

The Amazing Donkey Box

Designed by George Paddock and Chris Haarhoff, a time-saving modification that everyone should have. —Ed.

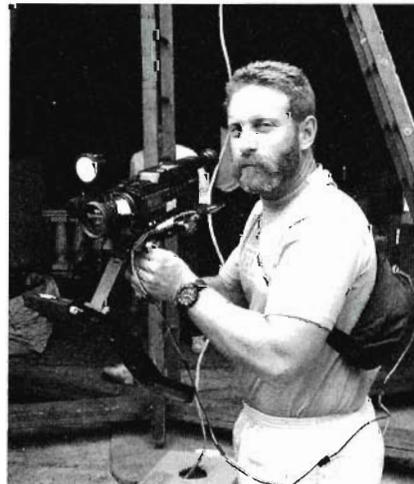
It's not unreasonable that a Steadicam operator should be able to slide on his camera in the normal fashion, lock it off where it balances well enough, and then make all further axis adjustments with the turn of a knob. What is remarkable, however, is that this was not fully accomplished previously. Even Panavision did it about a hundred years ago for all to see. They also ran their cables up the post, but that's another story.

As with most ideas concerning the Steadicam, however, there are enormously divergent opinions as to their merit. Many younger operators do not have the experience to support their desire for what are usually aesthetic changes, while the veterans have allowed the years to mellow their demands on their equipment. They know and understand every little quirk and have established a long relationship with the process.

Apart from the regular weight

and reliability grumbles, a glance at some of the best operator's rigs will tell you that the operators are generally quite resigned to the system. One *Donkey*, continued on page 6

**Inside:
Compact, Zalex™,
and...**



Rusty prepares for the ascent of Jiminez. See page 4.

Gag for Rain Gig

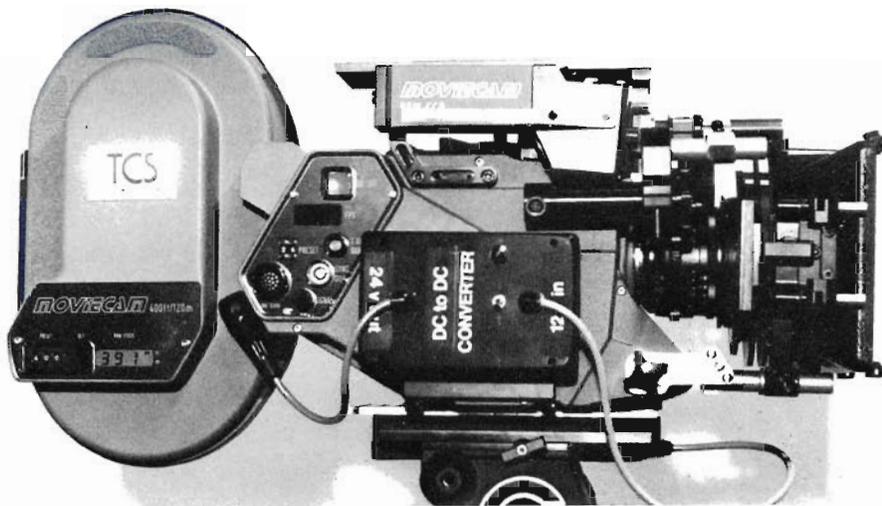
And then the producer says, "If you can't shoot in the rain, we'll find someone who can." Well, eight days of shooting 4,600 feet up in the mountains of Costa Rica doesn't happen every day (at least not to me). I said I needed a day to think about it, and told them to get moving on an insurance rider for my package in case I signed on for the shoot.

It's rainy season in Costa Rica, and so I envisioned tracking shots on 45 degree inclines in the blinding rain, in the mud. Fabulous. It's why I went into Steadicam. I spent the day thinking about my new IIIa sled, just waiting to be ordered when my rig smoked in the rain. I finally set my paranoia aside and hied on down to my local fabric purveyor. Lo and Behold - it's black, it's thin, it's rubber coated on one side. Just the thing. I also picked up a slab of lucite for the monitor window, went home, and started sewing. (Yes, I sew. I also change my daughter's diapers and make a mean four-course Korean dinner.)

