

ROUGH CUT

by Robert Rouveroy C.S.C.

Am very flattered by quite a few letters concerning my observations on ENG. A nice letter from Steven Smith of Williams-port, PA, who has recently gone ENG, spent around \$45,000 getting equipped (RCA TK-76 and JVC 4400) and claims 25 rental days within the first 100 days at about \$400-600 a day. This, for the bad winter months, is quite remarkable, and he'll stand a chance to amortize his gear within the first year. This is as it should be because nobody yet knows how the stuff will stand up to the rough and tumble of free-lancing.

To date I don't know of anybody in Canada who has gone ENG on a free-lance basis, but it will come.

The most logical place for ENG is of course Sports. There is a very interesting article by Robert Riger, a director of ABC *Wide World of Sports*, in the April 1977 issue of the *American Cinematographer* that I highly recommend to interested readers. It seems that the States has whole-heartedly jumped feet-first into electronic cameras.

Pity that the Canadian networks are somewhat conservative. One of the Networks here (the Chief Engineer in fact) told me that the quality of $\frac{3}{4}$ " tape was too poor for his network and that it would take several years before he would allow it on his network. So be it.

It is true that current electronic gear is still in the 1930 stage Auricon single system style. Editing is still cumbersome and elaborate, and the gear itself not nearly as portable as the one-man-band CP-16. But everything must have its start, right? In 1962 all we had in Edmonton was an Auricon Pro-600 but with the help of a body-brace and a 40-pound power-pack we went portable anyway. It must be axiomatic that engineers and cameramen too, for that matter, have to be hauled bodily, screaming, into the Twentieth Century...

First Cut

All this became rather embarrassingly apparent at a combined SMPTE/CSC meeting the other day at Ryerson in Toronto. Ed Digiulio, the president of Cinema Products, the maker of the CP-16, was our speaker. He started forthwith on a violent diatribe, a sort of open letter, to the TV industry. The gist of all this was that portable electronic camera gear was cumbersome (qualified true), fragile (we don't know that yet), expensive (very true), and incapable of getting as good a picture as 16mm (utterly false, as any inspection of the major networks newscasts or ABC WWS will show you).

Frankly, that last observation was rather idiotic. He points out the occasional glitches, drop-outs and skews on a few news items, totally forgetting the miles of over and underexposed, lightstruck, pushed-beyond grain-structure, ruined by labs 16mm film that any newscameraman has to contend with and that we, mercifully, never see.

He claimed that tape itself was more expensive than film because directors don't want the risk of ending up with damaged or drop-out tape and therefore won't re-use it. Even there he was not correct as a few minutes with your calculator will show. In Canada, $\frac{3}{4}$ " tape sells for around \$21. for twenty minutes. But 22 minutes (2x400') of ordinary newsfilm, say 7242, will cost you around \$90, never mind the processing which adds another \$60. at least. So there you are looking at around \$150. as against \$20. You could afford to shoot your brains out!

The only point he didn't bring out was the comparative quality of the news item. The ENG revolution came so quickly to the States that the film-cameramen got caught with their pants down.

It seems that the operation of electronic equipment falls outside the jurisdiction of the cameramen's union, in this case the IATSE. The NABET gleefully stepped in and manned the cameras with their people. Now this has the States all in a flap because very quickly a few basic problems became apparent.

You see, the true news cameraman is a breed all by itself. True, many of us have started out in news, quickly passed on into documentaries when we had a chance, finally ending up with our pie in the sky, commercials or features, if we could make it. I'm guilty of taking this course, as most of the cameramen I know are. It is rare to meet the occasional DOP who has never shot 16mm and who regards it as so much spaghetti, or Mickey Mouse. I feel they've missed a great deal of experience and excitement that usually shows up in their calcified approach to cinematographic problems.

But there is a true breed of news-cameramen who can't conceive of doing anything else, and who bring to their news stories an expertise, an excitement that clearly shows up in their work. I sometimes think I can recognise their work when I spin the dial on my TV set. They leave an imprint, a personal signature.

Prime Cut

Well, these people are sadly missing in the ENG field. For whatever reason, they have been side-stepped in the networks' headlong rush into ENG. And it shows. While the image quality is infinitely clearer and "live", the story quality often deteriorated in stand-up, talking head, 1960 feeling, badly composed, utterly blah shit...

And there is the rub. It is the Nut behind the camera that matters, not the nuts in it.

Final Cut

Poor Mr. Digiulio. The restive audience at his talk was clearly annoyed. Many points he made were quite valid, but in the end it became rather embarrassingly clear that ENG was cutting sharply into his sales figures and will continue to do so until news, at least, will be 100% electronic. Now don't get me wrong! I'm sorry about that too, because I'm first and foremost a film cameraman. To date, no electronic camera can do what I can do with a Panaflex, thank the Great Gaffer in the Sky, but I can see that it won't be long, another decade or so, and I will have to change over

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too! And those of us who do, and keep up with the ever changing technological revolution, will keep their daily bread buttered somewhat. Now what did I hear about this Thompson-CSF 5 lb Microcam? Jesus, my lens weighs heavier than that!

Mix

Ed Digiulio then came forward with what we really had come to see. The Steadicam, a contraption of harness, springs and levers that absolutely magically smooths out camera movements. Goodbye dolly shots! a demonstration film showed the absolutely superb tracking shots in films such as "**The Marathon Man, Rocky, Bound For Glory**" and others. Just really unbelievable. I went like a shot for the first try-out. Now those of you who know me are aware that I am rather "big". I prefer to call myself that, instead of some less flattering description.

