Masters Workshop
Proposed for Europe

The following is a note from Nicola Pecorini, who is organizing the next Master's workshop. -Ed.

Steadicam has certainly gone a long way since its creation. Thanks to the technological achievements and to the efforts and research of the first pioneers, practically all technical limits have been overcome, video assists exist that are more sensitive than the film stock, servo systems and radio systems are as accurate as possible, nuclear 12 volt batteries remain charged for years.

Two factors have fueled its development: the passion and enthusiasm of early operators who dedicated their best years and energies to the cause and to the workshop experience.

It's at the workshops, in fact, that we exchange experiences, technical solutions, spare parts, electronic gadgets; venture hypotheses to be experienced by the individual and verified at the next workshop. Without the workshops and the attitude of the participants, Steadicam would have had a tougher adolescence and wouldn't be so popular.

We want to raise the level of confrontation, research, aesthetics, to go beyond the current bounds: the goal is to advance the state of the art. The tool is the Masters Workshop.

The first ever Steadicam Masters Workshop was held in June 1988 in Rockport, Maine. With all the limits of a world premier, it has been a great success and nobody walked away unsatisfied and unrewarded. Unfortunately June is one of the busiest months in Europe and Rockport is not exactly around the corner. Few European operators were able to attend.

Together with the Steadicam Operators Association, we therefore decided to repeat the experience on this

The Contraption Wars
Ripoffs, Copies, and Imitations

There are piles of onion skin, files of agreements, briefs, patents, lawsuits, drafts, blue wrappers, torts and retorts stowed all over my house in Philadelphia. In decorated folders are seven U.S.A. and forty-two foreign patents, plus divisional cases, continuations, re-issues and pending applications for a dozen more. I imagine that if all of this paper were rounded up and stacked, the pile would reach the roof.

More than just my 18-year stint as a sometime-inventor is documented here - the character of the whole great stream of human inventiveness can be inferred by examining its contents. We advance on the strength of what has been discovered before, with many small steps and just a few great leaps and much re-inventing of things now forgotten. Here around me are copies of hundreds of other-people's patents - the ghosts of earlier thinkers on matters related to the stabilization of cameras.

Here's good old Howard K. Dearborn, inventor. I once thought a great deal about this guy and his patent. My earliest "pole rig" version was abandoned partly because his ghost turned up in my patent search. (I wonder if that's his likeness in the patent drawings, holding his invention? My draftsman sort of drew me, after all, including the period haircut!).

Wars continued on page 2

H.K. Dearborn c. 1960

Masters continued on page 6
G.W. Brown c. 1974

Wars continued from page 1

The Patent Office threw Dearborn and 45 other inventors at me, forcing me to “distinguish” over them all. Since then my own patents have been “cited” dozens of times against inventions that came later, and to the extent that these inventors’ efforts were scuttled as a result, I’m sure they cursed my name, without necessarily believing that their work was in any way derivative. It is human nature to be convinced of the originality of one’s own stuff. And now of course all of us lie in wait on the shelves in Washington to arise and irritate future practitioners of “the art.” as the Patent Office calls it, and spur them on to invent around us; and the Stream will continue to flow on beyond even the memory of our obscure contraptions.

Meanwhile... Here’s a chronicle of "The Contraption Wars," plus Bizarre Imitations, Astonishing Knock-offs and one shameful Excess of Defensive Zeal...

Panavision

The Steadicam® patent describes perhaps the most fundamental mechanism known so far that permits a human-carried object to be in “controlled isolation” as we know it. To date, no other device has been able to approach these results without infringement (by combining: “expanded camera equipment, remote viewfinder, and pivoting/rotatable connections between camera, ‘support means,’ and operator”). Many, however, have tried...

Panavision was first up to bat. Chairman Robert Gottschalk had seen my early filmed demo and was evidently in a fever to devise a machine that could do the same trick. He stalled me by saying he was interested, and began what reportedly became a 2.4 million dollar effort to prevail over Cinema Products, who had quickly become my licensee. At first Panavision had no idea how we did it, and Gottschalk’s engineers were instructed to make a prototype based on the spring-suspended fish-carrying devices Robert had seen on bicycles in the Orient. Friends in the business reported that the resulting gizmo, with camera suspended by bungee cords, made an appearance on “Black Sunday” for John Alonzo, DP, who later told the Academy Awards Committee that he had seen the “Panaglide”! (Yo!)...

