

# FILM VS. TAPE CONTROVERSY

We have received the following letter in response to the Rough Cut column in issue no. 38/39.

I have been a constant reader of your publication because I consider **Cinema Canada** one of the finest quality magazines in our industry. This, in spite of the fact that I have frequently winced at some of the wilder and more reckless ruminations of Robert Rouveroy.

I guess it was inevitable that I would be the next victim of Mr. Rouveroy's irresponsible journalism when I dared voice my convictions regarding the film/tape controversy at a combined SMPTE/CSC meeting in Toronto this past April.

While I do grant Mr. Rouveroy the journalistic license to characterize my speech as a "violent diatribe," I will not accept with calm equanimity his lies, distortions, and his attacks upon my integrity! His slanders are particularly offensive and inexcusable because a printed version of my speech was available and distributed to the audience that evening.

I did not, for example, claim that tape, per se, was more expensive than film. What I did point out was that Jim Kitchell, general manager of news services at NBC News, made the statement at the RTNDA conference in Miami last December that, at NBC News, they found no appreciable difference in overall operating expenses between film and tape. I added further, that we subsequently learned that at NBC, ENG operational costs run as much as 17% higher than with the use of newsfilm.

Again, Mr. Rouveroy is entitled to characterize my observation that 16mm newsfilm looks better than ENG on network news broadcasts as "rather idiotic," but I still insist that any objective observer would agree that, because of the limitations of the U-Matic cassette tape recorders that are being used, ENG cameras are still not realizing their full quality potential on network news broadcasts.

What I most bitterly resented, of course, was the implication that the views I was presenting were a self-serving attempt on my part to overcome the fact that, as Mr. Rouveroy put it, "ENG was cutting sharply into his sales figures." I don't know where he is coming from, but I would certainly like Mr. Rouveroy to know where I am coming from.

I have been an electronic engineer all my adult life, and the strength of my company has been its ability to apply advanced electronic technology to the solving of problems in the motion picture industry. We have a whole history of innovative electronic devices such as crystal-controlled motors, servo zoom controls, etc., and a broad range of experience in the application of video techniques. So, for example, we required a high resolution ultrabright monitor for Steadicam, and since none existed, we designed and built it from the ground up.

Far from being anti-ENG, we are firmly committed to its proper and healthy integration in a balanced news gathering system. In fact, we are currently developing a low cost film-to-tape transfer unit that will further enhance the compatibility of the two mediums.

Mr. Rouveroy might be interested to know, for example, that Steven Smith, of whom he speaks in the same article, purchased his TK-76 from us. We are now in the second year of an exclusive marketing arrangement with RCA, whereby we distribute the extremely fine TK-76 camera mainly as part of our Steadicam system. The Dorothy Hamill Special that was shot in Montreal, for example, used two TK-76's with Steadicam that we supplied. We are entering into a similar arrangement to distribute the new, most up-to-date NEC ENG camera in North America as well.

As for my financial worries, I wish to set Mr. Rouveroy's mind at ease by pointing out that in 1976, the year in which ENG had its major impact, our sales increased by approximately 15%. And in 1977 we expect a further healthy increase of at least 10% - to reach a record annual sales level of over \$10,000,000!

This is a far cry from the "poor Mr. DiGiulio" Rouveroy describes.

Even when discussing something as remarkable and innovative as Steadicam, Rouveroy still manages to muck it up with errors and distortions. While I take vigorous exception to some of the comparisons he makes between Steadicam and Panaglide, I would consider it inappropriate for me to make negative references to a competitive product, and so I decline to comment. Suffice it to say that, contrary to his comments regarding the lack of a patent, had Mr. Rouveroy paid attention during the question-and-answer period, he would have heard me make the statement, in reply to a direct question from the audience, that Steadicam had received a U.S. patent just a few days prior to the meeting, and that we were taking appropriate legal actions to protect the patent from possible infringement.

To demand a formal apology from Mr. Rouveroy would perhaps dignify his remarks too much. I am concerned, however, that my reputation has been damaged. And so, in fairness to me and to your readers, I do request that you reproduce my speech so that your readers can decide for themselves on the validity of my remarks concerning the film/tape controversy - an issue which is so important to our industry.

