *Beaf The Devil*, a hilariously revved-up, whacked-out version of the Faust myth with Owen and Godfather of Soul James Brown racing Gary Oldman's 'Nosferatu' in drag down the Vegas strip, rounded off with a cracking punchline from Marilyn Manson.

Making decent commercial films (the car's the least memorable thing about Scott's film) available to all as opposed

to filming effective commercials for products few can afford seems to be the key. If BMW and the hired talent can keep this level of quality control, then roll on *Series*, sorry, *Season 3*.

To see *The Hire* films go to [www.bmwfilms.com](http://www.bmwfilms.com)

Leigh Singer

## Sequels Nobody Want Dept

Mumble... mutter... err... umm... Adrian?



**#3** As if having Rocky portrayed as a mumbling, brain-damaged lunk in *Rocky V* (okay, more mumbling and brain-damaged than usual) wasn't enough, Sylvester Stallone has decided that what the world needs more than peace, love and understanding is *Rocky VI*. Yes, really. The 50-year-old Balboa will now be a trainer to a young boxer, just like Burgess 'The Penguin' Meredith was in the first film. Or alternatively, you could just watch the first film again and save everyone the bother.