Check this out: Industrial Espionage! I’m shooting “Marathon Man” in New York - the scene where the truck explodes in flames on 76th Street. I never leave my prototype rig alone for a moment, but as the truck starts burning, one of the teamsters tells me there’s a stream of gasoline leaking from the tank of my car which is parked up the street. The gas is running down the street toward the fire! I hastily drive away and find a repair place across town where they plug the hole somebody stabbed in my tank with an awl. The moment I leave, guys with bent noses show up and take lots of photos of the rig! (Wow!)

Another round finds us secretly demonstrating the Steadicam for John Boorman at Burbank Studios. Suddenly Gottschalk himself and an engineer are caught hiding behind the scenery taking pictures and are summarily ejected, protesting that they just “happened along...”

All of this info and more was cranked into the stream of prototypes being pounded out in Tarzana, with every attempt presumably being made to differentiate their work from ours, but the damned things kept turning out to resemble Steadics if they worked at all.

By the time CP sold our first production version, one would think that even Robert would have admitted defeat, but the great human rationalizing powers I referred to earlier must have kicked in and post-flashed his mind, for
..."tilting" a bottom-heavy Panaglide for lawyers

by the time the 'Glide appeared in Canada in 1976 on "Days of Heaven", he was proudly emphasizing that its arm used different springs than ours and its camera was silent and light. (The latter item is still its great virtue - see our letter to Panavision in this issue!) Haskell Wexler took over as DP and found it in the camera truck and soon sent some photos which astounded and angered us. We immediately authorized Weiser & Stapler, my trusty patent attorneys, to commence legal proceedings.

What a shock. I found it hard to believe that this legendary film-equipment guy and his famous company could do this to us - and more! For instance Gottschalk actually had the nerve to demonstrate the 'Glide in contention for the Oscar, and when the Technical Committee spurned him and voted for us, he persuaded the Academy Board of Governors to overturn the vote and delay our award for a year because of the pending suit. (One wit on the committee observed that perhaps Gottschalk should have entered the Panaglide for some sort of religious award, because of its miraculous resemblance to the Steadicam!)

Finally his attorneys pointed out that these machinations practically guaranteed that triple damages would be awarded for the harm done to Steadicam, and he capitulated at last and settled out of court. Panavision has paid us a royalty ever since on all reported rentals of the Panaglide, and the Oscar was a shoo-in a year later because the Technical Committee was so steamed.

Incidentally, Gottschalk's attempts to patent the Panaglide were emasculated (as it were) by the priority of my patent, to the extent that the only allowed "claim" was for an LED level indicator!

This was World War I! After winning this one, we thought that no future infringer could even bring on a sweat! Indeed some of them proved to be borderline comical...

Shinko

Suddenly, at Photokina in Cologne, friends began telling us of a camera stabilizer hidden in the booth at Shinko Electric. Various spies volunteered to get a look and collect brochures, and we decided to march on over there. Of course, Ed DiGiulio and I were recognized immediately, and they tried to cover the thing up.

Instructor from the Maine Shinko Workshop "treatin smoothly"

Ultimately we had to bring suit in Japan, which is an experience in and of itself. It requires a Japanese attorney, deep pockets and lots of time, but the good news is that the Japanese generally respond fairly and will honor your Japanese patent if your claims have overwhelming moral force. After several years of expensive maneuvers, we received a beautifully hand written document of capitulation. Accompanying it was a wretched typewritten translation saying in part: "...we also stoping the production and the sale concering the products which are doubtful to be any related with said both patents... our company desires to treat smoothly with sincerity based upon the respect of the industrial prorietary."

Looking at the photos, you may be less than astounded to find out that it was our arm patent that prevailed. Although the Shinko device appeared to be ineffective, we had to defend our "industrial prorietaries" or leave the field open to others.

Wars continued on page 8
Association Letter to Panavision

Re: Lightweight Panaflexes

June 21, 1989

John Farrand, President
Panavision, Inc.
18618 Oxnard
Tarzana CA 91356

Dear John,

Thank you for signing up Panavision as an associate member. We greatly appreciate your support. We would like to reciprocate with some product feedback and the results of a survey conducted among our 120 professional operators.

