

movie maker

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special
**CAMERA
GUIDE**

Incorporating Amateur Cine World, 8mm Movie Maker and Cine Camera

OTHER PEOPLES PICTURES

REVIEWED BY
TONY ROSE

Hobby films are often a bore. But once in a while an enthusiast is genuinely inspired by his chosen subject. Then he may find within himself and within the movie medium a way of expressing his pleasure that all can share.



Meet Bruce Brown of California. He is surf-mad and movie crazy. Crazy like a fox. At thirty Bruce is the first man in the world to make a fortune out of a hobby film. The film is called *The Endless Summer*. It is all about two fellow surfing enthusiasts who travelled around the world with him, following the sun and searching for the perfect wave. Bruce started to make surfing films on 8mm, when he was fifteen. When he was nineteen a surfboard manufacturer bought him a 16mm camera and sent him to Hawaii to make a publicity picture. On the journey he learned about technique by reading textbooks. He shot *The Endless Summer* single-handed on the Bolex H16 that you see in the picture—with the help of that 385mm. telephoto lens and a loan from his local bank manager. He had no script, no crew, no actors and no studio. He did his own editing and spoke his own commentary. Then he had the film blown up to 35mm, by Technicolor and offered it to the Film Trade as a full-length feature. The Film Trade laughed. They told him they were not in the home movie business. They said that nobody who lived more than a mile from the sea would want to know about surfing. So Bruce hired a cinema at Wichita, Kansas, right in the middle of the Middle-West. *The Endless Summer* opened there during a snowstorm. It took more money than *My Fair Lady*. The Film Trade said this was a fantastic fluke. So Bruce raised another loan and hired another cinema in New York. His film ran there for 47 weeks. Finally, he got himself a distributor. *The Endless Summer* has so far taken more than £3,300,000 at the box office and is still going strong.



MANY AN AMATEUR takes up movie making as a means of recording and popularising some other hobby. He gets steamed up about sailing or stamp collecting, goes crazy over camping or carpentry and the movie camera seems the ideal instrument for conveying his enthusiasm to other people.

To be honest, the results are often somewhat tedious to all but his fellow hobbyists. Unless it is accompanied by talent and sustained effort, the bright fire of fanaticism turns quickly to ashes on the screen.

Once in a while, however, something rather splendid happens. An enthusiast is genuinely inspired by his chosen subject and finds within himself and within the movie medium a way of expressing his pleasure that all can share. Thus the mystique of mountaineering was truly caught in *Arrowhead* and a passion for steam locomotives came whistling through the longeurs of *The Long Drag*.

These films may not have converted us into mountaineers or railway nuts but they

went far beyond the straight camera catalogue that usually constitutes a hobby film. Moreover, they did something that the professional often strives for in vain: they captured the full flavour of a real-life experience.

Now to prove that a hobby film can be exciting cinema and a box-office hit into the bargain, Columbia Pictures offer us Bruce Brown's *The Endless Summer*. This one is all about surf riding—or simply 'surfing' as the cognoscenti call it. Made by one man with a Bolex H16, it has been blown up to 35mm. Technicolor and, astonishingly, it is playing as a first feature in cinemas throughout the world. In many situations it has taken more money than Hollywood epics that cost fifty times as much.

Some of the posh critics have been baffled by its appeal. Penelope Mortimer, writing in *The Observer*, calls it 'a superior kind of home movie' and supposes condescendingly that producing it single-handed must have been 'some kind of feat'.

You can take it from me that *The Endless*



Summer is a magnificent, awe-inspiring feat. And if there is anything that commands more respect than the film itself, it is the way that producer-director-cameraman-editor-commentator Bruce Brown has battered his way through the ironclad defences of the film industry to get it accepted on a commercial basis. After doing battle with those thirty-foot waves, he could apparently find nothing to daunt him.

