

Take it easy on yourself

At this year's GTC Awards, a coveted GTC Seal of Approval was bestowed upon the Easyrig, a simple but ingenious rig that transfers the weight of a handheld camera from the shoulders to the hips. Now available in three different models, the purpose of this clever device is to make the life of cameramen handholding cameras of all shapes and sizes easier, perhaps even prolonging their working lives. Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that Easyrig was invented by a cameraman. GTC member Johan Hellsten from Sweden explains how he came up with the idea.

I am the happy cameraman that invented the Easyrig... the reason I did so was to relieve the pain in my back, shoulder, neck and arm. I have been working as a cameraman for Swedish Television for more than 30 years. Years ago, when I was one of the youngest cameramen at the TV station, I always had to do the handheld camera. Of course my body would feel the strain of holding the weight of the Betacam or the Ikegami for long stints on live transmissions.

There must be a better way

It all started in 1994 when I was shooting the handball World Championships, covering three games a day, all handheld. I would be positioned on the same spot holding the camera for hours. One day, as my back began to ache, I dreamt of suspending a rope from the ceiling

down to the camera. This would relieve the weight from my shoulder. But there was just one problem: I wouldn't be able to walk around.

Now, I like to hike in the Swedish mountains and am used to carrying a backpack, and the idea came to me of mounting an iron support bar onto the pack to support the camera. All the weight would come down on to my hips, using the same principle as the backpack hip belt. It worked!

Prototype Easyrig

The weight of my first Easyrig was about 9kg or 20lbs. About a year later, after many prototypes, I decided to change to a gas shock absorber. With the gas shock absorber the weight of the system came down to 3kg or 6.5lbs and I could properly say that Easyrig was born.

To start with I sold the new product

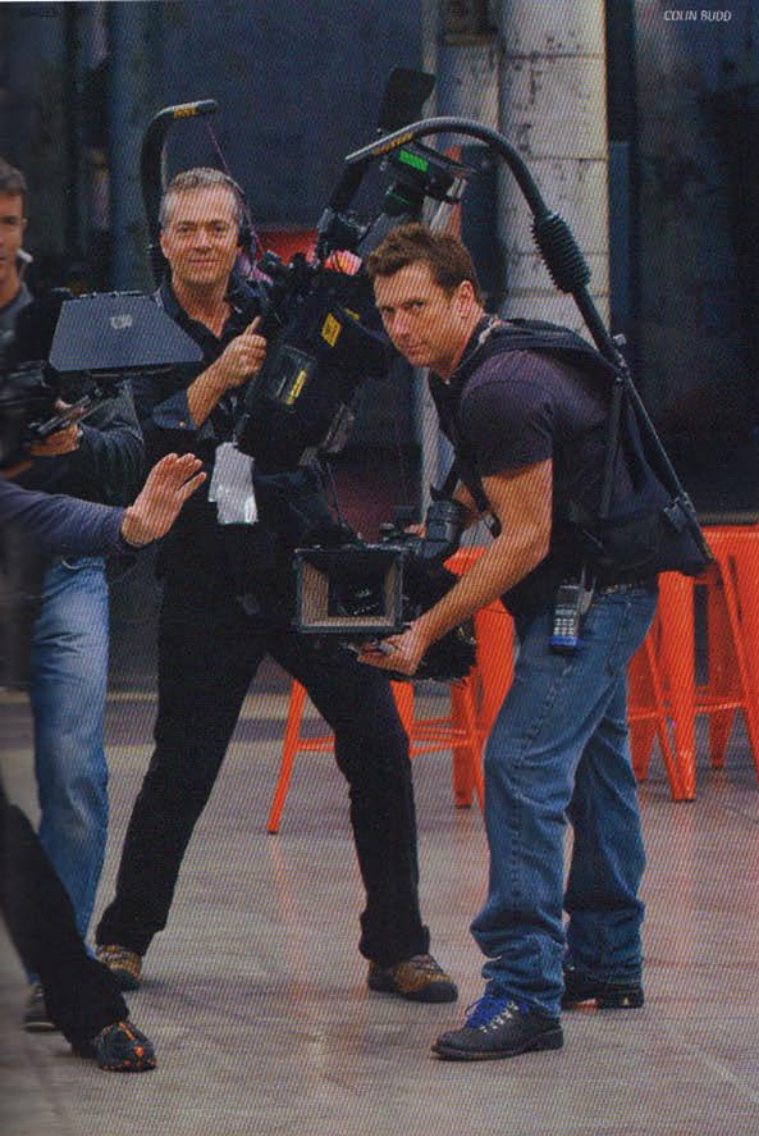
in Scandinavia, with Norway being the biggest market. I think the reason it took off in Norway is because they like hiking in the mountains so much.

