Cross Country is a formula murder mystery comedy cavalcade of cliches, incomprehensible murder scenes, all set in proper order from the moment the waddling black maid discovers her beautiful mistress—naked, dead, and bloody—on her penthouse bed until innocent boyfriend-suspect, eroticque Philadelphia ad-man Evan Bley, and blonde siren Lois Hayes (secretly the psychotic lesbian Killer) hurl themselves, bodies entwined, into the Grand Canyon. There it is in a nutshell.

And make no mistake, this is a nutshell movie, a tiddy package ribbon-bound in United Artists negative pick-up. Paul Lynch, has his APC/SNC crew working Parisian days inno on to 7:30 p.m. non-stop with a running buffet, averaging 14 or 15 story-boarded set-ups. Filmiline producer, Pieter Kroonenburg, is on set throughout to see that the numerous actors stand in the light and say exactly the words ordered from Bill Gray, who re-writes John Hunter's original scenes, sometimes mere hours before they're shot. Hours after each day's rushes are screened, editor Nick Rotundo works through the night assembling timing, pacing, establishing against holes in the story and dropping a timely clue here and there. All goes well.

Rene Verzier's veteran camera crew set up quickly, and the ease of lighting Kodak's new 250 a.s.a. stock (5293) allowsambitious night shooting with daytime efficiency and great production value. Verzier himself, operating with the new Sachtler head under the Panaflex, has never been finer. Though the casting lacks box-office punch (Richard Beymer, Mychele Boudiras and unit manager, Patridt Rousseau, doubling as Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Columbus, St. Louis and even Tucson, New Mexico. Production manager Mychele Boudiras and unit manager Carole Mondello have secured a degree of cooperation from city and provincial authorities that has allowed them to park vehicles and close streets, seemingly with abandon. With cameraman Verzier's preference for shooting with wide apertures and little depth of focus, the proliferation of French signs in the city has proved much more less a problem than imagined.

The franconghique technicians who crew English-language films in Montreal add wonderful zest to movie-set lingo with such expressions as "stand by, les gars," and "S'addresser on the plate a racing hours sharp!"

A reduced unit of key personnel and actors now move to Arizona to round out the filming with four days of "cascades dans le Grand Canyon."

Suzanne Lortie

Cross Country: Naked, bloody and dead

Claude Fournier eats his lunch alone. He's not the film director but the writer and director of Gabrielle Roy's novel The Tin Flute. Actually, he is directing two feature films simultaneously in both French and English, and a television series consisting of five one-hour episodes to be aired on both the French and English networks of the CBC, all on a budget of $3.45 million. Not only is Fournier the writer and director, he also does his own camera work. Something he has done in the past with his other features. He does not have time for long lunches.

Mireille D'Argy, who plays Florentine Lacasse in this tale of hard times and hope in the Dirty Thirties, rushes blary-eyed from her bed.

"Personne ne m'a reveille!"

"On a essaye," her brother replies.

"Cut, print," Fournier shouts. "Meme chose en anglais!"

Claude Fournier is working fast. He is ahead of his 20-week shooting schedule. This is normal for him but less so for the crew from The National Film Board. The NFB is co-producing The Tin Flute, supplying $1.1 million in financing facilities and crew. Bob Verrill, the executive producer of The Tin Flute is acting on the behalf of the English Section of the Film Board, says, "This is a rough and tumble experience for the NFB people, used to the serene and protected environment of the Board." The NFB crew is running with Fournier. "Our people were very impressed with "The Tin Flute,"" Verrill says. "But, they were impressed with Claude's skill. If he hadn't been up to it, the whole thing would have fallen apart."

Marilyn Lightstone, who plays the beleaguered mother, Rose-Anna Lacasse, has also taken out membership in Fournier's fun club. "Everybody comes at times that guy at the top," she says. "He makes everyone feel loved and important." Lightstone, although nervous at first, feels privileged to work in the French milieu. It is the first time in her professional career that she is reunited with her francophone contemporaries from the National Theatre School. She recently attended all classes except voice with the French students, one of whom, Michel Forget, plays her husband Azafris Lacasse. At that time, she felt the school was developing a style that was "Uniquely Canadian," much like this picture. The bilingual set gets a bit schizophrenic at times, but there's always room for one more. Referring to the actors playing the Lacasse family, "a whole family of schlappers," Lightstone brings a third influence to the culturally crowded set.

