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# Strong and Stabil - (eye)

written by Des Whelan ACO



Something technical that made “Darkest Hour” different is – “The Stabileye.” I had used the Stabileye on occasions, on other productions, usually for a specific shot.

To be honest I wasn't initially impressed. It turned out, not for the first time, that I really didn't fully understand how best to use it. But as I got to use it and came to understand its capabilities, I grew to love it. The first real opportunity, the first full picture, I got to use the Stabileye was on “The Commuter”. Paul Hymns (Key Grip) had used the Stabileye on various previous productions so brought his experience to bear, on what was a very difficult set to work on.

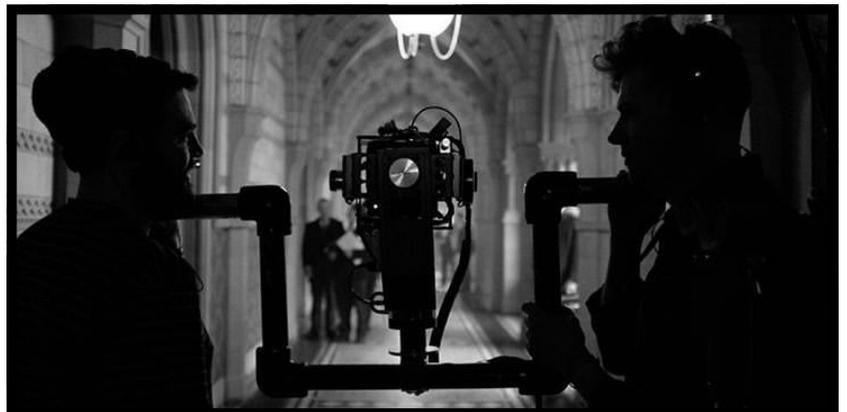
I don't think we could have executed, in that most restricted set, the very many complicated shots the Director demanded of us if we hadn't had the Stabileye or Paul.

It so impressed me that I wanted to show it to Bruno Delbonnel (DOP) and Director Joe Wright who were just about to start on “Darkest Hour”. I hadn't even read the script, but I was sure that they would be impressed with its possibilities and potential, as I had been. I arranged a show n tell for them in Pinewood. I set up a shot in the long corridor behind A, B Stage

Starting with the Camera tracking low, inches off the floor, feet breaking FG, tracking behind our actor then jibbing up to head height and wrap around, 360 degrees, tracking the full length of the corridor. I wanted to demonstrate a shot that could not be done by Steadicam or a Technocrane in such a restrictive space and also how fast and efficiently the shot could be set up and executed.

We used it every day on “Darkest Hour” and in every location and almost on every scene. There wasn't a location or situation that we were not confident that Stabileye wouldn't work or indeed, as often happened, saving the day. As our locations, including The Houses Of Parliament, were mostly listed buildings, which come with certain restrictions of access. Stabileye became the default camera platform. We mounted it on Cranes, Dollies, Cars and Wire Rigs, we tracked it handheld, running and walking through tight corridors and doorways handing it off from Grips to Stuntmen to wire rigs, uninterrupted and steady.

Just to be clear, the use of the “we” in any sentence that also includes the word “running” doesn't refer to me. It singular refers to the great team effort of Paul Hymns (Key Grip) and Joe Marsden (Head Tech). While all that running was going on, I was sitting by my monitor operating (my part) and talking with the Director and the DOP. Stabileye indeed demonstrates and expands the reality, that Grips are not only moving the Dolly or the Crane but also ostensibly moving the Camera. Now I know that it seems a completely obvious thing to say but it's often not related to in that way, it does make a difference when you consider, as I do, Grips as other Operators. With Stabileye it's never been more the case.



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# Stabil - (eye) cont.....

The level of collaboration and understanding required with Stabileye between Operator and Grip is not just desired but essential.

Often when operating remotely, as we all know, you can sometimes be out of sight of the set and the Actors, so accurate communication can be problematic. You are not always aware of the problems and issues that arise on set, separated by distance or set or both, your Grip and 1st AC become your essential link.

Executing long complicated shots, with a long dialogue scene and always being mindful of the pressure on the Actors, can be testing on everyone. A test, that as professionals, we are often required to pass daily.

The decision by Joe and Bruno to use Stabileye on "Darkest Hour" allowed us complete freedom and confidence in any and every location or set to get the shot required, with the least amount of equipment and in the shortest amount of time.

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