After a few years I was advised to go to IBC and decided to go along and demonstrate the Easyrig. As I wandered around wearing the rig

many cameramen would ask, "What's that?" They thought I looked funny with the rig on. So I would say, "Try it!" Almost all of them ended up with a smile on their face when they tried it. They immediately understood what it was all about: with the weight transferred to the hips, they saw that



▲ Johan receives the Seal of Approval from GTC President Dick Hibberd



▲ The Easyrig Mini is designed for the latest generation of lightweight cameras

they would be able to shoot handheld for longer and with steadier shots - without getting backache.

Easyrig takes off

When I first started the company, I

was still working full time at Swedish Television and it was hard work getting the company off the ground at the same time. I remember asking myself "Is this really worth it?" Then I got an order for six Easyrig units.

Why I use Easyrig

I remember seeing the Easyrig system some years ago and thinking "You'll never catch me in one of those things!" And I guess that is a sentiment voiced by many other cameramen who think they are too tough or too rugged to even try one out.

Well, in our GMTV days, we started doing more and more handheld work - on OBs, PSC, music inserts and especially a kids' show called *Toonattic*, which we would pre-record for three hours, twice a week, immediately after finishing the 3½-hour live transmission of GMTV and LK Today. This unrehearsed show called for the presenters to charge around a tight set, jumping up from sofas, running to the door to let guests in, and playing a range of games with children, often involving gunge and other nasty substances. Although a fun show to do, it was really tiring and so we borrowed a demo Easyrig and a couple of us (the brave ones) tried it on and were instantly converted. We found we had increased stamina, could hold awkward shots steadier and for longer, and without the aching backs that all too often bug even the strongest operators.

The ITV doctor was very keen to look at the Easyrig in use, but I went further than that; I asked her to try a camera on her shoulder for five minutes and then try the camera supported by an Easyrig. She was immediately convinced and couldn't understand why we put up with the weight and discomfort that handheld operators continually subject themselves to when operating on the shoulder.

We purchased three units and I have since then loaned Easyrigs to various other parts of ITV. Millbank camera operators have used one for political coverage and Central ITV have used them rigged with a digilink for news shooting.

I take my Easyrig wherever I go now, be it 'red carpet' showbiz stories, PSC shoots or corporate events. I wore it recently while doing roving camera positions for the investiture of the Bishop of Rochester, which allowed me to remain mobile yet offer steady shots from a number of unusual locations, including up on the pulpit. It also had an outing during the Royal Wedding when we were sent down to Bucklebury, the home village of Kate Middleton to cover the celebrations there.

Three years ago, I took Easyrig to the party conferences for the first time. Along with the usual witty comments - "Here comes the *Ghostbuster*", "Are you a dodgem car?" etc - a particularly harassed Sky News cameraman with fully-laden P2 HD camera, digilink, wide-angle and double PAG batteries came up to me and asked if he could try it. Five minutes later, even though my rig wasn't the correct weight setup for his camera, he was hooked, immediately recognising the benefits. Last year I saw him again, this time happily sporting his own rig!

Darren Bramley
Head of Cameras ITV Breakfast
Secretary GTC



The production placing the order was shooting 180 episodes of the drama *Friends and Enemy* and wanted to speed up their shooting. They were recording two episodes a day, shooting in two teams and editing through the

night. They hoped to be able to do away with tripods and use just the Easyrigs and one Panther crane.

I remember wondering whether it was possible for a cameraman to work all day handheld, day after

Easyrig

If you would like to get yourself an Easyrig please contact:

Production Gear Ltd.
Phone: +44 (0)20 8236 1212
info@productiongear.uk

For other countries find your local agent on: www.easyrig.com

One of the nicest things is when I am on a show and a cameraman comes up to me to say: "Thank you, Mr Hellsten, you have saved my back and helped me to continue my work as a cameraman."

day? Then I got the opportunity to go down to the set while they were shooting. I asked the cameraman how it was using the Easyrig. The response: "There's no problem working all day" but "sometimes my knees get tired". I knew then that my invention was working!

These days I only work part-time at Swedish Television and the rest with my company. I am glad to have a global network of agents around the world selling my products, but all parts for the Easyrig are made in Sweden.