As for Mr. Rouveroy who thinks that by throwing himself slavishly prone before the altar of technology he can appear to be a "with it," or "now" person, I think I will send him a couple of rubber bands and \$39.95 so he can try to make his own Steadicam, or whatever.

**Ed DiGiulio**

**President**

**Cinema Products Corporation**

The text which follows is made of excerpts of Mr. DiGiulio's address. We leave it to our readers to judge the issues at hand. And we thank Mr. DiGiulio for writing to us. Ed.

While electronic journalism - in the broadest, fullest meaning of the term - has been in existence from the very inception of television news, providing live coverage of important, meaningful news events, political conventions, Senate hearings, sporting events, etc., the tumultuous events of the 60's in the U.S. and abroad clearly indicated that new tools for news gathering were now called for to provide proper on-the-spot coverage from all parts of the world.

News events seemed to be moving at an ever faster pace, and the public interest in television news had grown to the extent that news programs were now expanded in terms of duration and the type of coverage offered.

These new requirements for television news were clearly not being met by the studio-type television cameras available at the time, nor by the assortment of bulky and clumsy 16mm film cameras (mostly conversions of the Auricon Cine-voice camera) used by TV-news cameramen until the early 70's.

What was called for was a new type of camera to provide extreme portability and maneuverability under difficult field conditions. A camera that would permit the news cameraman to really capture news events as they were unfolding!

Two new revolutionary tools for news gathering for television were developed in response to these needs, from different but equally valid premises. One was the first truly self-contained lightweight newsfilm camera, the CP-16, designed and manufactured by Cinema Products Corporation. And the other was the portable electronic camera, the minicam, developed by Ikegami under the sponsorship of CBS.



The so-called "ENG Era" was not born until May 7, 1974, when a CBS Ikegami electronic camera was conveniently available to cover the SLA Shootout in Los Angeles that fortuitously occurred during prime time television!

The dramatic significance of that event was that, for the first time, a television camera could be rushed to the scene of action and relay a live picture back to the station for immediate on-line transmission to the television sets in the living rooms of viewers throughout America. Understandably, the excitement caused by this event stimulated television network management to press for the development of smaller and lighter weight ENG-type television cameras to make electronic news gathering an even more viable and practical technique.

While we at Cinema Products, with our heavy commitment to advanced technology (especially electronic technology), applauded the achievements of our colleagues who design video cameras, we were appalled at the hoopla and ballyhoo with which network management has heralded the dawn of a new era of all-electronic journalism in the U.S.

For the past several years, we have been subjected to a barrage of rash and often preposterous claims on the relative merits and advantages of video cameras over film cameras, frequently defying all logic and economic common sense, leading one to wonder whether these proponents of ALL-ENG lack indeed the courage of their own convictions, and therefore hope to carry the day by press agency and hyperbole rather than performance.

Out of touch with reality, some network executives have even fantasized a Brave New World-type of situation, where news-as-it-happens will be intercut, live, at regular intervals throughout the day, much like the commercials that interrupt all programs.

The trade journals that service (and sometimes pander to) the television industry have taken up the same hue and cry, and we are inundated month after month with testimonials on the marvels of this new television news gathering technique... totally ignoring the important contributions of newsfilm.

All this despite the fact that the new ENG cameras, while smaller and portable enough to give them almost (and I underline the word "almost") as much flexibility as a 16mm newsfilm camera, they are by no means as rugged and reliable as a newsfilm camera, and there is still a great deal of ancillary equipment such as recorders, power packs, etc. that must be carried about, which severely limits their ability to move and set-up rapidly.

To counter this propaganda, Cinema Products recently ran a series of "Open Letter" ads in these same TV trade publications to point out the invalidity of most of the claims made by the proponents of an ALL-ENG philosophy. (Reprints of these ads, by the way, are available on request...)

One of our "Open Letters" refuted the fallacious claim that going ALL-ENG would result in great economic savings, compared with film.

