

ROUGH CUT

by Robert Rouveroy C.S.C.

My oh my, what a rat's nest I've stirred up! All you guys who called me to villify my observations on the relative merits of 35 vs 16 vs 8mm, please hold your peace. I never meant to imply that 35mm cameramen have it easy compared to the 16mm buffs, or the 8mm amateurs. Maybe I should have made myself clearer on these points. What I left out in my first article last month are the circumstances that surround the shooting of 35, 16 and 8mm film.

Big Shot

Take 35mm for instance. In nearly all cases, no 35mm stock is exposed until:

1. A camera test is conducted to ensure that all equipment and lenses are in A1 shape;
2. The script has been pared to the bone;
3. All technical personnel have been hired.

Shooting proceeds leisurely, giving the cameraman every chance, and plenty of time, to light and diddle and test and argue with the director. After every shot, the filmgate is inspected for scratches, lenses checked, door gently closed and yes, let's take another shot for insurance.

And rightly so, because the producer can almost hear the dollars rustle through that filmgate, so, if the moment of truth arrives in the daily theatre, that's the time the cameraman feels his gonads rise in his underbelly. The praise is oh so sweet, the silence oh so mortifying. The director can often bury his mistake or at least hide it. The cameraman just sits there thinking of that second mortgage.

Medium Shot

And now 16mm. Unless a VIP treatment is given to the film, in most cases the cameraman is given a day's notice, if he is lucky, to pack all gear and be gone to Oslo, or Oshawa or wherever, to make a deathless masterpiece, aided by an inept director who has visions to out-Ingmar Ingmar himself, on a miniscule budget that forbids lightingmen and assistants. The cameraman has to convince the director that no, he doesn't think it's possible to light that church with his three 650's and a Frezzo, and look: the Lunasix indicates f/0.00056. Then the director says: "Shoot it anyway, I'll take the responsibility".

And, the cameraman having cheerfully stroked the colossal ego of the director, is called into the screening room to be confronted with a Steenbeck and a gloomy editor who imagines himself a better director than the director (possibly), and a better cameraman than the cameraman (not impossible, but improbable). The editor proceeds to screech about the non-existent cut-aways, predicts incredible difficulties in making it match, and generally succeeds in making the director hysterical. By this time the cameraman slinks away to contemplate that goddamn second mortgage.

Mickey Mouse

In 8mm, the scenario is somewhat different. In most cases the producer is also director, cameraman, editor. So he ends up blaming himself for everything that went wrong, and given the low esteem of 8mm, is usually not contemplating that second mortgage, but his next cup of coffee.

Nitty Gritty

But now the serious side. If all three cameramen would have their work displayed on TV only, they would find that the original medium that the program was shot in is not relevant at all. Given optimum transmission facilities, the home viewer would simply not know if it was the effort that Hollywood, Toronto TV, or Joe Blow in the basement had brought to the production. And I am talking about technical excellence, not the fact that the 35mm cameraman usually has the opportunity to create optimum lighting effects, or that the 16mm cameraman often finds beauty in his viewfinder that has escaped the director totally and therefore pays for his second mortgage on time. What I'm talking about is what is transmitted to that very poor medium, the TV set at home. It is still not accepted that Super 8, on an area about 32% of the 16mm frame, can pack more bits of information than TV's 2-inch tape. "Bits of information" is the closest analogy I can find because to compare TV and film is really to compare apples and oranges, both fruit but totally different trees. They are actually incompatible and only because there is no better way yet than very expensive tape, do we still use film for TV purposes. No doubt in the very near future we will see third generation recording

devices, such as laser beam recording or thermoplastic recording, as long as it is as easily editable and cheap as film. And don't kid yourself that film will stay in your lifetime, unless you're 85 years old and still working.

Example

Let me give you an example. About 5 years ago, in 1969 in fact, CTV was interested in doing a story in Biafra. CBC had gone there before. The camera gear was impounded in Portugal and was finally released about 34 days later. The cameraman was lolling about in Estoril on full pay, languidly sending telegrams for more per diem to the head office. CTV at that time was still quite young and poor and such stories horrified the boss. Then, Stanley Burke, recently released from CBC, wrangled a trip to Biafra and contact was made with CTV to supply a crew. I had just returned from thereabouts (who do you think was there in Estoril!) and in my opinion it was very difficult to get in with 16mm gear. Yes I got there and later I'll tell you about it, but it cost me my ARRI-S, a tripod and a case of the runs not duplicated until Kashmir, several years later. So I proposed that I go with Super 8 gear. Incredible cheek that Rouveroy, got the bloody nerve to charge the same rates with that amateur shit! Burke could then just as well do it himself.

