March 2008

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Madame Tutli-Putli's Journey to the Red Carpet

Tech Focus: Which Camcorder Should You Buy?

Filmmakers Ask M. David Mullen, ASC

2007 Annual Summer Shorts Winners

Film Editing and the Narrative Through-Line

Picking the Right Audio Mixing Console

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This Month's Featured Networkers

On the Cover
Behind the scenes of *Madame Tutli-Putli* : Preparation for eye takes. Jason, Laurie, Maciek, and Chris. Photo courtesy of The National Film Board of Canada.



Film festivals around the world continue to contribute to the filmmaking world, from sparking inspiration within filmmaking communities to launching filmmakers' careers and opening doors to new opportunities. I'm very proud to announce our new website, www.filmfestivalpost.com. If you're a filmmaker, find festivals here. If you're a festival organizer, post your festivals online today. Sign up now on the site, and get your networking blogs up and running, so you can share both your accomplishments and aspirations to win film festivals.

Due to overwhelming requests from our readers, as well as Film and Digital Media educators and professors from universities across the US, we are very happy to extend the deadline for **The Edgewise Media / Panasonic Digital Media** Film and Video Shorts 2008 Awards Competition featuring "AMQ," which is presented and hosted by StudentFilmmakers.com. We will continue to accept your films, videos, and animations up to **Monday, March 31, 2008, 5PM, EST**.

Go to www.studentfilmmakers.com/edgewise-media and upload your videos now, as the contest is **free to enter**, and prizes include a $5,000 cash award; $1,000 in American Airline dollars; feature interviews in *StudentFilmmakers* Magazine, and more.

Additionally, **finalists and winners will be announced and screened** April 2008 at the NAB Show (National Association of Broadcasters), Las Vegas in the StudentFilmmakers Magazine Exhibit Booth # C10105 (Lighting and Camera section, Main Central Hall).

The Filmmakers Network on StudentFilmmakers.com continues to grow and has become one of the best online resources to find all levels of filmmakers in your area to work with. Get your free webpage at networking.studentfilmmakers.com. We continue to offer online networking and distributing tools FREE of charge. Be part of the searchable database. As a networking member you have a chance to be interviewed and featured in print in the Networking department of *StudentFilmmakers* magazine. See page 56 for this month's featured networking members.

Truly,
Kim E. Welch
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

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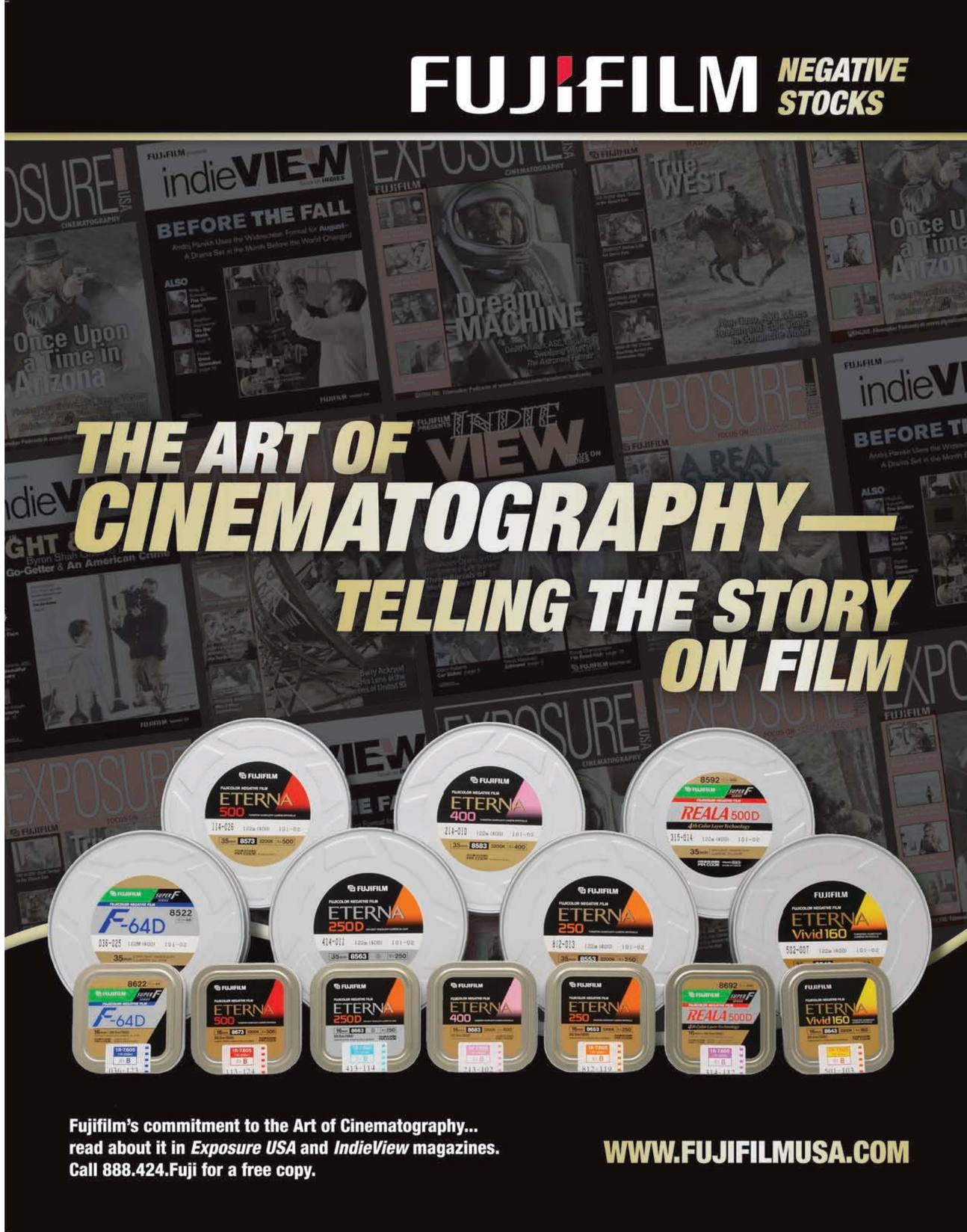
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Camcorder Choices