The arm got a simple sleeve with a drawstring at each end, and foam rubber inside the drawstrings. Pull tight and the closed-cell foam acts as a pretty nice water block.

The sled got a tent. I know, I know, it's a one-masted schooner. I laid my sled on the side, made a generous outline on the material. At the top of the post, between the docking ring and the camera platform, I marked the material. That was the folding point. I cut a very small "+" in the fabric, righted the Steadicam, and removed the camera platform. (What a pain. Remember, I really wanted this gig.)

Rain, continued on page 3



The lightweight B&W viewfinder

Compact Technical Stuff

Video block choices explained

The Moviecam Compact has been out in the field for over a year and some operators have discovered that two types of video blocks exist for use with the Steadicam. This may present a little bit of confusion on which video block to choose, but I will try to clear up any questions you might have about both systems.

First off, (for those of you who may not know) let me explain what a video block is. The video block for the Moviecam Compact consists of a small metal housing that encompasses a glass prism. This prism carries a picture image from the lens to a video camera which is attached somewhere on the video block.

The first of the two blocks that I will discuss is one you may have seen in a previous issue of the Steadicam Newsletter. This video block is called the LIGHTWEIGHT BLACK & WHITE VIDEO VIEWFINDER.

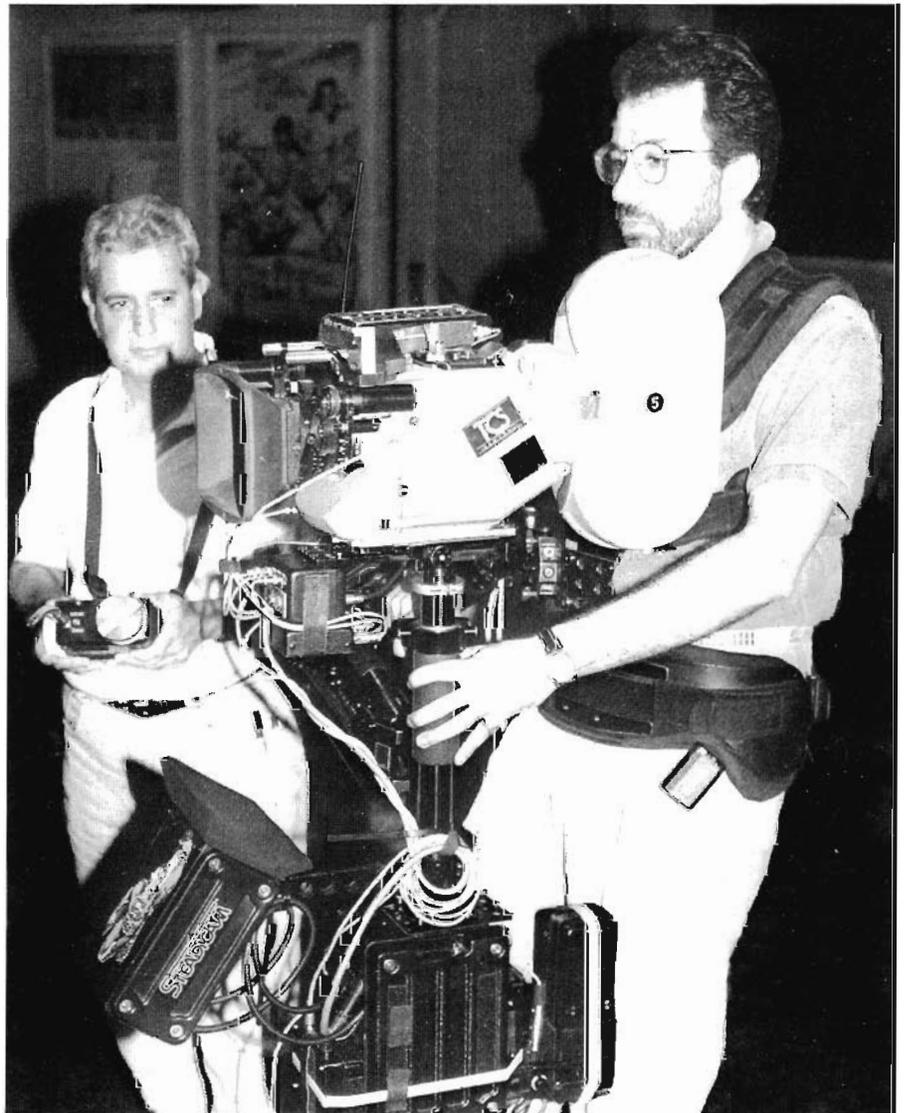
This block contains an iris knob, an on/off switch, a four pin Fisher connector, and a small accessory bracket to attach a video assist monitor or an assistant's work light.

