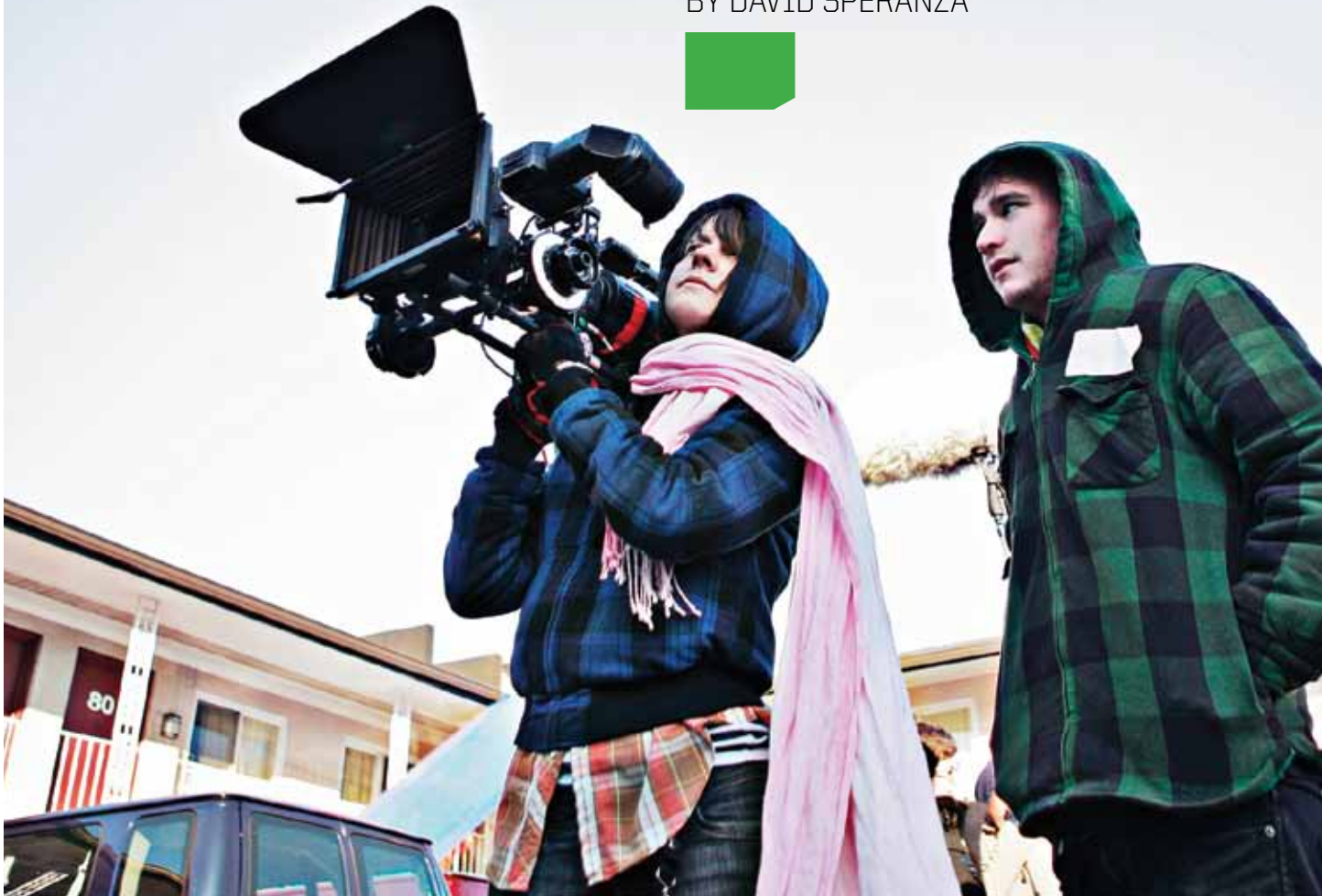


# CAN I GET A LITTLE SUPPORT?

BY DAVID SPERANZA



You've got your cast, your crew, and the perfect camera. But will all your shots be handheld?



On paper, the scene looks simple:

EXT. SMALL SIDE STREET - DAY  
Zach wanders toward a temporary wall surrounding a construction site, sees it is plastered with colorful posters and flyers. A handwritten "APT. FOR RENT" sign catches his eye. He scans it, then tears off a phone number and exits right.

We MOVE to the left, REVEALING a sinister-looking MAN chewing a toothpick, his eyes on Zach. Tossing his toothpick to the street, the man follows Zach, the camera PANNING HIM out of frame.

You scratch your head. Is there a best way to shoot this? That depends. What emotion do you want to get across? Is the film a comedy? A drama? A thriller? What comes just before and after the scene? Is there a particular style you'd like to emulate? Perhaps just as important: what's your budget?

If you have little or no money, then a straightforward approach—no frills, classic indie style à la early Jarmusch or Hartley—might be best. For that you would need a tripod, something sturdy with a head big enough to support your camera,

plus any accessories. For extra smooth tilting and panning, you'll want a true fluid head with separate horizontal and vertical drag controls. This should also have an onboard bubble level, since you'll need to compensate for the incline of the street. As for the tripod's legs, these should be as solid as possible, preferably tandem-style to provide greater support and allow easy locking and unlocking.