I think the biggest shock I gave CTV management was that I agreed: given a bit of training Burke could very well do it. And by this time the question was academic anyway, Stanley had to leave in a day. So CTV borrowed (yes, I said borrowed!) a double system B&H Super 8 outfit from Eddie Black. I think it would have cost about \$420.00 if purchased outright. I took Stanley to the airport and on the way I told him what to press, where to look through, and when to change cassette and film. Total training time: 40 minutes. Stanley had never shot film in his life but of course had seen plenty of it edited in CBC, so he knew what to look for.

So, with twenty rolls of film he went to Biafra, got there safely, and proceeded to expose the film, presumably keeping in mind the what, where, why, when and who. I had rigged up a small tripod for him and a long release button, so at one point he managed to set up the camera for a two shot interview with General Ojukwu.

Transfer

In the meantime I closeted myself with **Jack Sinclair**, the technical wizard at CFTO. We stripped a B&H 8mm projector and replace the motor with a Selsyn motor, and changed the shutter-blade to make the proper translation from 18 fps to 30 fps. Jack did some secretive stuff to a Philips Plumbicon TV camera that included taking off the complete lens system and projecting directly upon the target plate. It took us about a week to find the optimum transmission standard. All this without so much as making a wave with CFTO brass. Jack was incredible with electronics. He later left CFTO and now works for **Image Transform** in California, the outfit that electronically enhanced the moon TV transmissions and now is involved with making features for TV, using video images transferred to film.

Stanely came back from Biafra, with all film exposed. Some of it was incredibly bad as could be expected, but out of the twenty rolls, about 9 minutes was very good indeed. I edited it down and yes, it's a pain in the neck to edit, so much spaghetti indeed. And then, tying up a video chain for several hours, we transferred the epic to tape.

It looked incredibly good! On final transmission, Jack received several calls from the CBC, demanding to know how the hell we managed to get a VTR 1000 portable recorder into Biafra. The information that it was Super 8 was received in absolute silence. To this day I feel that some CBC technicians honestly believe that we were pulling their legs.

For a short while it looked like CTV got the message. I was asked to submit a report on how it was done. There was some talk that some more experimenting would be done. The report I wrote disappeared and never floated back up again. The Toronto Star got hold of the story and reported my saying that every housewife now could make her own feature films. That bullshit resulted in some vague threats that I would be roughed up in some dark alley. To this day I get fun poked at me as the 8mm nut. Maybe I should make the record clear: I've never shot 8mm for TV release myself, probably because I get the message loud and clear. The cameraman shooting in 8mm will not make a living for himself, ever. Then why do I dredge up this old story again?

Well, have a good look at an article on page 498 of the SMPTE of June, 1974. The same system of transferring 8mm to tape as described above has now been adopted in Germany by the Bavarian Broadcasting System. About 5 years after our short experiment at CFTO, the

ultra-cautious Germans with their far superior TV standards, give a qualified nod to Super 8.

And what are those qualifications? That the 8mm film should be exposed with the utmost care. That the cameraman should be at least as good in 8mm as the cameraman who works exclusively in 35mm. It is not easy to shoot professionally acceptable 8mm.

I do not for a moment think that Super 8 will ever displace 16mm for TV use. But whatever new system will ultimately replace 16mm, be it laser beam recording or some other goodie, you may bet that using it will most probably will be as difficult as getting a good image on 8mm. It will almost surely be smaller than 16mm.

Now I've had many arguments about 8mm with other cameramen. Just the other day **Eddie Higginson** promised to do grievous damage to my family jewels if I did not shut up about 8mm. This happened (the promise, I mean) while he and I, and some more film characters were attempting to seriously deplete the alcohol stock at the Andorre hotel on Charles Street. He remembered choking on his drink while in England on assignment for the CBC, reading the Star article some one had sent him. Misinformation will do that to **Eddie**, who at that time was just starting up PFA labs. To set up a film lab is pretty heavy stuff, investment-wise, and nobody needs the spectre of 8mm on the horizon.

Not to worry. Super 8 should only be used in very selective cases, in very unusual circumstances. The very simple reason is that the only feasible system is direct transfer to videotape, and editing that tape. As the cost of editing said videotape is in the vicinity of 400 dollars per hour, all cameramen presently occupied in shooting 16mm can safely relax. For the moment.

