

Getting the motor running

"Quiet on the set - please!" Almost instantaneously, hundreds of crew hands raise black walkie-talkies to their lips and whisper a collective "Shhh." The camera is rolling and all is well until the Chow Chows (a particularly loyal breed of dog) begin yapping in the back yard.

"Hold it. Stop. Cut."

Canadian director Allan Eastman is having a fit. There is only so much that the film crew of **Ford: The Man and The Machine** can do to noise-proof the Westmount mansion of Philadelphia lawyer Phillip Robinson. They have rearranged his furniture, disconnected his phones, his stereo system, his televisions, his clocks and they've most likely imposed toilet-flushing regulations during shoots. But muzzle his three pet Chow Chows they can't.

And so on day 19 of a 40-day shoot, Eastman is having a minor fit. He stuffs the red scarf dangling from his neck into his mouth and utters muffled groans. The ever-present assistants mimic his grief: one rolls his eyes, another pulls at his hair and one sympathetic soul drops an encouraging hand on Eastman's bent shoulders and tap, tap, taps soothingly.

During a late afternoon lunch break, Eastman admitted he throws temper tantrums to impress the staff. "Sometimes it is effective to let the crew think you're mad. It creates a mood," he said. "The hardest thing to get is a quiet set."

With at least 150 television episodes, three feature films and a recently broadcast mini-series (**Race For The Bomb**) to his credit, Eastman knows what he is talking about. "Yelling and acting mad

sometimes gets people moving like nothing will," he said. "I'm an emotional man."

And there is plenty for Eastman to get excited about. Not only is his latest venture another mini-series for him to bite into, but the script happens to be just the sort of thing he likes. "I love doing historical subjects in the 20th century... It's a wonderful story."

The Ford saga is an American success story. The film is a period piece which spans the great mechanization of America from 1865 to 1947. It portrays the life and times of industrialist Henry Ford (Cliff Robertson) and promises to divulge many personal tidbits about his obsessions, delusions, idiosyncracies and, of course, his loves - he apparently married off one of his mistresses to avoid a scandal.

For the man was infinitely more complex than his machine which changed the course of human history. He was a visionary but also a cold and unfeeling human being. Paradoxically he was dedicated to his family and wife (Hope Lange) but supported a lover and their illegitimate child. His only son Edsel (R.H. Thompson) received a life-long cold shoulder from the unloving Ford and finally died of cancer and a broken heart.

The auto magnate was an avid pacifist but he furnished Germany with parts and factories for armaments during World War II. He championed the rights of minorities but he was also a rabid anti-semitic. Incidentally, Ford received a medal from Hitler in the mid-'30s and is the sole American mentioned in Hitler's best seller, *Mein Kampf*. The great businessman believed in an international conspiracy of Jews and bankers. He also believed in reincarnation. Ford fought for the rights of the 'little man' but unleashed his union-bashing goons when the 'little man' tried to organize himself.

"Ford was an extremely contradictory man," said Eastman. "You can peel away layer after layer but you never seem to get at the core."



•Cliff Robertson and the '999' - *The Man and the Machine*

photo: Attila Dory

The major concern for Eastman as a director, "is to bring the story through the actor to the audience." To help him unravel Ford, Eastman says he has been blessed with terrific actors, namely Cliff Robertson, who at this particular moment is awaiting lunch in the upstairs master bedroom. Warming himself next to a blazing fireplace (the mansion has eight of them), Robertson looks every bit the auto tycoon as he reclines in his pinstriped gray suit, white shirt, paisley tie and a carefully poised felt hat. The jacket has been laid on a bed covered with a fur rug. Lunch arrives on a tray: poached sole in white wine sauce, salad and a glass of white wine.

To better enter the 'skin' of his character, Robertson says he conducts his own research through interviews and readings. "When you're doing a profile of a man who lived in a particular time you have to do your homework." Ford was misguided and obsessed for good and bad, he added. "But he never lost the sense of who he was."

Robertson says he found that he doesn't care for several quirks in his character's personality. "I didn't like his bigotry. And I didn't like, but understood, his difficulty in showing his love for his son." The understanding is easy if one remembers that Ford was a product of his time. "Ford reflects a consensus of the attitudes of his society,"

said Robertson.

With lunch over and done with, the crew and principals assemble in the main foyer. Everyone remembers to take off their shoes when they come in from the cold. In fact, everyone is extremely careful not to damage the mansion's treasures: the chinese vases, jade and marble sculptures, persian rugs, leather sofas... some of the stuff has been packed ceiling high in another room because there is just too much of it.

The owner, Robinson, doesn't mind the radical transformation of his castle. "I agreed to let them use the house in a moment of insanity," he jokes. "But the changes - oh my god. I just hope they took pictures so I can get everything back to the way it was."

The lovely hardwood floors have been covered by planks and the camera dolly swivels towards the front door. This is a scene where Ford arrives to visit his ailing boy.

"Nobody move, nobody talk, action."

The takes are repeated several times unsuccessfully. There is water on the floor, tracked in by Ford, or, the dogs bark: now the front door has been left open. By take number eight Eastman is munching on his red scarf. "Get the mops on the floor," he orders. But take nine is perfect. "It's a cut. Print."

Charlie Fidelman

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