Located towards the rear and permanently mounted to the block is a B&W CCD video camera. On the back of the CCD video camera is a BNC video out connector and a 12 pin accessory outlet. This block is held down by two 5mm screws.

Both video blocks have no

beamsplitter and thus provide 100% light transmission for the video camera. However, the second block does everything the first one does and a little bit more. On the VIDEO VIEWFINDER, the video camera is mounted to the side of the block and is detachable. This gives you the freedom to use either a B&W CCD video camera or a color CCD video camera.

It also enables you to quickly replace the video camera if it should go down. All controls, function and accessories are located on the video camera. On the video viewfinder block, there is an accessory connector that can be used in conjunction with the Moviecam remote. The video viewfinder block is held down by three 5mm screws and is about a half pound heavier than the lightweight



John Corso working on "Matinee" with the Compact



Close up of video viewfinder with interchangeable camera

B&W video viewfinder.

Many operators have asked about the differences in low-mode bracketry and profiles between the two units. Ideally, one would like to have the weight of the camera as high as possible towards the Steadicam gimbal. The bracket for the video viewfinder is raised slightly higher than its counterpart because the side-to-side and fore-and-aft knobs must clear the CCD video camera that is directly underneath. But, as far as the dimensions, weight, and accessories

go, the difference between the two video blocks is minimal.

Steadicam operators who have tried out both units at Technological Cine/Video Services Inc. in New York City have been satisfied with each. If you are still not convinced, you should probably take a look at both units and test them out on your Steadicam rig. I'm sure you'll find one that will fulfill your needs.

Ralph Fujiwara



Video viewfinder on Compact

Next Issue

More amazing mods and operating tips. Shooting the inanimate, Skyman™ update, and more!

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Rain, continued from page 1

When the material slid over the post, the rubber lining made it fit like it had eyes - no slop in the fabric.

I then cut a hole for the yoke of the gimbal and slid it through. I made the tent long enough so that the gimbal placement on the centerpost would not go beyond the "reach" of the hole. I also left plenty of slack down below for the monitor window, where the hole for the lucite was cut.

Gaffers tape stuck to the rubber lining so well that the fine-tuning of the window was a pain, but a nice seal was made. The window was further protected with some clear silicone caulking, inside and out. The J-box was just wrapped in Saran Wrap and gaffer's tape and it worked fine.

We wound up shooting only during the periods of "drizzle." The producer and talent both freaked when they saw the volume of rain. Noah and his crowd summers in Costa Rica, okay? The tent worked fine. Luckily, the rainy season is wet but devoid of wind. Production was happy with the footage and the rig didn't get wet. Of course, the silicon packing of the High-Voltage Tripler did blow out in two places on the first day (honest), but I won't go into that now.

Peter Abraham

Steadifinder Debut



The JR, Coherent, two battery packs, and wires

Rusty's got a great idea here. Just beware that producers will think that you can run with the "big one" as fast as you can with the JR. -Ed.