And at the recent Radio and Television News Directors Association convention held in Miami, it was indeed gratifying to hear Jim Kitchell, General Manager, News Services, NBC News, confirm our observations regarding the relative costs of ENG versus film. Without taking into account the original capital expenditures, which are many times greater for ENG equipment than for film, Kitchell indicated that there was no appreciable difference in operating expenses between film and tape. (We have subsequently learned that, at NBC, ENG operational costs run as much as 17% higher than news-

film! Quite an appreciable difference, I would think.)

One fascinating comment Kitchell made was that for network news, their policy is to never re-use their tape cassettes, since the many passes the tape receives in the editing process sufficiently degrades the quality so that they would not want to use it again in the field! So much for the so-called enormous savings involved in re-usable tape!

In light of Mr. Kitchell's remarks regarding operating expenses of ENG equipment and the non-reusability of tape cassettes, I asked why was he charging ahead with total ENG for network news?

According to Mr. Kitchell, the answer could be summed up in four important letters: T-I-M-E.

Mr. Kitchell, of course, was not referring to the capability of ENG cameras to relay live coverage from the scene of action directly to the station for immediate transmission to the viewers at home - initially ENG's main raison d'être! Because, by their own admission, all networks, affiliates and independent TV stations now recognize that 99.999% of the news shot during the day is not sufficiently important to interrupt soap operas, game shows and reruns of old movies that clutter the air waves during daytime viewing hours.

But so strong is the innate pro-electronic bias of network management, so great their distaste for film, that no sooner is one of their pro-ENG barrage balloons shot down in flames than they proceed to launch yet another!

Mr. Kitchell's main argument now is that even if a story is not put on the air live, transmitting it from the ENG van to the station for recording and editing still saves time, because the crew is then free to continue covering more stories.

Frankly, we do not quite follow the logic of this argument. As we all know, conditions are frequently not suitable for microwave transmission to the station, and ENG crews often must send their recorded video tape to the station by courier... just like any newsfilm crew. Furthermore, considering the costs of one complete ENG camera outfit plus van and transmission equipment, one could easily equip twenty individual newsfilm journalists - operating one-man-band style - each with his own modern, self-contained newsfilm sound camera. And most assuredly, they could cover far more news stories than any one two-man ENG crew plus van could possibly cover during the course of a day.

In addition, experience with ENG over the past two years has demonstrated that, more often than not, the extreme portability and flexibility of a modern newsfilm camera has provided the coverage on a fast-moving, fastbreaking story - coverage that was presumed to be the sole province of ENG equipment - beating ENG crews to the punch time and time again.

Such was the case when Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme attempted to assassinate President Ford in Sacramento, and such was the case when the Chowchilla children kidnapping story broke. And, of course, there are many less dramatic instances that could also be cited.

Finally, there is the claim that the picture quality put out by ENG cameras already exceeds that achieved by 16mm newsfilm, and is almost, in fact, indistinguishable from 35mm film when both are viewed on the home television screen.

For any of you who have watched network news broadcasts which are heavily loaded with ENG stories, I need not point out what pure hokum there is in this contention. I have yet to see a network news broadcast in which there were not several ENG stories that exhibited various forms of image degradation such as color shift, lack of color saturation, loss of definition, poor color balance, etc.

The truth is that the main arguments in favor of going ALL-ENG for television news gathering are patently invalid:

Going ALL-ENG does not save money!  
ENG does not improve picture quality!  
ENG does not increase the total number of different news stories covered!

And more often than not, ENG does not provide the live immediacy for fast-breaking news stories that have not been carefully pre-planned and set-up!

Why then does network management persist in going ALL-ENG for television news?

Could it be that the unconscionably high profits the networks have raked up in the past few years make it possible for them to disregard all economic sense (as well as their fiduciary responsibility to their stockholders) and indulge their inherent pro-electronic bias by going on a total ENG binge?!

While we recognize ENG as an important new tool with a very valid role in an overall, balanced, news gathering operation, the fact is that for most news gathering purposes, newsfilm provides the most efficient and economical answer.

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In conclusion, let me stress that while we recognize the valid role that ENG can play in gathering news for television, newsfilm is, and will continue to be, the backbone of any balanced, rational television news operation.