The active membership of the Steadicam Operators Association comprises some of Panavision's most enthusiastic fans. You rent the lightest 35mm silent camera in the world for use on our Steadicams - the so-called "Lightweight" - which is more than twelve pounds less burdensome than the BL's and Moviecams. Given a choice, any one of us would prefer the advantages that a lighter camera confers - greater mobility, speed, stamina, etc.

Unhappily, there are simply not enough "Lightweights" to service more than a fraction our jobs, and we therefore use the grously heavier BL's, etc. for hundreds of shooting days yearly. The Lightweights (all three!) are booked continuously and we believe that at least a dozen more could be rented non-stop, and most of these rentals would result in Panavision gear and lenses displacing BL's etc. As you know from your meetings and correspondence with operators, we urgently need help in this area, and we hope that you can find a way to provide more Lightweights, and, if possible, to provide them with a dual-voltage capability, since they are even more advantageous if we can power them with 12 volts and avoid carrying additional batteries.

The Panaglides are old and well-used, and despite the updating of gimbals and batteries, they just don't have the latest bells and whistles. In addition: Monitors still tend to be unviewable. The current CCD video-taps don't perform as well in low light as the LDH 26's and there are no gamma or gain boost controls to help reach for an image when shooting nights with high-speed stocks (We expect virtually no image with Kodak's new 800 ASA). Also, incidentally, the Panaglides now cannot be "trimmed" sufficiently to balance the Primo 29mm and some of the new anamorphics without adding weights!

Many of our operators arrive on a Panaglide shoot with adaptor cables and brackets to enable the use of their own Seitz radios, Heden motors, Coherent video transmitters, etc. and some even remove the camera and mount it on a Steadicam, and adapt the spare camera boards to make up a "surrogate" Lightweight! Although there are several operators who don't own Steadicams, and who will continue to rely on the Panaglides, most of us would prefer to use our own highly personal equipment and thus maximize our technical performance. Therefore we hope that some of the Panaglide cameras can be converted to Lightweights in order to more closely address the real needs of this market.

Clearly, John, we are worried about our prospects for shooting dialogue scenes into the next decade when there are only three good Steadicam cameras in the world! Our survey asked "Would you rent a lightweight Panaflex that ran on 12 volts?" Ninety-four percent of our respondents said an emphatic "yes!"

We cannot too strongly tell you of our enthusiasm for this product, and of our nearly terminal lack-of-enthusiasm for lugging around anything else! Please build some more of them! Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

The Association Members

cc: newsletter

Alternative to Thick Video Cable

Astoria, New York.

Many of us go out on a video shoot that is not multi-camera. As the only camera, our needs are basic: to feed component video to the deck and (sometimes) to receive camera power from the deck. Those of us who shoot with the Ikegami 79-D or E, or with the new HL-55, are aware of the thick, cumbersome cable that locks into the J-Labs adaptor. It is heavily insulated and tends to twist the rig about as you walk, tilt, pan, or do any of the other nifty things that separates a Steadicam from a tripod with all the locks on.

I finally got sick of the cable. I called Jerry LaBarbera. He owns J-Labs. I laid out a design for a lightweight, super-flexible cable that would carry what I needed. He delivered. The six foot long cable locks into the J-Labs adaptor. At the vest, it connects (by way of a barrel connector) with the standard heavy cable. The new lightweight is a dream to use, and presents minimal influence on the balance and performance of the rig. I haven't had to whip pan yet, but short of that, this cable is a godsend.

From here, the next step is fiberoptics. I had considered that, but it snaps easily, and therefore doesn't lend itself to Steadicam use. If you're interested, call Jerry at The J-Labs Co. at (213) 457-4090, or write to him at J-Lab Co., Box 6530, Malibu, CA 90264. Tell him where you read about it.

Peter Abraham
Public Speaking Increases Your Visibility and Promotes Jobs

Public speaking to a group of your peers can make a good impression and ultimately get you more work. It can also be a horrible experience if you are unprepared.

I've been asked to speak a number of times and from that experience I've developed an outline that may help. Just like the experts say, you must follow a procedure, assume no prior knowledge, and summarize your key points.