Some time ago I was booked for a two-day gig filming Bill Dana (aka Jose Jimenez) for the new "HA!" channel. It was going to be 22 minutes of screen time, all Steadicam, all over the old Belasco Theater in downtown LA, and we were going to shoot it in one day! It was going to be all master shots, no coverage, and we were to block and rehearse it the day before. The clincher was that we couldn't get the shooting camera until the morning of the shoot, so I wouldn't have anything to rehearse with. I hate rehearsing Steadicam shots with a director's finder, i.e. walking down stairs backwards and poking myself in the eye. Whatever was I to do?

Then the proverbial little lightbulb turned on over my head. I'd use a Steadicam JR! I hustled one up and, with the help of Chuck and Ken at Cinema Products, slapped a few mods on it over the weekend.

On Monday morning the JR and I were at the rehearsal, running all over the theater with the talent. I was not only seeing the shot, but transmitting it to the director's Watchman, just as if I were shooting with the IIIa, only this thing weighed just five pounds!

The rehearsal went fine. The director loved being able to see the shot as it would play, and I loved saving my legs for the shoot day and the Arri BL III. I was also able to record the final run-throughs and review them at home Monday night, reducing the chance for screw-ups and the number of times I'd have to climb those stairs fully loaded.

As everyone knows, the JR is a neat device for home movies and low-end industrials. Now it can be used as an accurate finder and rehearsal device for theatrical films and videos. Just be sure to choreograph your moves just as you would be when operating your big Steadicam, and allow for its increased size. Otherwise you might paint yourself into a corner.

Briefly here's how I did it. I added a "T" into the video out of the video camera and sent the video to the JR and the Coherent transmitter. I



No grinding with the one percent donut. See next page for details.

"Just be sure to choreograph your moves just as you would be when operating your big Steadicam, and allow for its increased size. Otherwise you might paint yourself into a corner."

powered the Coherent with 8 AA batteries stuck in a holder I got from Radio Shack and I put the transmitter and battery in a little fanny-pack slung over my shoulder. The JR was wired to the Coherent with a fine, flexible cable, slung with an elbow's length of slack (just as if I was running a hardwire focus).

The second problem was how to run the camera all day, because the little on-board batteries don't last very long. Since I also use my Hi-8 camera in an underwater housing, I already had some beefy battery packs, made from 6 NiCad D cells. These I also stuck in the fanny-pack and taped the power (speaker) wire to the video cable. These batteries could run the camera for 2 1/2 hours each, and recharge in less than that time.

It was well worth the effort (both CP's and mine), and besides, now I have a cute little JR of my very own.

Rusty Geller

The 1% Solution

At the Maine workshops this past October, Kenn Ferro and I were instructing our way through the basics of low-mode. When we hit the J-bracket, Ken mentioned that he uses the DeRose armpost ring and does not tighten the J-bracket onto the armpost.

I thought that was pretty clever, but I've always tried to eliminate points on my rig where aluminum grinds against aluminum. My armposts all have small flat nylon discs inserted into the ends so that the yoke does not ride directly on the post, but on the disc. These self-lubricating plastics reduce binding, making yoke-to-arm angle adjustments a snap. And docking and undocking in low-mode is as easy as in high mode (as it is with the F-bracket).

I made up a bunch of nylon and delrin donuts on the lathe, and tried them out at the Malibu Classic. The nylon disc proved a bit slicker, but they both worked as expected. I did not use Teflon because I thought it

would be too soft and crush in use. Total cost is about \$2.00, including labor. Total cost for an F-bracket might be \$200.00, including anodizing, machining, and aluminum. Maybe I sell them and call them the 1% solution.

Peter Abraham

And a 0% Solution

For some time I've been thinking about CP's J-Bracket. How could I make it safer? There is always a chance the four tiny screws could get loose. A Nightmare on Elm Street!