The story is a true and simple one. It tells how two young surf-riders follow the sun south for three and a half months, seeking the perfect wave and eventually finding it at Cape St. Francis in South Africa. Plot and character development are conspicuous by their absence. So is structure. If there was a script, I suspect that it was written on the back of an envelope and later lost on voyage. When Brown wants to introduce footage in which his main characters don't appear he inserts an arbitrary flashback. From time to time he cuts in unrelated close-ups of surfing celebrities who are named and then forgotten. His few attempts

at fictional or humorous embellishment—including a rather inept bit of pixillation—are in the corniest amateur tradition.

Yet despite these obvious crudities, *The Endless Summer* is a joy to behold. It kept me 'pumped up' (surfing language for 'very excited as the result of good rides') throughout its ninety-one minutes and at the end I was gasping for more.

The people in it may be mere nonentities on dry land but once they are waterborne—and fortunately this is most of the time—they seem to enter into a state of physical and spiritual grace. Balletic masters of their element, they will dance the length of their surfboards while riding the back of some monstrous wave that is hurtling shorewards at 25 m.p.h. They will skim down a shimmering thirty-foot wall of water or glide through a green tunnel formed by the wave's crest—'locked in' as they put it.

Of all the sports in the world surfing must be the most cinematic and it is tempting to imagine that, given Bruce Brown's opportunities, any one of us could have turned in

a movie just as exciting as this one. But let's not kid ourselves. Spectacular subject matter is a help of course but it's only half the story. Nobody has ever captured the authentic thrill of a real-life experience just by pointing a camera in the right direction, pressing the button and hoping for the best. The job demands technique and style.

If Bruce Brown's style appears unobtrusively simple, that just shows how well he has adapted his methods to suit his material. Most of his shots, for example, are taken with a very long telephoto lens and the action is slowed down almost three times by shooting at 64 frames per second. On the face of it, this might seem to be a mere gimmick designed to make the waves look more impressive. But the significant fact is that when we are watching the film we are not aware of slow-motion as such and the reason is worth pondering.

When a man is under stress and compelled by circumstances to think and act more quickly than normal, his perception of events is sharpened. Time, if you like, seems to

stand still—or at least to pass more slowly. Thus a slow-motion film of some fast moving and stress-filled activity like surfing is actually more true to the experience of those taking part in it, more natural-seeming than a film taken at normal speed.

Another way in which Brown makes us share the surfers' sensations is by using subjective camerawork. At times his lens glides along a few inches above water level and even noses through the breakers like an observant dolphin.

While I was wondering how he had achieved these breath-taking effects, I heard that Bruce Brown was in London for the launching of his picture and went hot-foot to his hotel where he sat me down with a cup of tea and told me the inside story. The subjective shots involved no faking or trickery. He took them while actually riding a surfboard, sometimes hand holding the camera and sometimes attaching it to the board by means of a rubber suction cup.

The Bolex H16, he explained, was too heavy and cumbersome to be handled in this way. So he used the little Bell and Howell 'Autoload'—a 16mm. camera taking fifty-foot magazines which looks more like a super 8 job from the outside. This was protected from the salt water by a flexible, plastic shroud which allowed him to wind the spring motor without having to dismantle it. The suction cup, fitted to the base, proved troublesome at first because it was too efficient; once it was stuck to the surfboard he had to slide it off the edge before he could get it free for eye-level shooting and this was a tricky operation in mid ocean. The solution came with time: as the salt attacked the rubber and partially rotted it the camera parted company from the board with less of a struggle.

When *The Endless Summer* was playing in New York and had become the talk of the town, Brown was approached by an advertising agency to make a commercial featuring a well known still camera being used by a surfer. The film, of course, had to be taken from another surfboard and the sponsors insisted that, quality being all important, it must be shot on 35mm. When Brown pointed out the practical difficulties, they agreed reluctantly to let him try 16mm. as an experiment—providing that he used an Arriflex.

Not wishing to prolong the discussion, he nodded his assent, then went off and shot the film on his Autoload. The result was enlarged to 35mm. and projected on a huge screen under the critical scrutiny of the sponsors, their advertising agents and a clutch of technical consultants. Everybody nodded wisely and agreed that the Arriflex was a marvellous camera. Brown pocketed his fee and swallowed his comments.