Gear

Let's get on where we left off last month. The **BEAULIEU** has it's pro's and con's and most cameramen that I know are, as I stated before, very conservative indeed. It's like every cameraman's generation has it's own pet camera. I cut my teeth on a **Bell & Howell Eyemo Spider 35mm**, like most old-timers I had to be hauled screaming into the 20th century to the **Arriflex 35mm**. I found *that* a pile of shit indeed. For let's not forget that the B&H was eminently suited for hammering in tent-pegs, and fighting one's way out of riots. It did build character, or at least one's right wrist, as the wind-up spring permanently left that part enlarged by at least an inch in circumference. So the **ARRI 35** really looked very flimsy,

what with that sissy battery. Yes, we were very scared of our livelihood, because we thought that with that easy through-the-lens viewing everybody could get into that very elitest society of cinematographers. No more parallax problems, or judging distance. To illustrate the way we operated, our very own **Roy Tash, CSC** showed me his system of getting his F-stop. As he often could not clearly see the engraved F-stop on the lens barrel, he looked straight down into the lens and judged the iris-opening. Can you honestly find any cameraman nowadays that can do the same thing and come up correctly? Mind you, this was in the time of Plus-X B/W. No leeway both sides. You had to be dead-on, or you'd be dead.

Anyway, most of us now swear by the **Arri-S**. It has rightfully become the standard in our industry. Therefore, most of us dismissed the **Beaulieu** as amateur crap, when it came out many years ago. And so my friends, did I, until that fateful day in 1969, when some Biafran villagers decided to steal my camera, because they thought that I was stealing their children's souls. It's true, many children soon died after our crew shot film of them, so after all it's not so far fetched is it? I could probably consider myself lucky that it was only the camera they were after because then (and now too) I was fat and plump. And their kids had stick legs and swollen bellies and were always cramming their hands in their mouths. Made great film though. As I reflect on it, this must surely be the only civilization in the universe that can observe dead and dying children on the idiot box while having supper. Well, anyway, my **Arri-S** got stolen and I fervently hope they sold it or something. Of course, the insurance company righteously pointed out that this loss occurred in a war zone, so, tough luck baby. That's another very significant sign of the times. Your insurance is no good in a war zone, nuclear holocaust, acts of God, and squirrels in the attic. If you don't believe me, ask your agent. If a godforsaken little squirrel gnaws through a cable and causes a fire in your house or car, the insurance pertaining to your gear is null and void.

TIP

I had not learned by that time that one never, never loses one's gear in a war zone. One always, always loses the gear in a hotel room in an eminently peaceful, neutral country. Believe me, this might be the most valuable advice that you ever had.

Anyway, there I was \$3500 out of pocket and so I rented my first **Beaulieu** from **Janet Good**. All her **Arri-S** were

out, and I believe she still had this Beaulieu on the shelf because nobody wanted to be caught dead with it. And here started my love-story with a remarkable little camera that has lasted to this day. At first sight a very filmmy thing, almost feminine in appearance, but quickly proving itself a very tough broad. It's incredible versatility (2-64 frames, forward and backwards), TTL focusing, stop-frame capability and other goodies in an incredibly light package is a joy to explore. Of course there are bad points too, like any woman has. The light meter behind the lens is a farce and the old turret had to be beefed up. And talking about tough! **Peter Reusch**, a very respected cameraman, had the misfortune to have his helicopter fail 150 feet above the Expo grounds while grinding away with the Beaulieu. It all ended reasonably well as accidents go. The pilot had his face smashed into the control-panel (he mistook the engine cut-out switch for the heater switch, he doesn't fly anymore) and **Peter** got thrown out in a mudflat, seriously hurting his back. The director only suffered consistent nightmares ever since. But the camera! This landed on a rocky plateau 200 feet from the helicopter. The door was never found. The lens, a **Taylor Hobson Monital 3.8 zoom**, was severely damaged.

With a slight dent in the top part of the body, the camera ran faultlessly. It was packed with mud. **Janet Good** gave or sold me that body, I forget which, and with buying a new door and a turret and carefully denting out the body, I used it for two years, until I had the mistaken idea to take it apart and built a 400 foot body for it, somewhat like the efforts of **Joseph Trnka** in Ottawa. I must very humbly admit the effort was a total failure and to this day I am in the possession of a box of Beaulieu parts if anyone wants it. So when **Jim Mercer** had a Beaulieu for sale for a soft price I jumped at it and after ripping out the TTL lightmeter, I'm still the proud owner of a very good camera, that has absolutely never failed me and has earned its bread over . . . and over . . . and over . . .