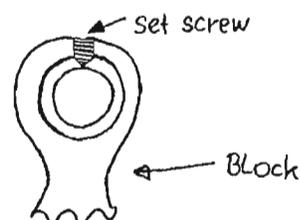
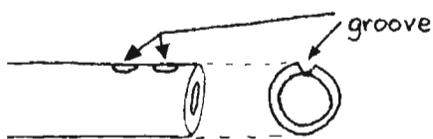
So here's a solution.

1). Remove the rods from the J-bracket Block. Where the set screws touch the rods you will notice two marks or scratches. With a drillpress you can make small grooves or indentations into the rods exactly in the center of the "screw marks." 2). Replace the rods to the block and fix the screws. Now the rod is held in place securely, and there is no chance that the rod will slip out.

This is a "no cost" and easy to do modification which will help all operators to make their low-mode and high low-mode work even safer.

Good operating,

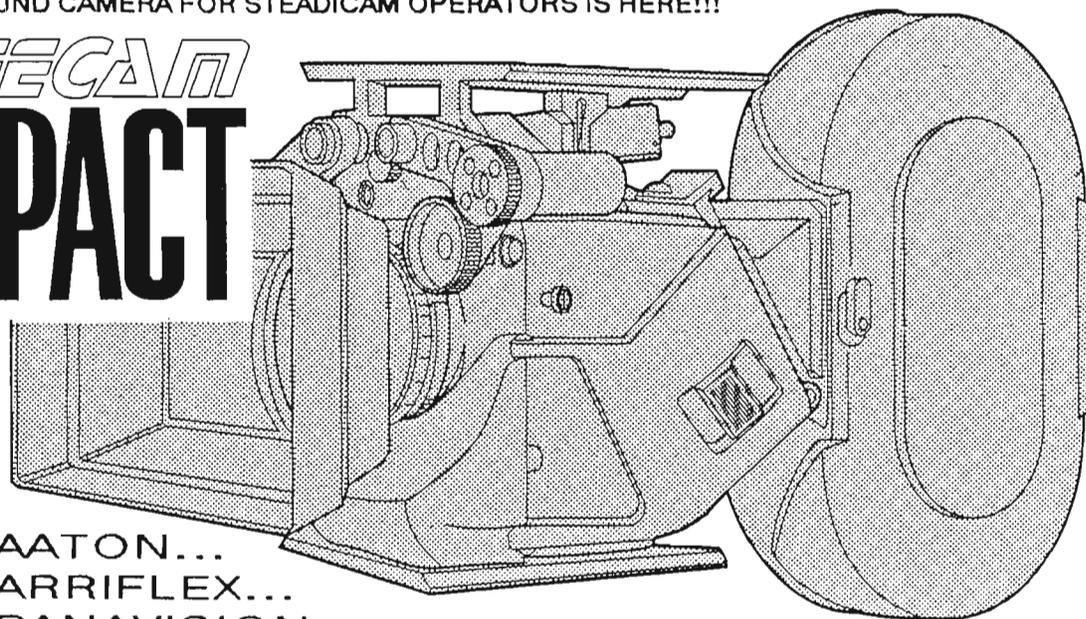
Wolfgang Maschin



The 0% Solution

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Donkey, continued from page 1

can also understand CP's reluctance to respond to every idea regarding lesser design changes. To their credit, many of the concerns raised by the operators at the Master's Workshop in 1988 were incorporated into the IIIA design. The question of a side-to-side adjustment was dealt with, but still within the framework of the original Camera Mounting Platform. This is where we saw a distinct weakness and where we focused our attention.

How many times has your frame filled up with a clapper board bearing the names of the two people you most needed to impress, just as you were trimming for headroom? Do you continue to tinker up top with a flurry of fingerwork, a sequence practised to perfection, or, noting that free time has been reduced to milliseconds, reach down and nudge the battery a few degrees? The problem is solved for the moment, and although this is an option recommended in the Owner's Manual, I (amongst others) don't buy it. I feel that the arbitrary manipulation of the sled's elements, no matter how slight, leads one gradually away from dynamic consistency into a world of pain.