Even the man at the helm gets mixed feelings. Claude Fournier, who shoots the final scenes of the film on the set of his own Munro's Restaurant, is upset that his main actor, Rose-Anna Lacasse, is not the top of the list. But his film is more than a film. It is a film based on the reality of the French-Canadian experience.
Cameron’s, there was a conceptual disagreement between the French and English sides. Fournier and Raymond believe in scripting extensive stage directions, spelling out the setting, the costume and the emotional subtext almost verbatim from the novel. Cameron believes that providing this sort of detail is not a screenwriter’s job and that ultimately, the director must make those decisions. This division of labor at the scripting stage was a harbinger of things to come and Fournier finally polished both the English and French drafts.

“A Unique Event” is how the press release bills the simultaneous shooting in French and English. “For the first time in the history of Quebec cinema,” it goes on to say.

Marie-Jose Raymond admits, “simultaneous shooting requires a big intellectual rigor from both the director and the actors. But after the first week, they’ve all taken a liking to it.” All except ACTRA, who has filed a grievance against the National Film Board.

The problem is precisely, “The Unique Event”, the simultaneous shooting in original French and English versions. Raymond admits the film was difficult to cast. This is because she preferred most actors to be bilingual. “In the English version,” she says, “the actors speak English to attain perfect sync but will be recoated by another actor if they have too much of a French accent. Although all proper nouns will remain French to give it a Quebecois flavour, she does not plan to cover any French accents on the English version.” It’s difficult enough capturing the attention of an audience, why make life harder by exposing them to five hours of people who don’t seem to be understanding one another’s way.

Bob Verrall points out, “It will not be the same as Maurice Chevalier performing in an American movie.”

Given the premise that the original English sound track will only be used as a guide track, Cine St-Henri, the principal producer, contracted the majority of performers under Union des Artistes guidelines. UDA rates are lower than ACTRA rates as the union has not been successful in negotiating a new contract.

Judith Harvey, ACTRA branch representative in Montreal says, “Although Marie-Jose Raymond states she is making a French film with an English guide track, ACTRA has discovered that they are preserving copies of the English dialogue in the case where the actors are totally bilingual. These actors are being asked to work in two films without the benefit of a double contract and any additional remuneration they are entitled to.”

ACTRA tried to get together with UDA over this matter without success. ACTRA considers the NF however the primary producer? Guy Gauthier, chief of staff relations at the NFQ believes not. “The National Film Board is a co-producer, not the principal producer or the engager. ACTRA is vague about what obligations the co-producers have.”

Although Cine St-Henri, the engager, is not a signatory to the ACTRA/CAMPP CFTA/NFB Independent Production Agreement, the NFQ most certainly is. Despite the NFQ’s stated position as co-producer, ACTRA finds it to be in violation by not requiring the engagement of performers to The Tin Flute to be subject to that agreement.

"Any insinuation of some kind of subterfuge on the part of the NFQ is incorrect," says Bob Verrall. “The board was the last to come into the film and by that time the planning had been done and most of the budget secured. Initial meetings between ACTRA, UDA and Cine St-Henri had occurred with no apparent problems. Now the problems are very apparent.

The protest by ACTRA has gone past the grievance stage. A standing committee consisting of members of CAMPP, CFTA, NFB plus equal members of ACTRA will meet to decide the fate of the guide track issue. An unexpected benefit of the “unique event” is that ACTRA is now negotiating with UDA to deal with the future of double shooting.

The production of The Tin Flute is a testimony to the determination of those involved. For Claude Fournier and Marie-Jose Raymond, The Tin Flute marks a departure from the majority of their previous films. Some might term Deux femmes en or and Chien chaud exploitation films but Raymond prefers to call them “sexy comedies.” Whatever they’re called, those films provided producer and director with the experience necessary to even contemplate such a large scale project on such a small budget.

Bob Verrall is impressed. “The Tin Flute is ‘Bright young people,’ and although the French side of the Film Board refused to touch the project, not wishing to tie up their resources for six months, Verrall went with it. He considers the project a good investment, but his over-riding concern is to bring this uniquely Canadian story to the screen.

The Great Depression provides the setting for The Tin Flute. The Great Recession is what film-going audiences are trying to escape, at least for two hours every couple of weeks. Other Canadian producers are serving up escapism: Porky’s and Paradise. The Tin Flute is about hope — not just in the plot.

Mireille Deyglun as Floreine

Emmanuel introduces Floreline to a better time (Martin Neufeld) plays Emmanuel