Begin by explaining Steadicam design and operation. With the sled set up on the docking stand I explain its balance points and why they are there. (Someone always asks why the screen is green.) I explain why it's shaped the way it is and anything else that seems pertinent.

Forget about precessing and very technical stuff; the audience will be lost. This ten minute intro gets you limbered up and starts everyone out with the same basic knowledge. By this time I'm suiting up. I also explain how the vest is good for playing "Warden's Wife" with a spouse.

Go through the simple moves - (walk forward, shoot back, et al.) these give your audience a good understanding of Steadicam operation and use.

Your audience can be producers, directors, agencies, or even students. Determine what they want to hear from you and how can they apply what you have to say. Your outline remains the same, but the examples and situations you create change with different groups.

Agency people want to know HOW it can be creatively used so have some good examples ready. Some examples I use are "The Untouchables," "The Shining," and "Wolfen." In addition have some examples that you can demonstrate. Emphasize the different "looks" you can achieve. Show how you can go from a swish pan to a dolly to a run, seamlessly. Remember these are the people who will "create" a use for Steadicam only if they are exposed to some innovative techniques.

Directors want to know the HOW TO of Steadicam. They want to know how the "Letterman Open" was done, and the specific gear that was used to create it. Be able to talk about the "float," how to get a lens height, dolly mounting, vehicles, wind, and follow focus. Directors are the most demanding group. "It doesn't do that" won't stand up with them.

Producers want to know the other end of the scale. They want to know the time, the money, how long will it take, and what you've done. You must be the most careful with this group since they act on what you say. If it really takes you 45 minutes instead of 15 to go to Lo-Mode they get unhappy fast. Also remember don't brag about gear you don't have. They assume if you mentioned it you've got it.

Industrial people are the most diverse because often the same guy who wrote the show will produce, direct, and edit it. The key points from above still apply but in a condensed form. Obviously the industrial people may want to create a look like "The Untouchables" but may not have the resources to pull it off. Discuss creative situations like walking through the Plant with the CEO rather than a comparable film look shot.

Corporate films are becoming much more sophisticated and their producers need to know when to use a Steadicam and when not to. It is important to discuss how a Steadicam can be integrated into a show shot on a tripod. Corporate films are are great way to talk yourself into work. Often there's a project that needs three Steadicam shots but can't justify the expense; have a couple of shots you can demonstrate that will make the Steadicam useful to them for an entire day. (Don't oversell, they'll get the idea.)

Students are a fun group to talk to but half of them are considering Steadicam operating as an occupation. Stress the cost and fatigue.

The key, no matter what the group, is to always talk about composition within a moving frame and how to use the Steadicam in both conventional and non-conventional modes. You arrive with a mysterious piece of gear. Before they leave, make sure they know how they can use it in their productions.

As you speak you don't have to wear the Steadicam. Encourage questions from the audience. Your style can be whatever suits you but have a general form to your presentation. Have the outline nearby. If you jump from subject to subject the audience will get lost and you will look disorganized. Don't try to remember everything, refer to your notes and keep the presentation conversational.

Examples of shooting are great but tell only good stories. If there was a bad Steadicam shoot it is guaranteed that someone associated with it will be in the audience or know someone who was.

As a wrap to the program, show some examples of your work. Be sure to highlight the specifics like choreography. This is a great place to

Speaking continued on page 11
side of the Atlantic. The first European Steadicam Masters Workshop will be held at the Castello Di Brolio, Siena, Italy, from October 22 through 28th, 1989.

Please note that the dates match with the vintage, and being in the heart of Chianti, we can also consider it a wine workshop: something unthinkable in Maine.

All participants will lodge in the castle in double or single rooms. The castle is fantastic and the surroundings of Siena are beneath the most beautiful places on earth, consider the possibility of coming with your husband/wife/lover.

All the masters must show up by 7 p.m. of Sunday, October 22nd. At dinner will start planning the program for the following days. There will be no instructors or students. The program must emerge from the common needs, curiosities, and stimulations. We can certainly suggest some topics: camera movements and visual perception, Steadicam and production planning, the actor and the mobile stage, camera body modifications, Professional and electronic interferences, dolly grip or camera operator?, computing compensation and compensating for fatigue, back-ups and gaffer tape, we could go on for ages.

