

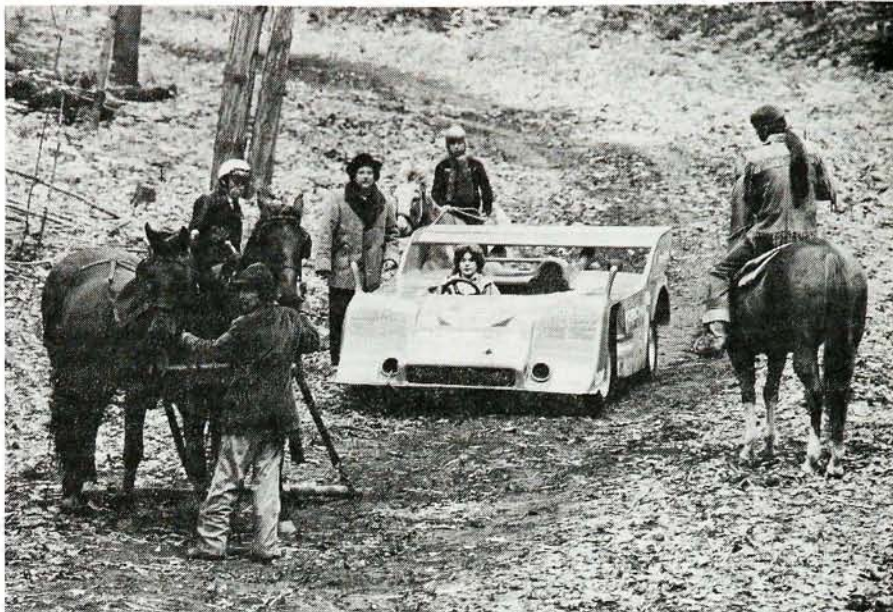
Linden says he is "filming Toronto as a steel and glass, old city." Different photographic styles, a variation of filters, lighting, and colour in the sets, will be used to illustrate the progression from the early society to the modern society which is "brighter, clearer, clean, harder lit, harder edge." He will then contrast this to the different look of Arizona, as representing California. In some respects, Van Der Linden says this is the most difficult film he's ever done. "It's very technical — lots of mattes, artwork to do, understand, and put together." In one sequence, Hart is driving his car on the highway at 285 mph with the jet spewing bullets just behind. Positioning the cameras will take some ingenuity under these circumstances. Says special video effects planner, Michael Lennick (**Middle Age Crazy** and **Title Shot** were his most recent projects), "Here, we are into many different levels of technology. That speed is as slow as a jet can go. But we're also dealing with helicopters, land cruisers, other planes — coordinations within a limited time and budget."

Lennick describes the city culture as envisioned in **The Last Chase** as a "video culture," one that *watches* rather than *does*. Giant video screens dominate the homes. Technical advancements in video must be duplicated in the film with credibility — "futuristic" films always fight audience expectations of cardboard comedy. Lennick is now experimenting with various video systems, declaring that under no circumstances will he "compromise on the film's scientific accuracy."

However, he goes on, "the main change in Frank Hart's society is not in its technology — the main change is in people's attitudes. People adapt to what there is, in an energy crisis or whatever. But the system in **The Last Chase** is one that's lost contact with its audience — a bit like the networks today. In one scene, Frank Hart is watching a newscast about the plague and ravages, which ends with a caution that there is only enough inoculation serum to save a fraction of the population. Then there's a Kentucky Fried Chicken commercial."

In **The Last Chase**, the society watches the cameras and the cameras watch the society, and each has lost sensitivity to the other. "It is like 'Big Brother,' says Lennick. "You don't enter production with this specifically in mind, but you can't help the parallel." Burke feels that, "The idea of America running out of oil and gasoline is really just all background. It's really about two older men chasing across America trying to recover lost dreams — involved in a chase and not wanting it to end."

Katherine Dolgy



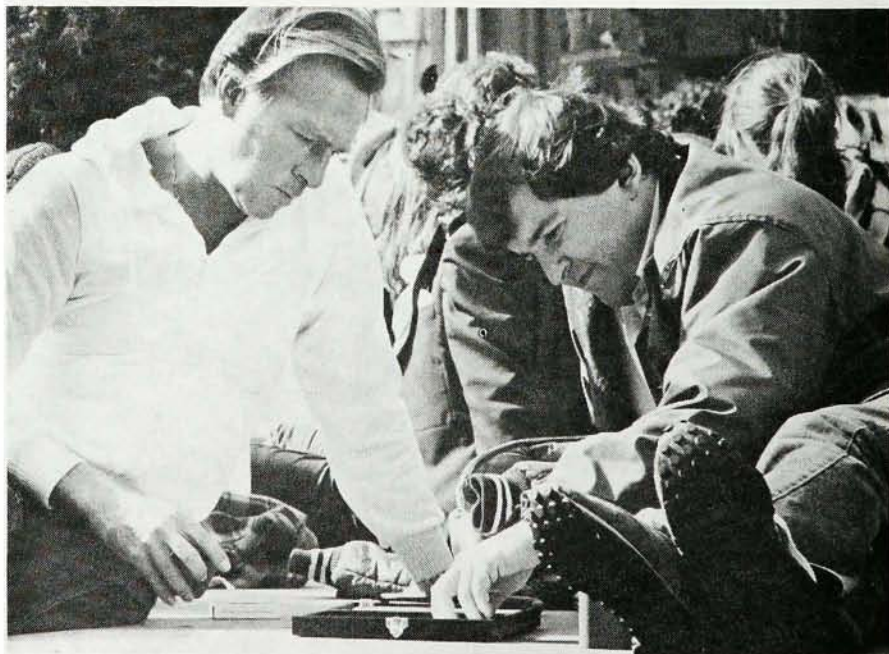
Chris Makepeace trying out Lee Majors' Porsche in **The Last Chase** — certainly will be, on a road like that!