I asked him which came first, his interest in surfing or movie making. There is no doubt about the answer. He started surfing at the age of twelve and was a veteran of fifteen before he bought his first 8mm. camera and shot off a few rolls of Kodachrome by way of a keepsake.

Because the camera only had one lens of standard focal length, his shots from the beach were all distant views. The action looked ridiculously remote and the figures inconspicuously small. This made him realise that a film record could be unques-

tionably accurate and yet totally inadequate. He saved up and bought himself a turret model Bolex with a telephoto lens.

Now he could make the subject fill the frame but steadiness became a problem. He got a tripod and learned how to pan with movement. Soon he had accumulated enough presentable footage to make up into what he then considered was a real movie. He rigged up a garage as a cinema, invited the local kids to come in and watch, then took a collection that paid for his next batch of film stock. The film was silent of course but he accompanied it with live narration and as time went on he developed a relaxed commentary style that mingled humour with information.

As the surfing cult grew in California so did his popularity. After attending one of his shows, a surfboard manufacturer bought him his first 16mm. camera and sent him off to Hawaii to make a publicity picture. This first professional assignment was exciting but the responsibility of it brought him up with a jolt. He realised that up to now he had been working entirely by trial and error; he had never learned the theory, not even the basic



While actually riding the surf Bruce Brown uses a tiny magazine-loading Bell and Howell Autoload in a watertight plastic case. He can fasten this to the surfboard with a rubber suction cup, then wrench it free for eye-level shots without losing balance—a feat that yields some of his most exciting footage.

grammar of film making. So he bought a pile of textbooks and read them on the voyage.

By the time he reached Hawaii he knew all the rules and in that first 16mm. film he obeyed them. Looking back, he says that it was his most 'correct' production but he thinks that his work has improved since he learned to break the rules. The point is, he thinks, that one set of rules can't be applied to every subject. Each subject dictates its own rules and in surfing he believes that the most effective shots are those that are held as long as the action remains interesting—often to the very limit of the camera's spring motor run.

"Given two takes of the same or similar action, an editor working by the book will always use a portion of each and go to a lot of trouble to find the place where he can cut smoothly on action. But not me," says

Brown. "If possible, I'll always use one continuous take. That way there's no visual adjustment for the audience to make and no suspicion that anything has been faked."

He made four more surfing films and used them on a series of successful lecture tours which took him as far afield as Australia and New Zealand before embarking on *The Endless Summer*. Even then, it seemed a chancy and highly optimistic venture. He raised the cash by means of a loan from his local bank manager and cast his two leading 'actors', Mike Hynson and Robert August, after chatting to them on the beach for 40 seconds. They went off on location carrying their gear: three surfboards, three cameras (including a spare H16 that was never used) and a stack of Ektachrome Commercial.

By feature film standards, the budget was laughable but one thing Bruce Brown didn't stint on was film stock. After surfing in Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti and Hawaii, he had shot about nine miles of film—enough to run for twenty-four hours. Cutting it down to the standard commercial length was quite a task but one that he relished. When it was done, he knew that it was watertight and seaworthy.