But maybe shooting on "sticks" won't be enough. Maybe you want to emphasize the uncertainty and danger of Zach's situ-



# STEADY HAND

How to create a budget steadycam Total cost: \$14.00

## THE TOOLS



Stationary vise

Drill

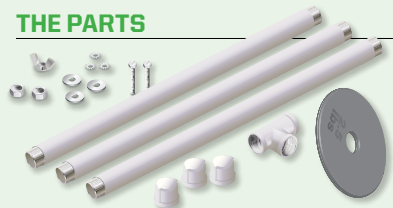
3/4" drill bit for galvanized steel

Wrench

Screwdriver

Hammer

## THE PARTS



Three 1/2" galvanized steel pipes, ten feet each

Three end caps, 1/2" diameter

One t-joint 1/2" diameter

One 2.5-lb weight w/1"-diameter hole

Two 1 1/2"-long 3/4" machine bolts

One 3/4" wing nut

Three 1 1/2"-diameter flange washers for 3/4" bolts

Three lock washers for 3/4" bolts

Two 3/4" machine nuts

## ASSEMBLING THE HANDLE:

Attach the tee and end cap to one of the pipes to form a basic handle.

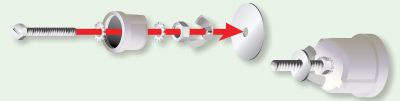


## DRILLING THE END CAPS:

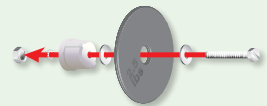
Put end cap in the vise. Drill a 3/4" hole in the center of each cap.



## THE CAMERA MOUNT

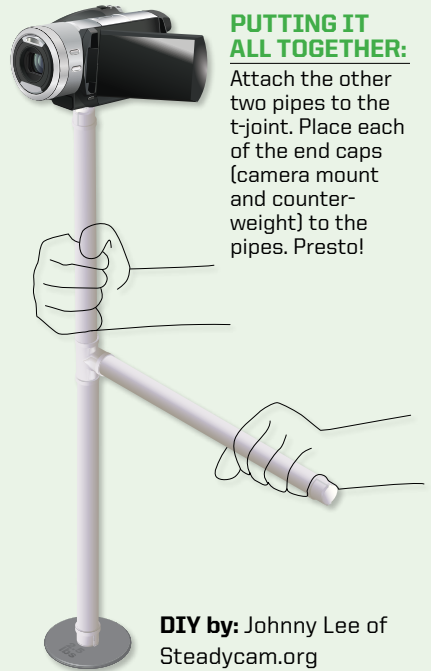


## THE COUNTER WEIGHT



## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

Attach the other two pipes to the t-joint. Place each of the end caps (camera mount and counter-weight) to the pipes. Presto!



**DIY by:** Johnny Lee of Steadycam.org

ation. As so many makers of low-budget films have discovered, a handheld camera is a cheap, effective way to impart an air of instability to a scene. So instead of Zach entering a set frame, we can shakily follow him down the street and up to the wall, then *whip-pan* to the left to discover his toothpick-chewing friend. This not only allows a more natural transition to the next shot—Zach being followed—it saves time breaking down the tripod.

But even with the sophisticated internal image stabilizers of today's cameras, your

shot may look a little too Blair Witch-y—and even light cameras feel heavy after a few hours. Which means you'll need extra support. A traditional shoulder mount—the kind news cameramen use—could work; or you might want to go for something more exotic, like the wheel-shaped Fig Rig, designed by director Mike Figgis to minimize direct contact with the camera and provide added image stability and maneuverability.

But suppose you've got a bit more mon-ey to spend? You still like the idea of shoot-

ing handheld, but going all shaky and verité here might detract from the later fight scene—which needs to be as shaky and in-your-face as possible. So...what about a Steadicam or some other stabilization system? Why not shoot the entire sequence in one smooth shot, like the opening scene in *Boogie Nights*? Even now, more than 30 years after Garrett Brown invented the first Steadicam, there's something almost magical about a true stabilizer. With its gimballed counterweight system, it suspends the camera in front of the user



and allows it, with the merest touch, to float gracefully around the action.

But there are so many to choose from—not only the numerous variations of the original Steadicam (the Merlin, Pilot, Flyer, etc.), but all those other brands with names like Glidecam and Artemis and Blackbird. They come in two basic flavors—with support harness and without. The former is designed for larger and mid-size cameras and shifts the weight of the rig and camera onto the operator's body; while the latter, with less control over extreme movement, is supported entirely by the arms. Both take a bit of practice to calibrate and operate properly, but the results can be sublime—almost as though a dolly is

*“Is there a particular style you'd like to emulate? Perhaps just as important: what's your budget?”*

floating gracefully through the air.

And then it hits you: a dolly. Would that be better? After all, there's no better hint of creeping menace than a slow, nearly imperceptible push-in to your main character. It's certainly a more classic look (just ask Spielberg or Hitchcock). So a push-in on Zach could continue to Mr. Toothpick, really giving us a sense of his malevolence

before tracking alongside him and leading smoothly into the next scene.

But what kind of dolly? If this were indoors, you'd go with a crab or doorway dolly, since their pneumatic rubber tires don't need tracks and can roll smoothly in any direction. Unfortunately, these need an especially flat surface to roll on, and your chosen street, alas, is cobblestone. Which means a track dolly is called for. If budget allows, this can give you an amazingly smooth push-in. But it also means extra setup time to lay rails for the dolly's flanged wheels, and a larger crew to operate it. You also may need permission to block off the street. Is the trade-off worth it?

Or would it be better to convey the sense

