

LAFOURMI Postproduction  
GmbH

(www.lafourmi.de)

Hamburg, Germany

BMW 7 Series "Milestones"

Autodesk® Flint® software

Autodesk® Softimage® software

When we decided to open our own place, we selected Flint as our main frontend system. It was an excellent choice for our effect and compositing needs.

—Sascha Schmidt  
Owner, VFX Supervisor  
LAFOURMI Postproduction  
GmbH

# TIME WILL TELL

## LAFOURMI Uses Autodesk Flint and Autodesk Softimage to Help BMW Travel Through Time for New "Milestones" Campaign.



Image courtesy of LAFOURMI Postproduction GmbH.

### Summary

They say time will tell. The question then becomes: what do you want time to say? Since its founding in 1916, Bayerische Motoren Werke – better known to the world as BMW – has been building some of the world's most elegant high-performance automobiles. It should come as no surprise, then, that the Bavarian automaker wanted only the best working on "Milestones," an epic 45 second spot chronicling the eras, fashions, and cultures that have influenced -- and been influenced by -- BMW motor cars.

The opening shot of "Milestones" holds enough beauty and artistic effort for any five spots you're likely to see, even though the opening shot is just one of the spot's seven spectacular views of seven incredible cars. A liveried chauffeur opens the rear passenger door of 1950's era BMW, a shimmering silver centerpiece. An elegant Eva Gardner-like woman steps from the car, clearly on her way to boarding the Queen Mary passenger ship that dominates the background, its smoke stack billowing into the brilliant blue sky.

As the camera pans to the right, the Queen Mary is replaced by a jumbo jet indicative of the 1970's. While two brightly dressed "stewardesses" walk towards the plane, a macho-looking pilot approaches his BMW, conveniently parked on the runway. The camera continues to pan as the BMW assumes psychedelic colors and designs and is transported from the runway to a 1980's style loft,

then to a 1990-style testing lab, then to what looks like the peak of a Himalayan mountain. The screen fades to black before revealing an example of the BMW 7 series driving majestically down a shoreline highway. The tagline says it all: "Driving the world ahead. Again."

Ad agency Interone and director Paul Street tapped LAFOURMI, a relatively new collective of veteran artists working out of Hamburg, Germany, to handle the formidable postproduction challenges on a spot that spans the golden years of the transportation age: from 1950's era passenger ships to 1970's jumbo jets to the brightly colored cars of the 1980's to the streamlined "clean energy" autos of contemporary times.

On the company website, LAFOURMI proudly proclaims itself as "Owned By Artists." Autodesk spoke with the company's two founding artists about forming a company; using Autodesk® Softimage® and Autodesk® Flint® software; and creating a spot of and for the ages.

### The Challenge

"The whole project started with LAFOURMI trying to create a 3D car for the mountain scene," says Florian Bruchhaeuser, founder and head of 3D at LAFOURMI. "The actual mountain range that the agency wanted is in China, and it was impractical to shoot there. As part of our pitch for the job, Schmidt used Google Maps™ mapping service as a reference

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# Autodesk Softimage offers new ways to be creative. You can really push the software beyond boundaries.



Image courtesy of LAFOURMI Postproduction GmbH.

to create a matte painting in Flint of the mountain-  
scape, and then Bruchhaeuser used Autodesk  
Softimage to create a stone plateau and a full 3D  
car. The client was pretty impressed that we were  
able to do that, and it was soon asking us to do more  
work for the spot.”

Even though VFX supervisor Sascha Schmidt,  
together with visual effects artist Florian  
Bruchhaeuser, had formed LAFOURMI a scant eight  
months earlier, the combined experience of the  
company’s principals made accepting the BMW job  
a certainty. Even with their significant expertise,  
however, an ambitious storyboard and tight timeline  
made the job a big challenge for the duo and the  
rest of the LAFOURMI team.

“Everything was motion control, so we knew from  
the beginning it would be challenging,” says  
Bruchhaeuser, who served as VFX supervisor on the  
job. “We had just three and a half months to create a  
truly epic spot about history, tradition, and the  
future of German automotive technology. That’s a  
pretty big task for any company. In the end, we had  
injust on every shot.”

Some shots, however, did prove to be more  
challenging than others.

“The Queen Mary shot alone had about 60 layers,”  
says Schmidt. “It was multiple bit depth, Open XR

stuff which needed to be converted on the fly in  
Flint. That spot alone had one of the biggest batch  
trees I’ve ever seen. The rendering also promised to  
be very demanding, so we needed tools that were  
not going to crash, no matter what.”

## The Solution

From the beginning, LAFOURMI decided to focus  
its technology arsenal on Autodesk software and  
solutions. Still a modest-sized post production  
house, the company selected Softimage and Flint  
for its inaugural systems.

“I’ve been working with these systems for years,  
particularly Autodesk Flame and Autodesk Inferno,”  
says Schmidt. “When we decided to open our own  
place, we selected Flint as our main frontend  
system. It was an excellent choice for our effect and  
compositing needs. On BMW ‘Milestones’, we had  
two operators running the machine twenty-four  
hours a day and seven days a week, and it performed  
really well.”

LAFOURMI also elected to use Autodesk Softimage  
for the BMW spot, Bruchhaeuser says. “Autodesk  
Softimage offers new ways to be creative. You can  
really push the software beyond boundaries.”

## The Result

The BMW project also pushed the LAFOURMI artists  
to their limits and beyond. Arriving in Los Angeles for  
the shoot, Bruchhaeuser discovered that LAFOURMI

would be responsible for the massive amounts of  
motion control data the spot would produce.

“I found myself in my hotel room, jetlagged and  
armed with a laptop,” he says. “In the end, we ended  
up creating the entire previsualization of the spot in  
Autodesk Softimage. It was the first time I’d ever  
used Python scripting in Softimage, but after a  
short period figuring it out, I was able to write an  
exporter and export all the motion control data.  
That was hugely important.”

The final shot of the latest and greatest BMW also  
presented significant challenges, according to Schmidt:

“The final shot actually had to be constructed out of  
two shots that didn’t initially work well together,”  
he explains. “There were a lot of missing frames, and  
we had to do a great deal of re-timing to combine  
them into a single, seamless scene. We used  
everything in Flint, from the TimeWarper to the  
stabilizing tools, and just about everything in between.  
We also discovered that we could use tools including  
SoftImport to extend our frame store capabilities.  
We were overjoyed to find so many ways to overcome  
challenges. We’re always able to get 250% out of our  
Autodesk software.”

There is simply no arguing with the final result that  
is BMW “Milestones.” Simply put, the spot’s  
pristine, precise vision promises to do even the  
iconic automaker proud.