The harness drops easily around me and is strapped very tightly indeed, causing some shortness of breath. The countersprung arm fastens to my hip and the camera, balancing on a swivel joint, magically straightens itself out. Moving around, the "feel" is superb. One is constantly aware of the possibilities in moving, panning, running, getting that totally impossible shot. But it is much more difficult than I imagined. I'm told that there are really only three experts on the west coast, and one on the east coast, who can consistently bring the camera to a dead stop. The inventor, Garrett Brown is, of course, the undisputed master in its operation. The only Canadian expert is Matt Tundo, who has considerable experience with the thing. He made me aware of some of the limitations of the Steadicam. For one thing, it is



Steadicam

really a production tool, and anybody who rushes out to buy one (at around \$18,000 each, as far as I could ascertain, from Alex L. Clarke Ltd.) to shoot news or documentaries with it will be sadly disappointed. The slightest bump causes the camera to swing wildly. The shot has to be pre-planned and rehearsed carefully, as it is very hard to come to a full stop without the camera wiggling. It is, therefore, totally useless in a crowd or in documentaries where the end-position of the subject is not known.

Cutaway

Of course I invented something that can do the same as the Steadicam does, oh, years ago, that works well in crowds. I offer it now to you, free and without charge. It is called the EHS, which stands for Extraordinary Homo Slither. Camera firmly packed on the shoulder, one pushes steadily through the crowd with a modified duckwaddle, a sort of a tango inspired slough, meanwhile, firmly holding one's breath for the entire 400 feet. If you don't mind the occasional titter or suspicious stare, I promise you it'll work better than the Steadicam, in a crowd that is. I must admit it works somewhat better if you're "big". You can at least wipe that smile off their faces, if the occasion arises.

Main Track

It is a pity that in the film business, very few inventions can be patented.

Look at the Steadicam for instance. It must truly be classified as the most innovative accessory to come out in a long time. Anybody who has ever been involved in an intricate dolly shot knows what I mean. Dollies are expensive, time-consuming and very limited. They are a sonofabitch to set up on uneven ground, practically impossible on stairs and very hard to conceal on retreating shots. Some of these shots take a week to execute properly. With the Steadicam they are a relative snap. So what happens? Look again at the April 77 issue of the American Cinematographer. Panavision has come out with the Panaglide, a similar contraption to the Steadicam, but using gas and hydro-pneumatic leverage instead of more simple springs. Given the Panavision track record of building superlative quality in their gear, I'm sure it will be a little bit better or more versatile. For instance, both systems use TV monitors for framing the shot. Now, when tracking backward, with the camera pointing to the rear over the shoulder, it becomes very hard to keep framing properly as all the movements are reversed. If you don't believe me, try it with an Arri SR or the old Bolex Pro, or some types of Eclair.

Well, Panaglide solved this problem very simply. They reversed the TV scan on the monitor.

Robert Gottschalk, president of Panavision, claims he got the idea for the Panaglide from Japanese food delivery boys about five years ago. Seems they had a gimbal and springs system attached to their bikes that kept soup bowls from spilling during transportation. I don't know where Garrett Brown got his idea. I'm sure they got their ideas independently. But let me lay this on you; I do remember seeing a similar contraption used in Indonesia where I grew up. This must have been around 1939, or 1940. It seems that little old ladies made some extra money cooking tasty dishes for the take-out trade, or rather, delivery trade. Food was stacked up in close fitting trays, 7 to 8 on top of each other, combined in a contraption called a *rantang*. Delivery boys had a thingumajig on the back of their bikes, full with rubberstraps, old inner tires or maybe a corset strap or two and were able to transport up to 14 of these *rantangs* simultaneously. I remember that delivery of one *rantang* entailed careful rebalancing with stones or re-adjusting the straps. It was an eerie sight seeing the *rantags* float-



Panaglide

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ing majestically by while the bicycles bounced along the ruts and crevasses of the pre-war Asiatic roads. Dammit, I could've been the inventor of that Panaglide or that Steadicam. Let's see, Garrett used springs, and Robert G. used gas and hydro-pneumatics. Now I have still some old rubber bands, and if I ask nicely I could lay my hands on some garter belts, and who knows! Combined with some foam and scrap aluminum I could come out with my superdolly at, let's see, around \$39.95. Hmmm...

Mix

The Canadian Society of Cinematographers now reaches its tentacles overseas. Harry Makin, past president of the CSC, informs me that during his stay in the USSR (for a CBC/BBC co-production on the Russian Winter Arts Festival), he drafted our first Russian member, be it honorary. This happened during a New Year's dinner in Leningrad. As is wont over there, vodka flew rough and fast. During the toasting, when it was Harry's turn, he promptly invested Leonid Mirzoyev, the second unit cameraman on this shoot. Leonid is a Senior Cameraman at the Moskva studio's and is usually employed in the public affairs and documentary section and is, according to Harry, a dynamite cameraman. Welcome Leonid! Good thing he's a honorary member though; I can just see Roy Tash CSC trying to collect his dues! Given the problems Roy has here in Canada, it would be rather insurmountable over there.

Harry also has a warning for other cameramen going to Russia for a shoot. If lights are needed (you're usually not allowed to bring your own, at least not big ones) make sure you order every single cable, connection, plug, extension, clamp and what not that goes with it. Seems Harry ordered three Brutes, and yes, they showed up on time, but minus the cables to plug them in. Harry did most of the shooting with available light and with two portable battery lights that somebody shipped sort of by accident, as an afterthought.

Harry, by the way, quit his post as president of the CSC this May. I think I speak for all of us members of the CSC in thanking him for a job well done. The CSC has grown considerably during his tenure and has gained status and clout under his administration. Thank you Harry! □

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