Highpoint

d. Peter Carter. sc. Dick Guttman. ph. Bert Dunk. sp. effects Cliff Wenger. ed. Eric Wraite. sd. Peter Sewchuck. a.d. Seamus Flannery. cost. Patti Unger. l.p. Richard Harris. Beverly D'Angelo. Christopher Plummer. Kate Reid. Peter Donat. Robin Gammell. Sol Rubinek. exec. p. Jerry Pam. William Immerman. p. Daniel Fine. assoc. p. Bob Opekar. pub.

Glenda Roy. p. manager Marilyn Stonehouse. p.c. Highpoint Productions (1979). col. 35mm.

"The stage, that's where an actor gets the most satisfaction. Film acting is like a kind of exercise to get back into shape,"



Who said 'All work and no play'? Christopher Plummer and producer Bill Immerman caught playing backgammon on the **Highpoint** set (photo: Camil LeSieur)

remarked Christopher Plummer as he relaxed on the set for the filming of **Highpoint** in Quebec City recently. It's doubtful however that Plummer got a good workout because the \$7 million Canadian production is an action-packed adventure film where the stuntmen are key figures. As Plummer put it, "there's a lot of hanging around."

Essentially a contemporary escapist film, **Highpoint** takes us on a wild chase from Los Angeles, through the winding streets of Old Quebec City, finally coming to a head in Toronto.

Christopher Plummer plays James Hatcher, the villain, whom he describes as a "crazed, larger-than-life character, a mixture of John Huston, Howard Hughes and Errol Flynn." The 'gentleman' villain is pursued by the infamous Mafia and a CIA agent, Richard Harris (**A Man Called Horse**). Ironically, they don't know why they're after Hatcher and they don't find out until they hit Toronto.

Two weeks of shooting, out of a ten week schedule, were completed in Quebec City on the Thanksgiving weekend. Hundreds of tourists, who normally throng the streets of Old Quebec City, were down at the Quebec-Lévis ferry-crossing where they were treated to a spectacle of daring stunts by Henry Mills, considered by producer Bill Immerman to be "the next Evel Knievel." A particularly impressive sequence involved a horse and buggy which successfully leapt onto the ferry just as it prepared to leave the dock. Predictably enough, the good guy didn't quite make it, and the second horse plunged into the St. Lawrence River. What appeared to be a comic scene by most onlookers wasn't written into the script however — the stunt horse paused before taking its fatal leap into the water. That sort of twist is what gives director Peter Carter and producer Immerman their headaches. "At an estimated cost of \$30,000 per day for special effects and stunts, including rental of the ferry, tug-boats and other equipment, the figures could go up to \$50,000 if we don't get the footage we want," sighed the exhausted Immerman. That's where improvisation comes in. "If it turns out to be of comic value, we use it."

Why is it that Immerman feels box office success is almost inevitable for **Highpoint** though many other Canadian films seem doomed to obscurity? Immerman, one-time vice-president of Twentieth Century Fox, says it's not a question of talent or quality. The problem lies with the lack of marketing expertise in Canada.

Comparing Canadian films such as **Mon Oncle Antoine** and **Kamouraska** with European art films, Immerman points out that they appeal to a very limited



One **Highpoint** is the wedding scene filmed at Place Royale in Old Quebec City

(photo: Camil LeSieur)

audience. Art films simply aren't marketable. Plummer looks at it philosophically, and describes the public as "a mysterious animal which changes as quickly as a chameleon does." The public mood must be constantly gauged in order to judge the type of entertainment desired. In a period of financial anxiety, people need that element of fantasy which allows them momentary escape. **Highpoint** promises just that, and, furthermore, it's the honest man that survives in the film. What could be more encouraging?

When asked if the future looks bright for young Canadian actors today, Plummer quickly responded "You're damn right. They've got a chance to make it in Canada!" Reflecting on his own acting debut in the early Fifties, he recalls how

the lack of opportunities forced an ambitious young actor to leave the country. "It was the only way one could bring back our acquired experience to Canada."

Plummer certainly has no regrets. His world-wide travels have enabled him to become one of those exclusive "international men." Referring to his profession as an actor, he describes himself as a gypsy who must continue to travel and learn. Then, quoting George Bernard Shaw who also left his homeland for a time, he adds "I didn't know my own house because I'd never been outside it:" or, one can't fully appreciate a specific situation until it is contrasted to a broader reality.

Marcella Smit