Assuming you have the means to spin your rig and find the dynamic sweet spot, you will probably be more sensitive to the perils of messing with the "perfect model." This is a subject which I have literally bored hundreds with, so I'm not going to get into it here, again. I'll note that among those that seem oblivious to this refinement are operators that have done some of the best work, so feel free to draw your own conclusions.

For those of us who are looking for every advantage, however, the top of the Steadicam looked like it needed fixing. The solution was not simply superimposing another stage on the existing side-to-side plate. Apart from needing to conform to a large variety of cameras and configurations, the strength, rigidity, overall height, and weight became the absolute parameters of our design. To maintain a dovetail height of 3/8 inch with the minimum overall height increase, we had to discard the existing platform and make both the X and Y axes share a common male dovetail segment in the center section.

Also, it concerned us that in most

side-to-side designs, tightening up the tolerance between the dovetail surfaces is achieved by distorting the plate's area of contact. As this area can be the source of some camera vibration, we tried incorporating a set of adjustable brass gibs between the dovetail surfaces. Aluminum on brass makes the adjustment a whole lot slicker and a dovetail height of 3/8 inch throughout bears the load more effectively.

"Ted Churchill feels that he's now saving time he didn't even know he was wasting. Having been around the old system for more than a decade, Ted is entitled to be slightly depressed by the fact."

Having redesigned the whole Camera Mounting Platform, we were also able to add a few refinements. One of these, an "automatic safety lock," has been at the back of operators' minds for years. Also, in a break with tradition, we moved the adjusting knobs to the right hand side of the rig. Initially, I was not completely convinced that this was a good idea. But instead of releasing your (left) operating hand in order to make the adjustments, the right hand turns the knobs. The rig is not jostled around by a sequence of unlocking, racking, and re-locking. The rig settles immediately, and you feel the subtle balance changes immediately with your operating hand still on the post. One quickly realizes that no matter how efficient you were with the old process, you were wasting time and stressing out unnecessarily for years.

Integral to the new design was the use of Tercite, a special Teflon-impregnated plastic, to reduce the backlash in the X and Y stages. The threads are cut to fit more tightly than typical metal to metal tolerances, and the material is self-lubricating. The effect is a very positive and precise positioning of the camera relative to the post.

Donkey Box devotees most value the time saved at the head of each shot. Ted Churchill feels that he's now saving time he didn't even know

he was wasting. Having been around the old system for more than a decade, Ted is entitled to be slightly depressed by the fact. Mark "ten-minute-take" Moore even quantified it as being up to two-thirds faster in set-up time. I find myself agreeing, and having just humped a converted Platinum around on a picture for five weeks, I will never go back to fast finger work, no matter how much of a crowd pleaser it is.

Having really only received positive feedback, I'm not sure what we can do to improve the design in future runs. Ted would like the support for the J-Box beefed up a little, and we've already decided it would be prudent to send out a packet of critical spares with each new box. The machinist assures me that a version for left hand operators is in the cards, with the next run being a little slicker than the first.

The installation is no big deal, as the Donkey Box screws straight on to where the old platform screws off, and you only need to remove the racks from the bottom of your camera dovetails and mill out a short groove for the automatic lock. Conveniently, we designed the dimensions of the base to mate with the new, super slim DeRose J-Box which situates itself at the top of the post. Once again, some may disagree with the concept, but DeRose's design runs the cables up the post with each plug emerging at the most economical position in relation to the camera. Apart from this being a first step towards cleaning up your rig and allowing it to spin a full 360 degrees, it gets a lot of wiring out of the way and makes changing to low mode a snap.

If all of this excites you, the Donkey Box is being sold by myself and by DeRose Cinema Engineering. And for those of you who are perplexed by the question, "What's in a name?" feel free to venture your own opinion on the Donkey Box. For me it's just the furthest thing away from "Alternate Fore-Aft/Side-To-Side Camera Mounting Platform."