Different models

A couple of years ago, my English agent called me and said "The new James Bond movie needs an Easyrig." That made my day. Nowadays, 3D is popular and the camera weight is doubled. Last spring, ARRI Rental in Munich asked for an Easyrig that could take 35kg or 77lbs. With two ARRI Alexa cameras on the rig the weight is extremely heavy. So, we built a special rig that can take up to 32kg (70lbs). At the moment, this model is the most in demand.

When I invented Easyrig, I imagined I might be able to sell the rig for a few years but then cameras would get smaller and smaller and the demand would wane. But as it turns out, if anything, because of high definition and now 3D, many camera rigs have actually got heavier.



▲ David Paul in New Zealand shooting with the Easyrig 3 Cinema

At the other end of the scale, the Danish wanted me to develop a rig for small cameras. So I built a rig using a small backpack from Petrol and made the support arm foldable, meaning it could be rigged up and down. There is also a compartment for the camera in the backpack. This rig was called Turtle X. Now I am happy to announce that I have redesigned it to look more like its big brother Easyrig and have launched Easyrig Mini, which has been available since its release at NAB 2012.

Less than a year ago, I received an email from an Australian lighting cameraman named Colin Budd. Attached was a picture with eight cameramen, each wearing an Easyrig. They were shooting *Master Chef* (see the lead picture on the previous page). Colin wanted to tell me that I have added many years to their careers as cameramen!

Work in progress

One problem that has perplexed me is that the gas power mechanism limits the adjustment range of the rig. I have been working with German engineers to solve this problem to develop an Easyrig Vario that will have a bigger range, i.e. be able to support cameras in the range 10–18kg (22–40lbs). This model did actually come to market but there were some sound problems so we decided to withdraw it. I hope that some day we will be able to solve the problem.

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▲ Cameraman Bob Hayes shooting film on the Easyrig in California back in 1998

Which Easyrig model?

Easyrig Mini

Camera weight: up to 6kg (13lbs)

The Easyrig Mini has been created for the latest generation of lightweight, compact video and DSLR cameras. There are two versions: the Mini for cameras up to 4kg and the Mini Strong for cameras up to 6kg.

Easyrig 2.5

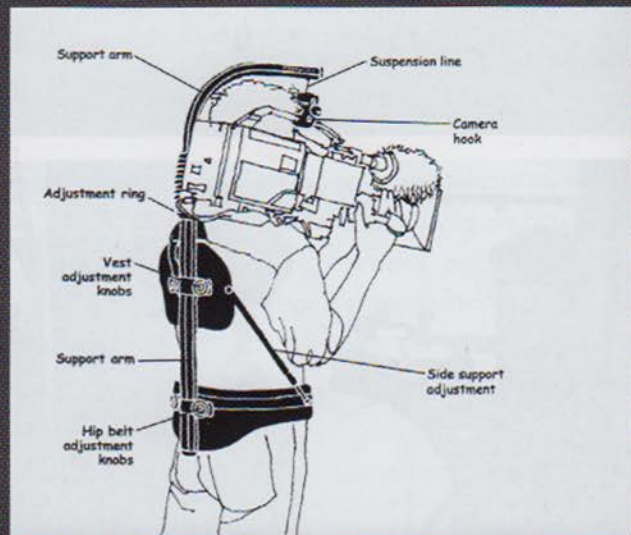
Camera weight: up to 15kg (33lbs)

The original model designed to be used with both video and film cameras of medium weight.

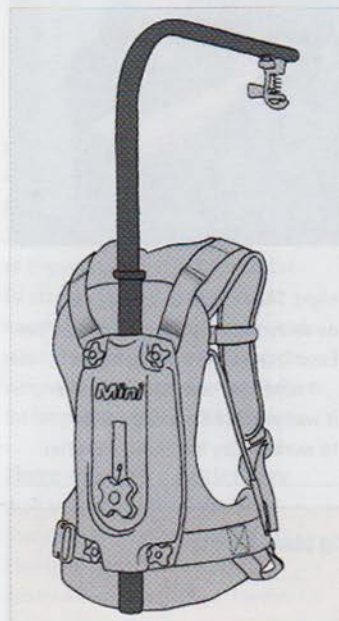
Easyrig Cinema 3

Camera weight: up to 25kg (55lbs)

Cinema 3 is the heavy-duty model for movie cameras and can be used with both video and motion picture cameras.



See more about Easyrig at www.easyrig.com



▲ The newest model, Easyrig Mini – designed for use with the latest generation of lightweight cameras



▲ Lightweight, portable and steady: the Turtle X (the old version for small cameras, which has now been updated with the Easyrig Mini)