Jim mentioned to me the other day that after a very easy year with the American customs regarding T.I.B.'s (temporary import bonds), they are again cracking down with a vengeance. Apparently, some dingbat in the West used these T.I.B.'s to export expensive furs to the U.S., then switched labels and returned with a load of rats or squirrels or something, thereby severely depleting America's wherewithalls to wage war, or conduct phone taps or whatever our good neighbours use their taxes for. So now one has to alert a broker in the US city that one goes to, and clear customs on

the spot. That, by the way, precludes taking fragile equipment like lenses or soundgear with you on the plane, causing pained howls from soundmen who rightfully suspect airlines of deep malice toward all camera crews. So for you who contemplate trips south, please contact your friendly broker. I had pretty good service from **Airspeed Brokers**. They do a lot of camera crews and know what you're talking about when you mention Elemacks, or spiders, or twelve to one-twenties over the phone.

Love Story

BELL & HOWELL is also a very respected name in the business. I know of many cameramen, who, after packing a BL or NPR for a trip overseas, after packing 16 cases of all sorts of exotic gear, throw in, almost as an afterthought, a B&H 70DR. Just to be sure, you mind! With a 10, a 25, and a 75mm lens, this camera has been a standard in the industry for umpteen years. It's in a class with the Auricon, (the Great Gaffer bless 'm) and is a last resort nowadays, when the BL fails, the NPR blows it's last transistor, the 16-S power connector disconnects, the Beaulieu jams, the Bolex spring breaks, and the director screams bloody murder to keep on shooting. What can one say about a camera that grinds out film faithfully after 21 years?

I bought mine in 1953, in Hong Kong. An old B&H HD, used, as I had my first 16mm assignment. Up until that time I had only shot 35mm and this HD was just like a funny toy to me. It cost me HK\$ 1200.00, probably about \$80.00 US at that time. The assignment went well, netted me about \$200.00 US so it surely was not a dead loss, even if I did not use it for another 4 years. I never had to clean or overhaul it until 1960 when I started in Vancouver with **CHAN**. So I gave it a face-lift and upgraded it to a 70-DR, with interlock turret, and I also gave it the 10-25-75 mm complement of lenses, and later a filter slot.

It is still with me. I don't use it much, but it has saved my skin at least twice since then. Once in the north, with an outside temperature of 45 degrees below zero, the BL had to warm up inside every 15 minutes. The 16-S was totally useless. The B&H did not even waver 1/10 of a frame. The BL and 16-S were winterized. The B&H was not. And of course that time in Dacca, when the hotel decided to save electricity so I could not load my batteries. So what more can I say? No repairs since 1960? No scratches, ever? I wish that cameras nowadays would be made with the same technical expertise. And for you young uns, who have never even seen this

camera (Jesus, I feel old!) take a look any night on channel 7, Buffalo. They use a photo of the thing at the head of every local story. And don't point at it and laugh — they haven't made a better one yet.

Small Stuff

For you people who have a BL with a 110 volt AC motor, a new powerpack is on the market. **Ron Niecke** has developed a real gee-whiz package that works exceptionally well. I bought one about two months ago and frankly, I was sceptical about the claim it would do 13 400 foot rolls. So, during the elections I did not charge it up for 4 days, shooting about 3 rolls a day. I finally did charge it overnight because I was worried it might not last past the 13th roll. Usually, claims for new equipment are a bit exaggerated: it is one thing to run a camera on a bench under controlled conditions, another if you have to use it with the start-stop conditions we work in.

It does me good to see Canadian gear come on the market. After all, we do a hell of a lot more documentaries here than they do in the States. For TV use, that is. It's really funny, we went crystal here in Canada much quicker than the guys in the States did. Some of the stories in the ASC go all goey about so-called new gear, sync-up methods etc., stuff that we worked with pretty exclusively years ago. It always does my heart good to hear an American director go gaga on those assignments I sometimes get for the American networks. Like radio-links, instant playback on cassette, syncboards with LED read-outs etc. **Niecke's** pack would drive em wild!

Projections

I feel that there is enough expertise in this country to develop the dream-camera. Something like a cross-breed between the ECLAIR ACL and the ARRI-SR, with some of the features of the PHOTO-SONICS and the CP-16R thrown in for good measure. But simpler and more rugged. Good Lord, if you just knew what kind of a dossier I'm assembling on the characteristics of the ACL, I wouldn't sleep so good at night, for fear of being strangled by the French.

