# cover story

VAVISIER

# Serge Desrosiers csc Camping Sauvage – 'Never Lose the Beat'

DOP SERGE DESROSIERS csc poses on the set of the Quebec feature *Camping Sauvage* with his Panavision camera from Location Michel Trudel.



hat's that, up in the sky? It's a bird, it's a plane, it's . . . Cameraman! It's really Serge Desrosiers csc, Panavision camera on his shoulder, suspended from a wire at the end of a crane over a Montreal intersection. All in a day's work for the Quebec director of photography, who does his own operating, no matter how precarious a situation the shot may require.

For *Camping Sauvage*, a French-language theatrical feature shot in Montreal and Granby, Que., last summer, Desrosiers not only flew like a Cirque du Soleil acrobat, he also got up close and personal with a raging fire, filmed bare-chested from atop a gay parade float, rigged his camera to the front of a "pedalo" (pedal boat), and had fun manipulating a Hot Gears remote system.

The comedy, probably destined to be screened only in "la belle province," was shot in Super 35mm with three-perf pull-down on Kodak film, mainly the 50 ASA 5245 stock. Desrosiers said the Panavision camera gear, from Location Michel

## By Don Angus

Trudel in Montreal, was the first used on a Quebec feature since the award-winning *Léolo* 

of 1992, shot by Guy Dufaux csc and produced by Lyse Lafontaine, who also produced *Camping Sauvage*. On set, Lafontaine was given the nickname "Miss Pana." Tony Roman also produced.

*Camping Sauvage* director Guy Lepage, in collaboration with Sylvain Roy, is also the movie's lead actor.

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HOT SHOT: Wearing firefighting gear, Serge Desrosiers csc takes his Panavision camera in close to shoot a controlled blaze that is key to the plot of *Camping Sauvage*.



CAMERA PRIDE: Serge Desrosiers csc gets into the spirit of things from atop a gay pride float.

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Desrosiers told *CSC News* that the story revolves around a broker who witnesses a hit-and-run on his way to work one morning and tells the police the licence number of the truck that ran down the male

pedestrian. At the end of the day his car explodes, and

the police reveal that the truck driver is a big motorcycle gangster. Our straight-arrow hero agrees to testify in court when the police promise to hide him for a couple of months in a mobile home at a remote camping site.

The DOP called the production's Panavision Platinum "the Cadillac" of camera equipment, "and we had everything, like the 135-to-420 mm zoom, the 4:1, which is absolutely beautiful; it's like four feet long.

"One day," he added, "we had both the Platinum and the Millennium cameras. I shot the whole day with the Millennium, which is something rare for us Canadians, here in Quebec any-

'Your meter has to be set perfectly all the time'

scenes especially at the camping area. It's not an easy film stock because I'd say by 7:30 at night, that's it; you can't shoot anymore even in the summer. It really needs a lot of light, but for me that was the challenge of trying to get

> the most sharpness available with the three-perf. It ended up with a

way. Normally you only get to shoot with the Millennium on American features, but for a Canadian feature it's rare to get hold of a Millennium that costs US\$2,000 per day. Another day, we had three Arri 435 cameras to shoot high-speed car chases, explosions and stuff like that."

Desrosiers said he chose the Kodak 5245 "because I really wanted some sharpness, since we were shooting in three-perf and we had a lot of exterior nice look that I called the 'Florida look.' I tried to make the camping site look really contrasty, with a lot of sunshine and a lot of colors, and a lot of saturation."

When shooting in Montreal, he shot day exteriors with 5274 200 ASA, "to change the look from the camping scenes," and he went with the Vision2 5218 500 ASA stock for "all my night exteriors and night interiors. It's an • see page 10



HOT GEARS: In a shaded break from his hand-held photography, DOP Serge Desrosiers csc runs the controls of the Hot Gears remote system from David J. Woods Productions.

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incredible film stock. I would say it's probably a 600 ASA and not a 500, with no grain, which was really great for us, especially for digital transfer."

*Camping Sauvage* was transferred to an HD digital intermediate then back to 35mm film. "I wouldn't go with the 5218 on a film-to-film transfer because it's a low-con negative, the blacks are really high, but if you bring it through the digital process it really looks good."

Desrosiers said the weather in the Granby area was bright for the first couple of weeks, but it poured rain the last week, making it difficult to match the sunny look of the early footage. The crew had to wait for the rain to stop, then light everything. Because of the moisture on the ground, extras with garden hoses pretended to be watering their lawns to fake what the DOP called the "wet-down look."

"The 5245 did a great job but it's a really hard film stock. I mean, your meter really has to be set perfectly all the time. There is no point of return. We had one shot in which my meter was set with the wrong ASA, so we were two stops under and we had to shoot again. Two stops under with 5245 is absolutely useless. There is no way we can even think about taking that image."

He explained that shooting threeperf Super 35mm was not only about saving 25 per cent of film-stock cost, but "going hand held, I could operate with a 1,000-foot mag, giving me a lot of time before we had to reload, and just never lose that beat. For us it was really important on this shoot: never lose the beat and just go with it."

Desrosiers said *Camping Sauvage* was his first comedy feature, and he found that "what's surprising in comedy is that you always have to think about whether what you are doing is funny. We would take a lot of time to figure out angles and to determine really bizarre shots that would be funny, like shooting actors with a 10mm lens at two feet. Their faces go fisheye, and the motorcycle gang members look especially bizarre.

"We also had a lot of POVs where the actors would talk to the lens. They would talk to each other on a two shot or on a wide shot, but in the close-ups we would shoot them like they were talking to themselves. That's why shooting with the 14-minute, 1,000foot mag was really important."



FLOATING CAMERA: This remote-controlled Panavision camera takes a cruise on the bow of a pedal boat ("pedalo") in a scene for Camping Sauvage.

When Desrosiers wasn't operating hand-held, or supervising Daniel Sauvé's and Yvan Bourdages' "incredible" steadicam work, he shot with the Hot Gears rig provided by David J. Woods Productions of Toronto. "With two directors on the production," he reasoned, "I was afraid of being with the camera 100 feet or more away from them while they sat in front of a monitor with the script. I thought they might invent another movie than the one I was thinking of at the moment I was at the camera. With the Hot Gears, I would always be sitting with the directors and the script and I would always be there to get the information they were discussing and to help them evaluate the scene." He never "put a foot on the dolly for 35 days," except to use it sometimes as a tripod. "My first assistant was on the dolly alone."

Hand-held, he explained, the directors were almost always beside him, except when he was dangling from a wire. Editor's note: Desrosiers was DOP for Lance et compte - La nouvelle génération, the revival of the 1986 hit Québec series Lance et compte (He Shoots! He Scores!). See CSC News, September/2001 or search Archived Articles on www.csc.ca.

