I've been wanting to write about this since the first time I saw ITV's coverage of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, but boy has it been a busy few weeks! I'm at risk of missing out entirely if I don't get my head down and give it the ol' college try now, so as I patiently wait for a hospital consultant to perhaps *not call me* (God bless the NHS), here we go.

The World Cup is probably the biggest sporting coverage on any free to air network channel in the UK. We have a specific law in place which states that the competition MUST be shown in free to air TV, which would in theory be the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 or Channel 5. Channel 5 are seen as the 'Prince Harry' of UK's free TV, launching in such a way that half the country couldn't view it, and watched only for sensationalist documentaries or shows such as 'Can't Pay, We'll Take it Away!'. Channel 4 *does* have some sports coverage, most notably being the home for Formula 1 Hightlights, with the exception of the British Grand Prix which they show live, because it too needs to be shown on free TV by law. They also show the Paralympic Games during Olympic years.

BBC and ITV have historically been the TV stations which have secured rights to the World Cup. This is likely because they are the more 'trusted' TV stations in the UK, but also because they have more than one channel on free to air TV. BBC have BBC Two as a secondary Channel, with ITV normally using ITV4 as their 'overspill' sports channel; they used to show the Tour de France on here, as well as motorsport and other events. BBC Two is normally used for showing Athletics, Wimbledon coverage, and on occasion the Women's Super League when it can't be accommodated on BBC One.

Enough of a history lesson, let's move to the opening credits. I could have done a direct comparison between the BBC and ITV here, but there's a few reasons why I'm not doing so. First of all, it has to be remembered that the BBC is dependent on the License Fee, and is making cutbacks in every way imaginable. To contextualise this to non-Brits, the License Fee is chargable to *any household* where live TV (*from any channel)* is watched, or TV on Demand via BBC Iplayer. It funds almost all of the BBC's services, from TV to radio output, to BBC News, online content, the World Service and so on. It's not really increased in line with inflation, and it's always under attack of potentially being scrapped as unfit for purpose. There's been pretend vans that 'allegedly' can 'catch' people using TV who haven't got a license to do so, the terminology of what a TV is in terms of being able to pick up a reception has varied, and even this great advert for the License Fee didn't manage to change attitudes.

The BBC doesn't play commercials in the UK, and whilst there is an international arm, this

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is in itself very convoluted. So long story short, where the Beeb is it's known can save money, it will. The first part of this was hosting the World Cup primarily from their studios in Media City Salford, but also likely in the level of detail in creating the opening ident. Afterall, people are watching anyway… Right? I wouldn't call this a bad opening; there is a clear nostalgia link to Panini sticker albums and other collectables, but it's clearly done to a budget and one too many boring inter-departmental meetings. Here's the video for your entertainment.

The reason why I wanted to instead focus on the ITV opening is because frankly, it's simply amazing, and is something which could easily stand the test of time for decades to go. Online people have been making comparisons to greats such as the 1986 and 1990 World Cups, and in all honesty is a *MASSIVE* improvement over the last few world cups.

2022 ITV Opener – Qatar World Cup.

2018 ITV Opener – Russia World Cup.

2014 ITV Opener – Brazil World Cup.

It's at points hard to put into context why I feel that this opener is so good, so it's going to have to take a bit of step – by – step thinking, but the key phrase, to take something away from someone whom I used to work with in my Sim Racing commentary and production days is 'humanisation'.

Three Countries, One Tournament.

On paper, trying to get something that would work for three different countries, arguably with some difference in culture and natural geography should be on the complicated side. Off the bat, ITV manage to navigate this perfectly.

The backing track used 'Life is a Highway' was originally witten by Tom Cochrane. He's Canadian, but there was a cover version made by a band called Rascal Flatts, whom are from the USA. From Country heartland Nashville, Tennessee to be more specific. The latter version was used in the Disney Pixar Movie 'Cars', so for people just a few years younger

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than me (And I assume their parents), it evokes some kind of reminiscing memory. Not a million miles away from the constant playing of 'Three Lions', but without it being metaphorically shoved down our throats. It's worth noting that the single actually charted for the first time in June 2026, almost certainly in no small part due to this opening credits. In 2006 streaming wasn't included into music charts in the UK, and downloads had only just been added, hence why this likely never 'charted' earlier.

The way the opening credits are shot themselves evokes potentially more sentimental meaning. The company behind the piece said that rather than using your traditional 4K cameras that are used everywhere these days, they went old school, with the footage captured on 16mm film to give a truly authentic look, rather than relying on using video editing / AI to do the job later on (and we all know how this always ends up). In terms of removing the US only stereotype for the World Cup, there are plenty of scenic images of Mexico and (to a slightly lesser extent) Canada which works well in what must have been a logistical quagmire to try and work around.

What They Said.

To do a bit of plagiarism, and steal a set of quotes; John McKenna, producer & CEO, Noah Media Group told Broadcast Now: "It is always a privilege to be chosen to deliver the opening titles for ITV Sport's FIFA Men's World Cup coverage. For this tournament, we wanted to create something that felt different – less animation-led, more cinematic, and something that simply felt like summer. The idea of a road trip across North America, shot on 16mm film and woven together with the incredible World Cup archive, felt perfect. I'm hugely proud of what our team has delivered and hope the sequence, together with Rascal Flatts' iconic 'Life is a Highway', connects with viewers and helps capture the excitement of the tournament ahead."

Mackenzie-Smith added: "For any director, the opportunity to travel across North America creating a major title sequence is incredibly exciting. To be able to shoot it on amazing 60-year old 16mm film camera made it even more special, and gave the project a distinctive look and feel from the very beginning. We covered thousands of miles, filming cities, landscapes and landmarks across the continent. Once we saw the first processed footage, we felt we had something special. It was then about trying to get the very best of this into the one-minute sequence – not easy! DOP Andrew White, editor Hussein Hussan and the

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whole Noah team did a fantastic job.”

Honestly, this is one where I could go on and on and on, but there’s no point, as sometimes a picture tells a thousand words, and in this case, and opening sets the entire scene. So enjoy.

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