But we don’t want to plan too much in advance. The goal is to have the chance to face all the problems we care about, to solve all the doubts we have, fill all the gaps we have. We will have contributions of distinguished cinematographers who will tease us with their points and objections, encourage us with their enthusiasm.

Bring along all your Steadicam equipment, especially the personalized accessories, the “slick gadgets,” the state of the art toys. Also bring along your tapes (better if VHS) so that we can discuss and analyze a lot of footage.

Cost: All the participants will cover all of the expenses. The fee is 1,200,000 LIT, about $800 US, which includes use of the castle and facilities, 6 nights at the castle, 6 breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, insurance for all equipment, other expenses (rentals, co-ordination, guests, etc.) Fees for Husband/Wife/Lover will be 800,000 LIT ($550 US), which includes all the above except “lessons.”

Entrance requirements: To be effective, the Masters cannot be overcrowded. We believe that 20 to 25 would be the right number. Priority will be give to those who 1) have at least one year of Steadicam experience, 2) own or have access to a Steadicam with accessories and bring it to the castle, 3) belong to the Steadicam Operators Association, and 4) have attended one or more workshops in the past.

To apply, fill out the following form and mail to BASE, Via Ampolo n.14, 20139 Milano, Italia or FAX to BASE, fax number 02, 4814706.

Nicola Pecorini
Custom Steadicam ATV
Available from Association

Is currently at work on "The Freshman" with Marlon Brando and Matthew Broderick.

Active members can now rent a custom Honda 4WD ATV adapted for off-road Steadicam shots. The vehicle has been extensively modified with welded seating and foot platforms front and rear, and with a total of four welded mounts for 1.5 inch vertical pipe. In addition there is a heavily-reinforced central mounting socket on both front and rear for a swiveling molded racing-type seat with removable footrest. Although the vehicle can easily be used in the conventional ATV manner by hanging on and shooting hard-mounted, it also permits a safer and more comfortable operating position with the swiveling seat mounts which permit 180 degree freedom of rotation. These seats can be used for both hard and soft mount shots, including those which require the operator to mount or dismount.

The vehicle comes with a special set of tires and rims which mount on the front wheels and widen the footprint by 8 inches for greater stability in turns. It also has 26-60 psi custom air shocks installed in front to prevent diving onto the stops when heavily loaded. The Honda 4WD is a heavy and rugged vehicle, capable of speeds in excess of 40 mph.

It is suggested that only qualified stunt drivers be allowed to run it, and all standard safety practices for shots of this type are strongly recommended. Anyone riding or driving it must do so at their own risk. Operators should thoroughly rehearse and test the vehicle and the route before actual shooting. As these vehicles can be unstable in tight turns, conservative driving is a must. It is not recommended for use on paved roads, and is noisy, thus not suitable for dialogue recording.

Call the Database line, (215) CALL CAM, in order to organize a rental. The whole package, including various brackets, speedrail mounts, seat, extra wheels, etc. is available F.O.B. Philadelphia area, providing:

1. Vehicle must be picked up and delivered - preferably with pickup-truck or large van.
2. The rate is $100/day travel, $200/day shoot, or $500/week flat.
3. Production must provide a certificate of insurance for a replacement value of $6,800, and provide a hold-harmless letter and proof of liability insurance.
4. Rentals available only to active members of the Association, subject to availability, first-come-first-served.

This is the first equipment item available for rental by your association. For the future we are considering the logistics of renting threaded magazines, radio focus equipment, and possibly a Steadicam III, in order to provide back ups for Association members.

Larry McConkey on "The Freshman"
The next installment was noticeably devoid of humour...

Continental Camera

This one required a real battle - long, costly, and acrimonious. Maybe the Steadicam patent is difficult to understand, or maybe attorneys tend to be overly optimistic about their clients' chances of avoiding infringement suits, but in many cases our adversaries seem to embark upon these unstable seas with about the same grip on reality as the Spanish Armada!