Vital statistics: Price: \$1,750. Manufactured by Yogi in Arizona and distributed by DeRose Cinema Engineering, 818 982-8889.

Chris Haarhoff

Vidiots Delight

I've always envied the simple, solid way that you can get into low-mode with an Arri II-C or III. That built-in bracket that clears the mag and yet is close to the camera's mass is the right idea. But what about we vidiots who Steadicam most of the time with a Sony 507 or Ikki HL-55? I have spent the last 18 months doing the R&D on the solution. The Zalex™ plate will fit nine of the most used configurations of head/deck or head/CA3 or head/TriAx back (vidiots know what I mean here).

It allows room (albeit not too much) for access to the playback controls of the deck on top. The rig is tight and uses the existing holes in the camera bodies for its mounting. The kit I've put together will include the Zalex plate, a set of special support tubes, and custom-fitted metric machine screws. The Zalex will screw into any three of the five holes at each end of the dovetail plate. Those 10-24 screws will be provided

as well. The sets are in production now and will be ready for shipping in August. It sells for \$500 and comes in a cordura nylon pouch. I've been toying with electric blue anodizing - Janice Arthur has a line on an anodizer in Chicago who'll do it.

So far, I've flown two cameras from the Zalex plate, and it's a working thing. No vibrations, and the mass of the camera is significantly closer to the gimbal than with existing low-mode hardware. Also, the width of the plate is less than that of the camera, so there's nothing protruding to worry about.

My thanks to Kenn Ferro for some good ergonomic design suggestions. Kenn's the Ergonomic Master - his whole IIIA rig packs into a Banana Republic knapsack. Be in touch if you want one. Zalex is trademarked and the US patents have been pending since February.

Peter Abraham

Articles Wanted!

Annual dues instituted

You may have noticed that it's been a while between issues.

Although the day-to-day operations of our Association continue much as we had hoped, the newsletter can't be published without your help. We need articles, insights, amusing stories, and photos and drawings. Whenever a critical mass of material is received, we'll publish another newsletter.

Along with this unavoidable change in publishing policy, we need to charge *yearly* dues for Active and Associate members to keep the phone and advertising bills paid up. For those of you who only subscribe to the newsletter, your fees will cover four issues, *no matter how long that takes!*

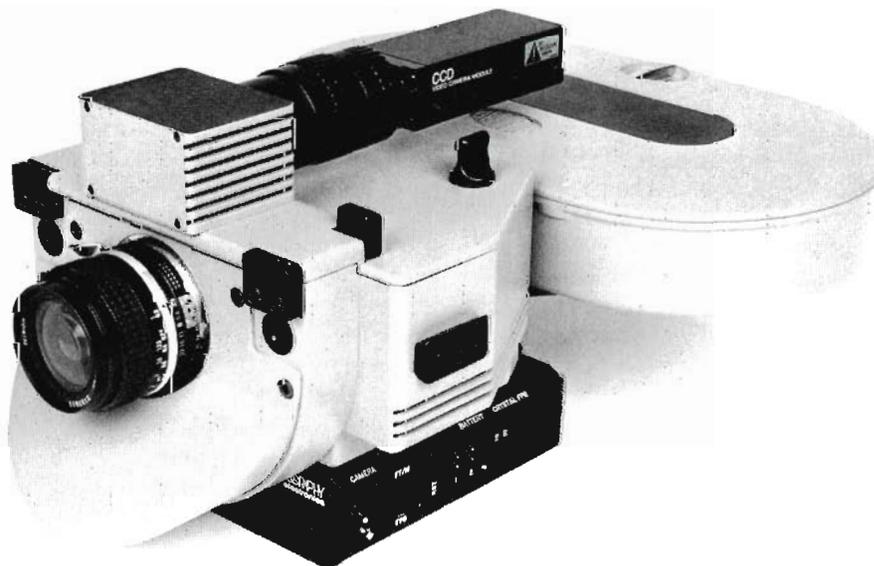


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Steve Adelson, 818 884-1210.