However, when it comes to the production of TV specials and commercials, documentaries, dramas and theatrical features - where visual impact and production values are of primary importance - film simply can't be beat!

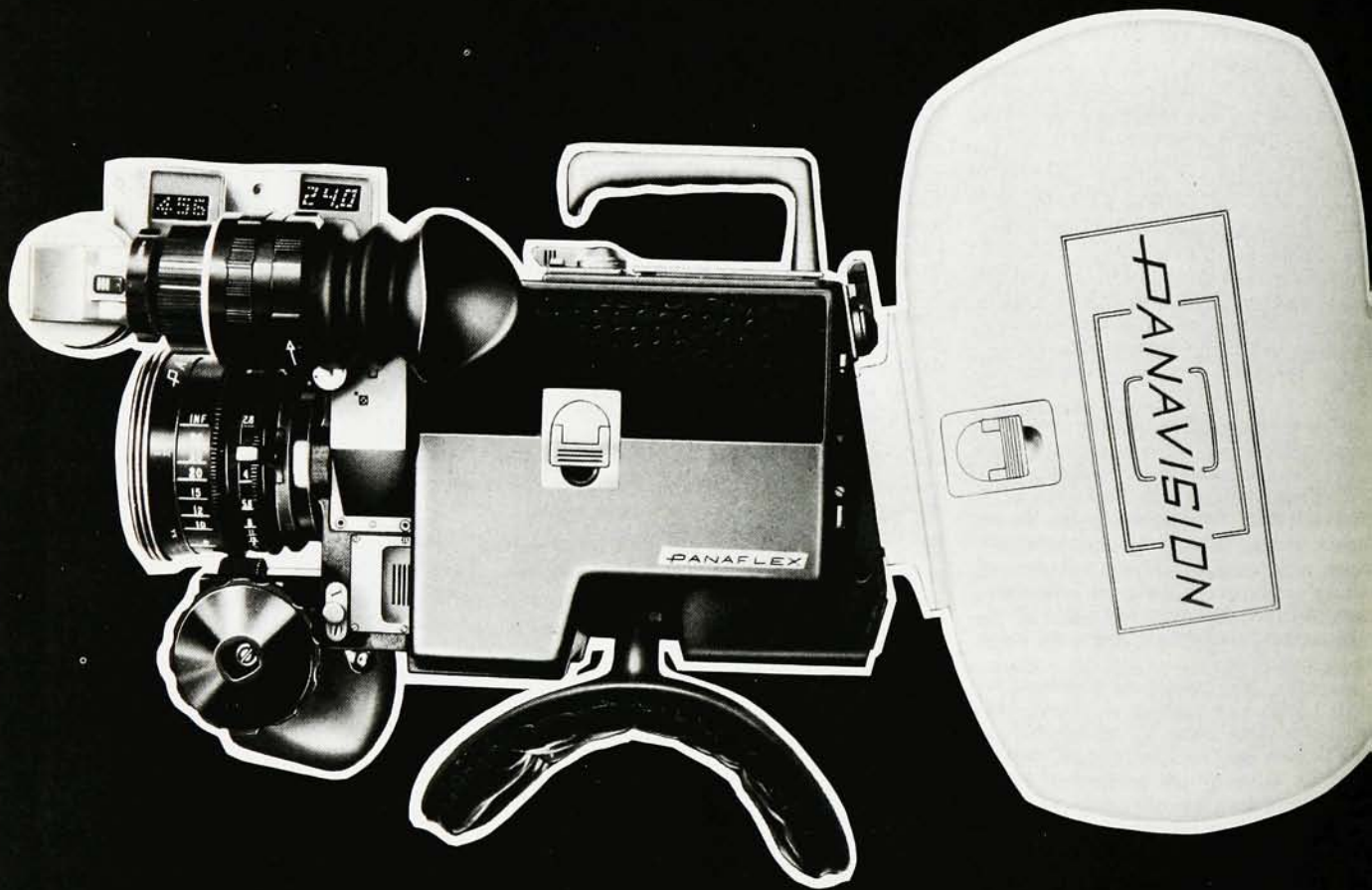
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Ed DiGiulio



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