John Carroll and Ernst Nettmann believed their "Body-mount" was different. It sort of hung sideways, after all, and didn't use an actual arm, and their feelings were hurt when we concluded that they infringed and asked them to desist. Although we didn't believe that the device was of much use, or commercially threatening, it couldn't remain unchallenged, so I had to fly from an award ceremony for Steadicam at the BKSTS banquet in London direct to a rooftop shootout in LA with attorneys in order to demonstrate infringement beyond a shadow of doubt. They weren't convinced.

The court found that even if a device is patented it may still be infringing on an earlier patent. Your application can only "claim" what's new and different about your invention, but if any aspect of what you're selling is previously claimed in someone else's patent, for example, you may get to meet the local version of the redoubtable Weiser & Stapler!

Unless of course you are a large global superpower...

"One Bulgarian guy was terrific and strong like bull, but sweated so profusely that he had to frequently empty his shoes."

Continental haircut, c 1980

Who is this guy?

Continental Body-mount

Wars continued from page 3

The course of this struggle provided a great lesson in obscure offensive and defensive maneuvers over intellectual property. Many people don't understand that even if a device is patented it may still be infringing on an earlier patent. Your application can only "claim" what's new and different about your invention, but if any aspect of what you're selling is previously claimed in someone else's patent, for example, you may get to meet the local version of the redoubtable Weiser & Stapler!

The Russians

Patents in the USSR used to be of dubious value. I know. In the beginning we sold ten Steadicams to various Soviet studios and I met several eastern bloc operators at shows like Photokina. One Bulgarian guy was terrific and strong like bull, but sweated so profusely that he had to frequently empty his shoes.

Anyway, when Jimmy Carter pulled out of the Olympics and embarrassed the Soviets over Afghanistan, our current order for ten more units was instantly cancelled. We soon heard that they were building them in Bulgaria, and that they were made of iron and heavy as hell. The Russian operators supposedly preferred to use our old ones.

Bulgarian-cam in missionary position

Several years later I finally saw a picture of it on a brochure posted in the Soviet booth at the London show. The operator might have been the Bulgarian. (He looked damp!)

Rumours have foretold new Russian orders for years, but none have materialized. Perhaps perestroika will turn this around. I can assure you that we won't be suing anyone for infringement. I don't want any adversaries with nuclear weapons.
Imitations

There have been an astonishing number of imitations, and some are quite sophisticated. When the original sells for as much as a pair of BMW’s, there is definitely an incentive to build your own. As long as they aren’t offered for sale or flaunted as rentals, I personally am for it. I can’t answer for CP, but perhaps someday we can come up with an amnesty program and trade them in for the genuine article.

Some are whimsical and experimental, and others appear to be serious functioning machines whose owners should just lie low and not advertise!

Of the whole collection, the most interesting knock-offs are third-world. While in Bangkok to give Steadicam lessons, I discovered a brilliantly-made leather and aluminum copy of the vest, and a weighted, featureless dummy sled built in the machine shop of Thai filmmaker Prince Bhanu for the sole purpose of preventing his cameramen from 1. sweating up the brand-new CP vest, and 2. falling down and denting the real sled!

The vest was fabulous and much more desirable than the plastic and velcro one we sell, but it was way out of my price range - it cost the prince $25 to build it!

The most remarkable of all imitations was built in Sri Lanka by a very gifted local engineer and machinist who copies (by eye) any piece of film equipment, including Elemenaks, cranes, and lights for renting out locally. While there to work on “Indiana Jones II,” I kept hearing about this guy and his copy of the Steadicam! One evening on the way back to the hotel in Kandy I spotted what looked like a Tulip Crane with an oversized rear end parked outside a shop along the main road. In the window was a profusion of film gear, and we figured this had to be “the guy.”

I knocked at the house in back, and he opened the door and appeared to recognize me immediately (from Cinematographer articles, I heard later) because he started laughing hysterically.

After I strangled him for a while, he showed me his equipment including a fabulous Steadicam knock-off made of steel, canvas and an old Chrysler torsion-bar. He apologized incessantly because it was rusting, but explained that aluminum, velcro, titanium, etc. are unobtainable in Sri Lanka. Even lead can’t be found, hence the huge crane weights made from lengths of railroad track. Can you imagine? For that matter, imagine working 12,000 miles from both CP and Seitz! (“Just kidding... Where’s everybody going? Come baaack!”)