But to be fair, one must point out that many cameramen are very loyal to their own gear. Like **Bob Dutru** who says: "If and when you get it to work, it's the best camera there is. I wouldn't work with any other camera than the ACL". It's that "if and when" that **Bob** seems to have forgotten, his trips to France to get it to work properly, the shitty front-end that **Heinz Jungermann** (did I spell it right this time?) had to rebuild. I



wonder how much money he did spend to get it to work properly. I was told that **Randy Platt**, another proud ACL owner, spent more than 4000 bucks to make it perform normally. Yes, I said \$4000.00, not four hundred.

Cutting

The other day I was in the vicinity of **Alex L. Clark Ltd.**, so I decided to drop in and found **Gerry Quinney** excitedly playing with the first ATEMA editing table. Now I had heard a lot of talk about it from some editors I know and, like anybody in this crazy business, they have just as many hang-ups on new gear as cameramen. The older ones have sucked titty on the old **MOVIOLA** and wouldn't be caught dead at a **Steenbeck**, and the younger ones have never seen anything else but the **Steenbeck** or **KEM**, but all editors I talked to had grave misgivings on the ATEMA.

To tell you the truth, it's not for editors only. If you look for an editing table only, it's a bad buy. First it's pretty expensive, about \$12,000, never mind the taxes. But it is the answer to those filmmakers who wish to do the whole she-bang themselves. It's incredibly versatile, will transfer 1/4 inch to 16mm with full attenuation, and it is a full-fledged rock and roll pick-up recorder. This means that simple mixes and pre-mixes can be done by the filmmaker himself.

We all realize that filmmaking has to be

a co-operative effort. Everyone of us is quite convinced that we're indispensable in our own bailiwick. And deep in our hearts we're all scared that our function could be phased out by newer methods or machines. So we tend to be very negative towards all those new-fangled developments. But only those that can and will adapt to the ever-changing visual-media field will be assured of their daily bread.

Because of the ever-spiralling cost of filmmaking some of our jobs have disappeared. Not more than 15 years ago it was practically unheard of to shoot anything at all without a lightingman and soundman and assistant. Well, look again!

The small, lightweight quartz-lights came on the market, the cameras became smaller and lighter and sooner or later cameramen were approached to do it all themselves, first by very small outfits, and followed by the bigger ones, like TV stations, and then by TV networks. For reasons of their own, mainly financial, more and more cameramen became used to accepting assignments without the larger crew. And frankly, we often saw that a situation that might get uptight when the whole house was full with all kinds of technical people, was more relaxed with a crew of camera, sound and director. We liked that and thusly we dug our own, and others, graves. Unless it's a biggie, the networks will say no dice to extra personnel.

It's very difficult for me to say that I

agree and surely I'll get heavy flap from a lot of people. But these are the facts of life, baby, and we'll have to live with it. The film world is changing very rapidly now. Even the unions are slowly waking up to the facts, and that's why you see even union features that do not have full crews.

This gets me away from the ATEMA. It is not an editing table. One should look at it from a completely different point of view. It's a pick-up recorder, transfer machine, with editing facilities built in. Bought separately, such facilities might cost you about \$25,000. In this combination, filmmakers can do most everything themselves. I see its use mostly in schools, small TV stations and with small filmmakers. After the immediate outlay of all that bread, it will be a boon for them, and might well be the reason that many more films will be made that would never have seen the inside of a projector. All this is the positive side. Now for the negative. Will it work? Will it stand up to the daily pounding in the editing room? I get visions of all those connectors again and shiver.

Letters

No letters worth answering this time. I'll say it again, if you have involved technical questions, look it up in the ASC bible. If I was even nearly as good as **James Wong Howe** I would've been in Hollywood, not here. The questions I like to answer are those that affect our work situations, and by that I mean, TV 16mm documentaries and such. Like, someone phoned me to ask what voltage to expect in India. I told him to get a booklet titled: "Electric Current Abroad", from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Used to cost 30 cents, but that will be much higher now, I'm sure. Oh yes, it's published by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Business and Defense Services Administration.

Well, that's it for this issue. Next month and in future issues I intend to discuss rates for free-lance cameramen across the country. I really need your help for this, so please write me care of Cinema Canada about the rates applicable to your particular part of the country. Preliminary findings indicate very wide discrepancies indeed. With the totally insane price increases in camera equipment and related gear, not to mention food, rent, gas and other commodities, it is time that we discuss a fair return on our investments and talent. Be assured that your letters will be totally confidential. And don't forget to join the C.S.C. if you haven't done so already.

See you.