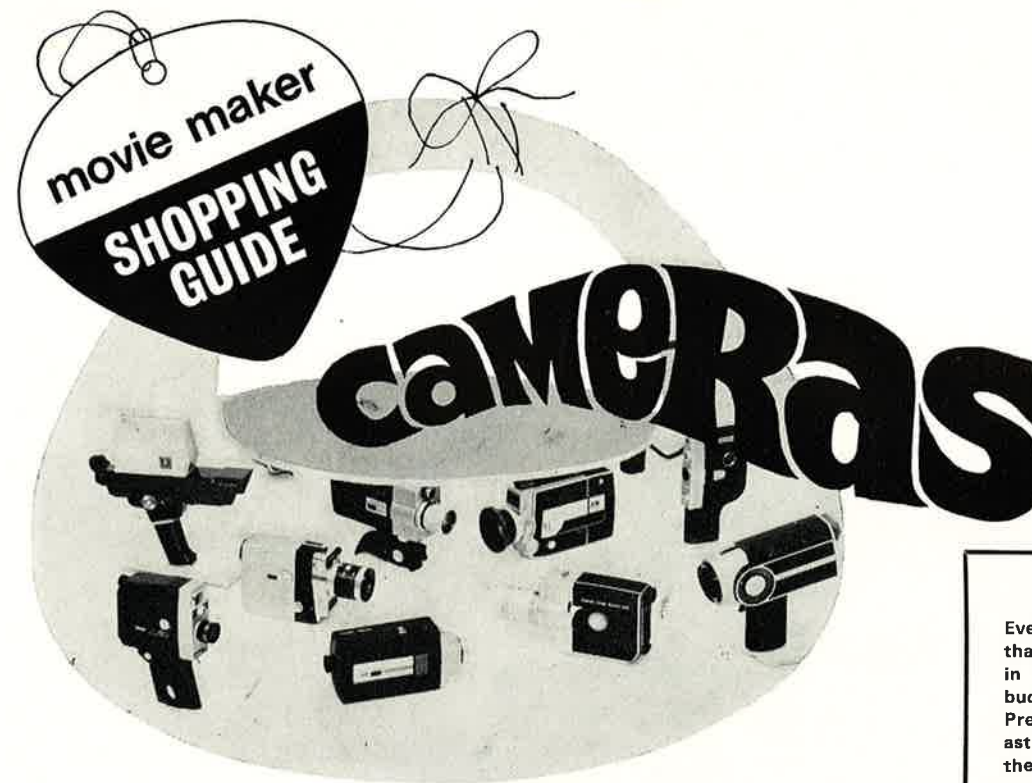
Now that the film has brought him fame and fortune, he is in great demand. TV networks in America have offered him *carte blanche* to make a film at their expense on any subject he likes to choose. But he is in no hurry, admitting humbly to himself that he doesn't know how to film anything outside of surfing.

It's a strange dilemma but one that I fancy will not long delay this determined young man. With no formal training and no artistic pretensions, he has made himself into a highly skilled craftsman. Admirers have dubbed him 'the Fellini of foam' and the description is not entirely facetious. Now he has to find new seas to conquer.

QUICK LOOKS

Not much space left for the remainder of the month's viewing. I had a second look at an old favourite, Bert Stern's *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, which is actually doing better business now as a 16mm. library offering than it did on first release in the cinemas. Its perennial appeal is not difficult to fathom. Apart from being an anthology of outstanding musical performances by such immortals as Louis Armstrong, Jack Teagarden and Thelonius Monk, it is a fine example of imaginative colour photography applied to an actuality subject (the Newport Jazz Festival) that was outside the film makers' control. If you can bear to, try switching the sound off for a few moments and you'll still be fascinated by the visuals. *Jazz* is available on hire from Hunter Films, 182 Wardour Street, London, W.1.

Thanks to the efforts of the Scottish Film Council and the B.A.C.C.C., cine club officers in the London area were treated to an evening of French amateur films, produced by members of the Club des Cineastes de France. They were a mixed bag, of course, but considering that they all came from one club, the standard was remarkably high. What impressed me more than the all-round technical accomplishment was a comedy film involving at least a score of talented actors! How many British clubs could muster even half that number?



NOTE

Every care has been taken to ensure that the recommended prices quoted in this guide are correct after the budgetary increase of purchase tax. Pre-budget prices are marked with an asterisk. Some prices are omitted at the request of the distributors.

THIS YEAR'S Movie Maker Camera Guide highlights the rapid progress made by the super 8 gauge. It was introduced less than three years ago in America, 2½ years ago in Britain. And in this time, super 8 has almost completely taken over the new camera market.

Two years ago we recorded 65 cameras for standard 8mm. Last year the number had dropped to 19. This year it has dropped to nine of which four are made in Russia—the last country believed still to have production lines running regularly for standard 8mm. models. The only advanced camera in current production capable of taking standard 8mm. is a multi-gauge model that also takes super, Single, and double-super 8 as well as standard 8mm.