For Sale: Model I & II spare parts. Model I or II DeRose Docking Bracket, \$200. Model II monitor bracketry & tubing, \$50. Model I & II battery pocket with terminal block, \$50. Ikegami base plate with gear rack, \$200.

Brant Fagan at 203 762-9502.

Never Again: The director, crew, and actors are in place and ready. You, the Steadicam Operator, can feel the adrenaling pumping as you mentally run through your next shot. Suddenly, inexplicably, a loud noise breaks our concentration. Your look at the monitor, and there's no image. Frustrated... Embarrassed. These are your feelings now, as you scramble to get something working. Take control.. Now, there's an affordable way to keep this from happening to you. It's called a Periodic Maintenance Plan, and my company, Tricolor Service, is making it available to Steadicam Operators.

For more information, please call Tricolor Service, 213 876-2885 or fax 213 850-5302.

For Sale: Arri 35 BL I, updated, overhauled, excellent condition, with video assist, wide angle eyepiece, Zeiss speed primes, three 400 ft mags, extension eyepiece, Barney, new cases, Angenieux 25x250: \$48,000. Also Arri IIC, PL hardfront, lightweight CP crystal base, CCD videotap, w/ 2 Steadicam mags, all like new: \$17,000.

Chris Squires 310 301-4932.

For Sale: Modifications to your Model I and II vests. Retro-built vests can make a Model I into a hot blowaway vest. Model II vests are either rebuilt with a larger and stronger blowaway system using top-grain cowhide or totally rebuilt. Or you can get that shoddy white plastic replaced with new matte black. A selection of mods and prices for the discriminating operator. Three year warranty on all parts. Individual vest parts for sale as spares (nice to have when one craps out and you happen to be 400 miles into the arctic circle).

Peter Abraham (718) 956-8807.

For Sale: Focus transmitter and receiver, 1 CP motor, (Seitz amp modified), \$1,900. Direct top plate for Ikegami cameras, \$75. Sony waterproof Sports walkman and UHF channel 14 video transmitter, \$225.

T. J. Williams, 206 938-3990.

For Sale: Steadicam IIIA. Sled # 550, Arm # 598, Vest, 5 NC-12's, 2 chargers, SONY 8mm recorder adapter CP, 2 Wrap grips, Docking Bracket (New CP version), 3 arm posts (short and long) 3 cases, cables, J-Bracket, Low mode cage, screws, tools, etc. Complete: \$34,000 or best offer. **Also for sale:** Steadicam Arm, 42 lbs, modified with articulated IIIA elbow hinge, delrin bumpers, new spring covers, new bearings, very clean, performs like goose grease, no sound, soft case and 1 arm post. \$6,300 or best offer! Will ship to USA.

Wolfgang Maschin, Praterstrasse 30/2/6, 1020 Vienna, Austria/Europe. Phone 0043-222-24 59 082, Fax 0043-222-214 98 66.

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For Sale: The J-bracket is obsolete. The new F-bracket is smarter, energy and time saving, comfortable and very versatile. You can go low mode, low-low mode, High-low mode, and even High-high mode in a snap, never having to change or remove your 6 inch arm post. Made of aircraft aluminum, the F-bracket is a reliable, quality product, built to last the rest of your Steadicam operating life. \$200. Francois Archambault, 514 382-1283.

For Sale: Eyepiece tap for Panavision. Fits Gold and Platinum. Makes your rig instantly compatible with Panaflex; no more begging for a "speciality" Panaflex. Only three made. Fits any C-mount video camera. Great rental. \$2,800. Also for sale: Full set (16) arm trunions (solid) w/ hardware.

Jerome Fauci, 310 372-1943.

For Sale: Arri - Worrel, Arri II body, magazines, and lenses. Worrel head, new Arri tools.

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STEADICAM Letter

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