

A nice set of wheels

The **hillrigs** tracking system reviewed

GTC member **Mari Yamamura** tests out the Kliktrak/Kombidolly portable tracking system from the innovative father–son team at Hillrigs. Through responding attentively to feedback from users and approaching the design process with a fresh engineering perspective, it seems the duo have come up with a very impressive lightweight tracking solution at an affordable price.

For a small to medium production, a lightweight dolly and track system is often part of the essential camera kit. I have used brands such as the Wally Dolly, Indie-Dolly, Focus Dolly and Keywest Magic Dolly and they all have their different strengths and weaknesses. Now there is an interesting addition to the market, which features innovative design, great attention to detail and will potentially save time on set.

I first came across the Kliktrak and Kombidolly from Hillrigs at an early demonstration in Bristol, where the company is based. They had just finished their trial run in the field, with various camera people and rental houses such as Visual Impact trying out the prototypes, and had come up with their first production model. Jim and Dave from Hillrigs had been painstakingly listening to feedback from the users over a period of a few years in order to improve and refine the products.

One of the factors that makes these products unique is that they have been created by hydraulic engineer Dave Hill, who had no background in the film or TV industry. Working alongside his son and daughter-in-law, who also aren't full-time camera operators but had identified the need for such a piece of affordable kit, engineer Dave came to the project with a totally fresh approach to the design and problem-solving for the products.

An enthusiastic reception

When Dave and Jim achieved their official product launch at IBC 2014, Kliktrak and Kombidolly quickly caught the attention of some high-profile professionals including DoP Rodney Charters ASC, who has given the products his endorsement. Meanwhile the system was also catching the eye of the industry press, picking up the Best Camera Motion Device award from 'News Shooter'. The first stock sold out straight away.

Having seen the first production model last year and liked a lot of the features, I have since then been recommending other people to take a look at the system. So, with this article in prospect, I was excited to be able to try out the system myself in a real working environment.

A shoot for a low-budget short proved to be the perfect opportunity.

Kliktrak/Kombidolly features

The Kliktrak and Kombidolly is a very portable dolly system and yet it is durable enough to take the weight of a high-end digital cinema camera. I was using the new Panasonic VariCam 35 and it coped admirably.

The complete kit comes in two EVA foam-lined aluminium flight cases, ideal if you are flying with it. The Kombidolly weighs in at 12kg, while the slightly heavier Kliktrak is 19kg; its case is therefore equipped with wheels.

The assembly of Kliktrak is very quick and simple. You just click the tubes together secured with a locating pin, which goes



underside onto the sleepers. The rails are held in place on the sleepers by a spring-operated indexing lock and can be released in an instant when you want to take them apart again.

Attention to detail

The inherent issue with any tracks can be the slight bump when travelling over the joints. I was very impressed by the way Dave has overcome this problem and found the track to be exceptionally smooth, not feeling any jolts at all throughout the shoot. Furthermore, nothing is screwed together, eliminating the risk of cross-threading joints. The Hillrigs team have also gone to great lengths with detail such as the type of aluminium coating making it lovely to handle and again enhancing the smooth tracking.

Each rail is 60cm in length and six are supplied in the standard kit, making 3.2m (10ft) in total. You can buy or hire more tracks to make it as long as you need. Because everything is clicked in, once the whole track is built, up to a 6-metre length can be easily moved by one person, which was very handy when changing positions on set.

However, the feature I love most about these tracks is the ability to use them on uneven surfaces. In my opinion, it is this that really sets this system apart from other portable dolly systems. The tracks are industry-standard 62cm and each sleeper is height-adjustable. Levelling feet on the bottom give a fair amount of adjustment and there are built-in spirit levels on the top of each end of the sleepers, so you don't need to carry a separate spirit level. No tools are required to use Kliktrak and Kombidolly. All you need is your hands.

If the adjustable levelling feet are not enough, as an additional nice touch, the kit comes with 12 silicone rubber wedges. These are waterproof so you can just wash or wipe them dry if they get muddy or wet.