Wars continued on page 10
Trade Marks

Not only do we have to protect the bloody patents, but we must also stop unauthorized use of the the precious word “Steadicam®” or it may get to be as generic as kleenex.

For example, we must attempt to discourage the Hasbro Toy Company from selling “G.I. JOE - Repeater - the Stead-I-Cam Machine Gunner.”

Check this thing out - their designer must have seen John Ward’s Steadicam arms in the movie “Aliens.” This toy includes “Electro-mechanical machine gun and body mount.” (Heden motors sold separately?)

As promised, the Wretched Excess of Defensiveness Award.

It wasn’t deliberate. I was leaving on vacation when someone sent me an article from Cinemagic magazine titled “The Floating Effect” which offered plans for a home-made camera stabilizer using a crutch, a shower ball joint, hinges, and football pads. Just send eight stamps to Jack Imes, Iowa city, for complete xeroxed instructions. At first glance it seemed to be a joke - there was Jack in his big old shorts, looking very serious, like somebody’s first ad in Cinematographer, but he’s wearing a junk-caricature of the Steadicam!

Upon close inspection I could see that he was serious, and that his cheapo version might work just fine with light cameras. He had it just right, and he must have been a very clever guy to come up with this just so his readers could “save $16,000!” (Jack, what about the other $24,000?)

Unfortunately I showed his article to my secretary, and jokingly said “We oughta go after this guy! Show this to Weiser, ha, ha.” Then I left for Australia. I should have known.

She sent it to Weiser who landed on Imes like a Panzer division, Letters, threats, and demands followed in close succession. Jack never knew what hit him. He sent back to us all of the postage he had collected, and all of the xeroxed sheets, and abjectly promised never to do it again or even to go to the movies for the rest of his life. It was pathetic. My stupid joke had escalated in absentia into WWII, and I am ashamed to admit that I have never been man enough to call him and set it right.

I just wake up sometimes in the middle of the night, picturing what this guy might have accomplished in this business if I hadn’t been such a jerk.

Jack, I apologize...

Garrett Brown

This concludes the Early History series. The next issue will be devoted to articles from our international members.
Letter to the Editor

After giving it some thought, I think including a rating or rank or skill level on operator referrals is a bad idea.

Trying to categorize an operator by number is like trying to grade art. Each operator is unique. A Ted “10” does not compare to a Larry “10”. Neal Norton is a “10” operating the way Neal Norton operates. Who wants to be considered mediocre because they haven’t done 83 features in Bangkok, Bolivia, and Poland? Believe me, a producer will see a “6” as mediocre.

You will never be able to convince a Producer that someone rated a “6” is highly competent and able to do the job. Anything other than a “10” will immediately exclude an operator from most of the jobs coming from a referral. Who wants to work with mediocre people? I don’t.

People are starting to ask me for the database phone number. Awareness of the database is growing. I don’t know how important referrals could become, but I don’t think we should take it lightly. Please delete my rating from the database. Gear we can quantify, people we cannot.

How about more discussion on this issue? How about a vote?

Sincerely,
Neal Norton

Reducing credentials to numbers (or even a list of credits) can never produce an accurate or complete picture of abilities. It’s a form of shorthand, like the number of hours in pilot ratings, that provides a starting point for a rushed production manager who needs an operator quickly. (Is the alternative simply a list of names and telephone numbers? No one has objected to these categories yet.) Should we continue to include in the database only the information each operator sends us?

I still feel we should give out as much information as possible. How we should operate the database referral system is certainly open to more discussion (as are other issues). Write to us and tell us if you think the “experience” category should exist at all.

Ed

The J Bracket

International news to be focus of next issue

I was going to reveal the secrets of my docking stand in this issue, but there wasn’t enough space for the drawings and photos. Maybe in a couple of issues... We’d like to devote the next issue of the Letter to international (non-USA) events, ideas, credits, and tales from the front.

A couple of operators have written to us already, but we clearly don’t have enough for a complete issue, yet.

Deadline for the next International issue
September 8, 1989.

We’d also like to devote future issues to technical problems or concerns, so if, for instance, you have a desire to learn about antenna design or how to build your own hardware focus controller, let us know. One of us had probably been through it, has the design, or knows where to get the information.