Confusion, Complexity and Challenges

by Carl Filoreto

It's a simple premise. You've finally managed to get several video projects on the launch pad, and you're looking to buy your first camcorder. Or maybe, like me, you're a professional freelancer or possibly a production house looking to add a small format camcorder to complement their gear package and increase their versatility. Simple, right?

Get ready to strap it on because you're about to undertake a journey through an avalanche of jargon, techno babble, breathless promises and marketing hype. Advanced gamma functions, 14 bit AD conversion, codecs, 4:4:2 versus 4:4:0, CMOS versus CCD, MPEG -2 long GOP, advanced gamma functions, NLE compatibility, SDI outputs and/or HDMI inputs, and variable frame rates comprise just a smattering of the vocabulary populating the marketing literature.

Slightly over a year ago, I decided to finally replace my trustworthy but now aging and increasingly balky Sony PD-150 camcorder. It's an iconic camera, to some degree, as it helped revolutionize the art of capturing video images by placing a small and affordable camcorder into the hands of a growing market segment. Through years of duty my PD-150 had performed well under a lot of difficult circumstances. It'd been exposed to hurricanes and desert heat, had been mounted to a wide variety of moving vehicles, even once unceremoniously falling off an ambulance moving at speed. And it finally suffered a near fatal blow when I gave it to a couple of overly energized expert snowboarders (I know, snowriders) who managed to crack the outer case of the unit while not landing a 720 rodeo and I imagine, using the camera to absorb the impact of the fall.

I was already behind the curve, as a number of cameras in a variety of configurations had already been introduced into the sub-$10,000, handheld, small format camcorder arena. I certainly wasn't prepared for the blizzard of information and jargon I was about to encounter, and I'd seriously underestimated the amount of time it was going to take to properly research the field. I learned a lot of lessons, and I'll try to distill them for you. I'm not making any equipment recommendations, instead I'm providing some basic guidelines so that you can make the right purchase for your needs.



Producer John Gallaro of Chopper Pictures, Toronto, engages in an interview with Thane Barrett of Starz Entertainment in an audio suite at the Starz headquarters in Englewood, CO. The Panasonic HVX-200 is in the foreground. Photo by Carl Filoreto.

"The customer has to become a technologist in order to buy the right product for them," advises Jan Crittenden Livingston, a product manager for Panasonic's broadcast division. If you're tech driven and keep up with developments in video production, you're ahead of the curve. If not, then you need to start cramming. Video technology is riding a tidal wave, and it changes almost daily. And like it or not, you need to learn the basics of codecs, recording formats, storage devices and workflows in order to make a knowledgeable decision.



Carl Filoreto checks the look of an interview using a Panasonic HVX-200. The camera was mounted on a jib arm to provide a more dynamic look. The shoot was performed for Chopper Pictures, Toronto, Canada, and the final client was Microsoft. It took place at the Starz corporate headquarters located in Englewood, CO. Photos taken by Steve Dalton.

Once you've mastered the basic vocabulary, you're ready to start evaluating the marketplace. "Look at your production requirements and workflow, and see what works best for you. Often, the storage technology will dictate your purchasing decision," recommends a rep from Sony. This is critical. You need to look at the primary purpose your camcorder will serve, and decide which production workflow best suits your needs. The primary choice is between a tape based system, or one utilizing a solid state technology like the P2 cards utilized by Panasonic's HVX-200, or the express cards used by Sony's latest entry into the solid state field, the PMW EX-1.