In this third year of super 8 we list about 85 cameras for the new gauge, against 75 last year and 37 the year before.

Fuji's Single-8 system remains fairly static in a number of cameras, there being one new model from Fuji themselves, plus one other, and the multi-gauge model mentioned above. We find that one Single-8 camera listed last year has been quietly dropped, while the manufacturer has introduced a more advanced super 8 model.

Double-super 8 makes further progress, with the introduction of a DS-8 magazine for a multi-gauge camera.

Nine-Five seems to be undergoing a retrenchment. Some models listed in previous years are no longer included. We understand, however, that they may be specially ordered from France if required.

In 16mm., we see the ever-increasing trend to professionalism, for there have been no new truly amateur cameras in this gauge for some years. On the other hand, there are plenty of models now to interest the serious amateur who wants to work on this gauge because of the excellent technical quality and the facility for making copies.

ALL THE GAUGES AVAILABLE

STANDARD 8. User-surveys show that four out of five amateurs still use standard 8mm. film. And in our Ten Best competition the ratio using standard 8 is higher even than this. Yes, for popularity standard 8 is tops—and looks like remaining so for a few more years yet.

The almost wholesale swing of camera manufacturers away from this gauge has done little to reduce the number of cameras in use—nearly a million in Britain alone. This means that we are assured of a supply of film in this size for as long

as most of us could conceivably want it. It is still worth remembering that this gauge has the lowest running costs, by a big margin, and results on the screen are only marginally less good than the new super/Single-8 gauges.

SUPER 8. There's no doubt that this is where the design progress is being made. This year we see the trend towards even more advanced (and more expensive!) top models. We see lenses with 8-to-1 zoom ratio from several manufac-

turers. There is even one model with a 12-to-1 zoom. At the same time there is an unmistakable trend towards going 'electronic', with transistorised speed controls, transistorised meter circuits, and servo-motor systems to operate a conventional lens iris, as a first stage in getting away from insufficiently robust meters. And we see more careful attention to convenience in use. Many designs have two features we like very much: an indicator in the viewfinder to show that the film is actually running through when it ought to be, and another to show the exact moment of reaching the end of the film.

One or two new designs are aimed firmly at the low-price beginner's market—and very efficient models they are, too. You can rarely tell the difference in results from models at twenty times the price.

What does super 8 offer? First, the convenience of the almost idiot-proof cartridge-loading. Second, you don't have to touch the film at all. There can be none of the edge-fogging that you can so easily get with standard 8mm.

Third, the 50-foot of film is all in one length, so there is no half-way turn-over as with Double-run standard 8mm. On the other hand, the very ease of shooting tends to make you use up more film.

Fourth, the ASA speed of the film is automatically set on the camera by the length of one of the special notches on the cartridge.

Fifth, the film manufacturers have standardised on Type A (indoor) film as a universal material for daylight and tungsten filament lamp use. In daylight, the filter in the camera is (on most models) automatically positioned.

Kodak's super 8 cartridge design is very compact because it has the feed and take-up rolls of film side-by-side. The pressure pad is in the cartridge, and just the front half of the gate is in the camera. Claw position is standardised (inherently) on all cameras using the cartridge, and most projectors use the correct claw position as well. So optimum picture-steadiness is obtained, irrespective of the slightest variations in perforation accuracy.

All the super 8 cameras use electric drive—

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INCORPORATING AMATEUR CINE WORLD
AND 8mm MOVIE MAKER
& CINE CAMERA

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Mr. Bruce Brown,
P.O. Box 714,
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11th April, 1968

MM/TR/SDY

Dear Mr. Brown,

Here at last is a copy of our May issue containing my review of "The Endless Summer" and a report on the interview you kindly granted me while you were in London.

As you will gather I thoroughly enjoyed the film and I hope you will think that I have done it justice in print.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



Tony Rose,
EDITOR.

ENC.



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