The following excerpt, from John Boorman’s book, The Emerald Forest Diary, coincidentally came to our attention today. Garrett claims it’s only partially true. (The spelling is Welsh.)

“...Gareth Brown... made some astonishing shots for me on The Heretic in 1976. At the time the camera was still in the prototype stage. It had cost him a lot of time and money to develop it. At one point he approached Panavision, one of the foremost camera equipment manufacturers, and tried to sell it to them. They examined it carefully, rejected his offer, and set about making their own version. It proved more difficult than they thought.

As Gareth was getting strapped into the camera at Burbank to do a shot for The Heretic, a figure leapt out of the shadows and began taking pictures of the Steadicam. It was Gottschalk, the President of Panavision, no less. He was a flamboyant character who wore gold bangles and necklace chains with pendants before such ornaments became the standard Hollywood dress.

So, skilfully camouflaged in red shirt, flowered silk scarf, tight jeans containing more than ample flesh, and crocodile boots, Gottschalk flashed his camera and then fled. Gareth ran after him, trying to get the Steadicam going to record evidence of this flagrant industrial espionage. It was a great triumph for the Steadicam. Gareth, wearing the camera, was actually gaining on a man running flat out and carrying only about 40 pounds of excess fat. Gottschalk just made it to his car and got away, but not before Gareth was able to record his shame on film. Poor Gottschalk was later murdered (not by Gareth), and Panavision eventually made their own device called the Panaglide.”

“Gareth’s version” of the same appears on page two of Garrett’s article!

Jereth Holway

Speaking continued from page 5

interject war stories and I encourage the audience to call me if they have questions about a specific project.

One last observation. Steadicam is becoming more and more regionalized and as it does you must learn to cultivate recognition within an area. Find out who’s in charge of the groups by going to their meetings, then volunteer to speak. The worst thing he/she can say is no.

Good luck, and remember:
STAY OUT OF MY AREA.

Janice Arthur
New Associate Member To Provide Technical Support

Press release follows

August Design and Development of Philadelphia has joined our association. They have a broad background in servo systems, computers, robotics, and motion control.

Recently, while working on SkyCam II®, they became aware of the Steadicam community and our needs.

-Ed.

August Design and Development (ADD) announces its intent to market its services to Steadicam users. ADD specializes in the custom design of electronics and software for government and industry.

In explaining the move, partner Ed Dougherty said, "The inventiveness shown by the Steadicam group is impressive and exciting--and we'd like to be a part of that. We feel that ADD's technical capabilities can help to quickly turn many of the ideas into practical realities."

While ADD is new to the field of Steadicam, the company has a broad background in related technologies. ADD is currently working on some of the world's smallest and largest high tech devices, including a miniature, long term cardiac monitor, and the world's largest robot.

The 140 foot robot arm will load and unload container ships at sea. The arm will automatically position itself over the cargo with the aid of three CCD cameras, two laser scanners and high speed digital image processing.

"Working on contracts with large agencies is stable," adds Dougherty, "but it tends to be impersonal and slow moving. We look forward to working one-on-one with creative individuals."

Contact Ed Dougherty at August Design and Development, P.O. Box 235, Merion Station, PA 19066-0235. Phone: (215) 642-4000.

Vehicle Available for Active Members; see page 7 for details

Classifieds

For Sale: Steadicam Model II with 41 lb adjustable arm, vest, two batteries, chargers, cases; arm and suit just overhauled, $17,500.

Steadicam Model II with frame line generator, DeRose battery housing mod, 51 lb adjustable arm, vest, two batteries, chargers, cases, $22,500. Call Derrick at Whitehouse A.V. (213) 479-8313.

For Sale: B.U. Russell Video Mount, possibly new, may have been close to Daryll Hannah & Jessica Lange, or for lady steadi’s, Tom Selleck and Don Johnson. History Here--call quick--good deal. Special price to museums! Bob Ulland, (813) 294-7274.

For Sale: P.A.G. fast chargers and the new Arri viewfinder tap from Precision Camera now in stock. Call us for all of your Steadicam needs including battery re-builds. We are dealers for Cinema Products, Seitz, P.A.G., Russell, Coherent (video trans), Precision Camera, etc. Call Derrick at Whitehouse A.V. (213) 479-8313