The track wheels that sit on the rails are also unique to this product. Kombidolly track wheels are designed to run on vertical wheel bearings as opposed to the 45-degree skate wheels seen on some other dollies. Dave says this allows the bearing to last much longer and reduces the wheel noise dramatically. In fact, it was totally silent when we were doing tracking shots. Specially developed silicone rubber tyres are fitted to each wheel to achieve the optimum glide – but with just a hint of resistance. If anything, perhaps I felt there was a little too much resistance in some cases, particularly on very slow tracking shots when I found it easier for somebody else to track for me using the telescopic handle, which also comes in the kit.

After feedback from customers, the latest telescopic handle now has a spherical mounting lock so it can either be locked in a fixed position or left free-running for more flexible operation. I preferred this flexible operation mode; it worked very well for me. Apparently it counters any unwanted lever effect that might be exerted on the bowl.

A versatile set-up

Another nifty feature is that Kombidolly comes with a lo-bowl adapter, which simply slots into the hole in the middle of the spreader. To change from normal height to low mode is instant – just transfer the head from a tripod to a lo-bowl adapter and remove the tripod from the spreader.

You can choose the desired position by selecting which hole the location pin goes in. Furthermore, if you remove the



Above: Kombidolly with tripod on the Kliktrak rails
Below: Kombidolly using studio wheels with camera head mounted on lo-bowl adapter



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track wheels from the Kombidolly and put the supplied studio wheels on instead, you can use it as a rolling spider on a studio floor.

The one downside to the lo-bowl adapter is that it only takes 75mm and 100mm bowls, so you won't be able to put a very heavy rig on it. On this shoot, I had my camera on an O'Connor 2060 with 150mm bowl, tall legs and short legs in normal studio mode, and an additional Sachtler18 to be used on the Kliktrak and Kombidolly. I sometimes used the Kombidolly in low mode with studio feet on it, like a hi-hat, and this worked a treat. The Kombidolly is essentially designed for a video

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that you don't even notice the joints in use is very impressive. I think these are probably the most well thought-out products of their type.

Dave originally embarked on designing a portable dolly system for his daughter-in-law, who was filming luxury property videos on her own in the countryside in Europe, so his aim was to come up with something that was easy for her to carry and operate on her own; the two manageable cases fit easily into a normal car.

tripod. I could have used the cine-style legs instead of the Sachtler18 and it would have withstood the weight, but the tripod feet were too large to be able to use the rubber straps to secure them in place. Although it wasn't available at the time, the standard kit now includes a latched pull-down cord as an alternative to the rubber straps; you simply attach the pull-down cord to the central housing to secure the tripod. This is another response by Hillrigs to requests from customers.

Conclusions

In summary, I found Kliktrak and Kombidolly by far the easiest, quickest and smoothest portable dolly system I have used. The fact



Top: Custom wheel design reduces noise and adds tracking resistance

Bottom: Height adjustable rails sitting on custom Hillrigs wedges

The kit includes:

KLIKTRAK

3.2m Standard Gauge Track System

- 6 x sleepers
- 10 x 600mm track sections
- 2 x 270mm track sections
- 4 x buffers
- 12 x wedges
- 1 x aluminium flight case with on-board wheels

KOMBIDOLLY

Tri-leg Dolly System

- 1 x centre block
- 3 x legs and snap-on wheel mounts
- 3 x track wheels
- 3 x studio wheels
- 1 x telescopic handle
- 1 x lo-bowl connector
- 1 x handle mounting
- 1 x latched pull-down cord
- 1 x aluminium flight case

Prices:

KLIKTRAK	£1050.00 + VAT
KOMBIDOLLY	£1150.00 + VAT



Hillrigs is a company that is always keen to listen to their customers so that they can carry on improving and evolving their products to meet demand. Since the initial conception in 2010, I think this is how they have managed to create such accomplished products in a relatively short period of time as a small family business. I hope some readers of this article will have a chance to experience these fantastic new products.

P.S. I have heard a rumour that they are now developing curved tracks!

Fact File

GTC member **Mari Yamamura** has started lighting and operating after 14 years as a focus puller in dramas and commercials. Her recent work includes, Liz Crow *Figures*, *Tractor Ted* and music videos for Sophie Ellis-Bextor's latest album 'Wanderlust'.

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