"It's cost and performance", continues the rep from Sony, "sometimes a tape based format is still a better medium for your workflow." Very true, when making my decision, I finally chose a tape based camcorder. It sounds like heresy in this era, but I had definitive reasons for this decision. In addition to my own projects, I often use the camera for clients, and I need to hand them a video product at the end of the shoot. Handing my clients a bunch of memory cards or a portable hard drive just isn't practical for me – or them, so I was able to focus my search on tape based cameras. It allowed me to eliminate a lot of the field and narrowed my choices.

However, if you're shooting a documentary, and you're going to work with the material entirely on your own editing system, then solid state might be the best choice. "The P2 workflow eliminates tape problems, it's file-based, and downloads can occur in the background so you can continue to use your computer for something else while you ingest video," touts Livingston. Solid state solutions have a number of advantages. First and foremost, it's file based, so it simplifies handling video. And it eliminates any nasties that can occur with tape, like when the tape doesn't thread properly and it starts unwinding its load



HD Clear Soft Effects Filters offer perfect softening with a minimal loss of detail and contrast.
These filters allow light to pass through mostly undisturbed, however, a small part of the surface area of the filter has a series of tiny perfect hemispheres acting as small, high quality planar convex lenses. These hemispheres defocus the light, producing a slight softening of the image within a very small area of view. The filters soften facial images perfectly, even in the harsh conditions encountered when shooting HD.

HD Soft Gold Enhancing Filter offer a subtle softening of the image with skin tone enhancing.
This refractive filter uses the latest developments in camera filter material technology to soften outlines, enhance flesh tones and remove facial blemishes without distortion. Tiny particles within the skin tone enhancing matrix bounce incoming light onto the reverse face of the glass filter. Total internal reflection projects light into the camera lens, refracted by the glass, thus softening and enhancing the tone of the image without losing contrast or creating a strong color shift. Available in grades 1, 2 and 3.

Also available: HD Supersoft Gold Enhancer for the ultimate softening and skin tone enhancing.
Supersoft Gold filters combine the softening effect of the HD Clear Soft Effect Filter with the subtle softening and warming of the Soft Gold Enhancing Filter. The result is the ultimate in facial enhancement producing a very soft image with enhanced skin tones and removal of hard lines and blemishes. The standard filter provides a HD Clear Soft Effect grade 3 with the Soft Gold Enhancer grades 1, 2 or 3. (Other combinations are available upon special request)



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Carl Filoreto checks the look of an interview using a Panasonic HVX-200.

into your record deck. That's a situation to avoid.

Solid state solutions, though, have their own inherent drawbacks. For one, the storage cards are expensive. And while their storage capacities are increasing into the 16 and 32 gig range, they're still limited to how much video data they can hold. At some point you have to offload the cards so that you can reuse them. If you're recording say, HD material at 1080i and 24p, that point is going to arrive sooner than later. I recently performed a shoot with Panasonic's HVX-200 unit, and I needed to hire a digital assistant who could handle that chore throughout the shoot. If you're working for profit, this inflates the budget. If you're working in a low or no budget scenario, then it means you'll have one more friend that you'll be owing a favor. On the other hand, using solid state memory can eventually bring your costs down. "If you're going to use it once then it's expensive", touts Livingston, "but if you use the card a thousand times, then it's a fraction of the cost of tape".

Two themes repeatedly occur as you sift through all the information. First, manufacturers seem to be welded to the concept of proprietary systems. Forget compatibility. The days of one or two formats dominating the marketplace is long gone, and manufacturers seem to believe the most profit lies in creating proprietary systems. You don't believe me? Well, just look at the number of codecs your editing system is designed to handle. It reminds me of the last time I purchased a photo printer. I was looking for an inexpensive model at about a $200 price point, and each manufacturer had about five or ten different models in that price range. It seemed incomprehensible to me that there were so many choices, by the same manufacturer. The video arena is far more complex, and the choices are complicated and expensive.

The second recurring theme is compromise. Today's camcorders found in the sub $10,000 range are remarkable pieces of equipment. They can produce images that rival far more expensive full size cameras, and the array of features offered is truly remarkable. Beware of the hype, though. To achieve their performance at a lower price point, the manufacturers must make compromises. A Panasonic HVX-200 is a marvelous piece of engineering, but it's not a Varicam. There are many reasons why a new Varicam lists in the mid-$40,000 range, and an HVX-200 lists at $6,000. Each manufacturer makes different decisions, and their camcorder may be feature rich in one area, but deficient in another. Again, you'll need to research and compare.

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