

FREEZER BURN ALL WRAPPED UP

By Lee Rickwood

Spooner Lenses Black Comedy



John Spooner csc is pictured on the Alberta set for *Freezer Burn* with the Genesis HD camera, used on the new comedy film. The big chip digital camera “brings it all back to film”, Spooner says.

LEFT: Director Grant Harvey and DOP John Spooner csc on location in Alberta during the filming of *Freezer Burn*, “a blackened comedy”: starring Tom Green.





It certainly was an appropriate wrap date for principal production on *Freezer Burn*, the new comedy film, directed by Manitoba native Grant Harvey and photographer by John Spooner csc.

Halloween seemed a propos, not just because of star Tom Green's reputation as a bit of a shock jock comic, but also because of the film's bizarre plot line: some-

thing about aliens, disguised as film company executives, making crop circles in order to change the world to their liking!

But when the Alberta-based production came to its end, Director of Photography John Spooner csc was more than eager to talk about "changing your whole world" not in the sense of an alien takeover, but referring to the new technology embodied in digital cameras like the Genesis HD.

It's known as "a film camera that shoots digital" due in part to its Super 35mm-

sized sensor, and its ability to use all existing 35mm Panavision spherical lenses, notably the Primo series. It can shoot at speeds from one to 50 fps, and its wide colour gamut easily intercuts with film.

"Sure, it's a big chip digital camera, but the beauty of the Genesis is in the fact it brings it all back to film," Spooner explained when reached on location by CSC NEWS. "For example, the body takes 35 mm lenses, so all those lenses you've used are still relevant. So if you're comfortable with film lenses, and you know their depth of field, this camera brings it all back. It's so much like film – it even has a familiar mag mount, so you can pull off the mag and go hand held, working very quickly when you have to. There are some really cool things coming along, and this explosion of possibilities will change your whole world."

Yet Spooner made sure his comfort level was very high before undertaking the assignment. He talks about speaking with other cinematographers and digital camera users in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

He talks about working with Scott McDonald at Panavision in Vancouver, reviewing the shoot and going over the camera's capabilities. "I've known Scott for a long time," Spooner says. "A lot of it has to do with a close relationship we've built; I am very comfortable with him and his advice."

He had certain comfort level, too, in working with director Harvey. Spooner noted, having worked with him before: "We could connect on the vision for the film, and we related to certain scenes together. It's kind of like working in short-hand, working with Grant."

Josh Miller wrote the script, and acted as producer on the film.

Canadian-born comedian and star of the film, Tom Green, couldn't resist talking about Edmonton, and the month-long production there:

"Edmonton, home of the hockey dynasty The Edmonton Oilers, The CFL team The Edmonton Eskimos, and also the largest shopping mall in the world," Green posted on his blog. "In the breadbasket of North America. Surrounded by wheat fields, and a bunch of other cool stuff. I hope to have a good time staying in this amazing world class city...this impressive town."

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Famous for his outrageous brand of shock humour, Green (who grew up in Ontario but now lives in LA) was diplomatically described by Spooner as “different...but fabulous to work with.”

Part of the working with Green, or when shooting any comedy, Spooner added, is the need “to frame things differently. You have to frame for movement – not movement of the camera, but of the actors. The gags run a little longer, and both the actors and the director are open to improv.”

As Bill Swanson, an out of work ex-NHL'er fighting to save humanity, Green would be expected to improvise and develop scenes right on set – the emphasis is a little different in set-up and execution as a result.

Genesis can record either to the new Panavision Solid State Recorder SSR-1, or to the Sony HDCAM-SR videotape recorder (which is what Spooner used). Both units dock directly to the camera, ensuring a totally portable package without cables to external recording devices. Record start/stop and format options for both recording devices are directly controlled from Genesis; 50 minutes recording per cassette of 24 fps is supported, as is instant playback of full resolution colour images.

Another bit of improvisation came with the pre-production planning and budgeting, Spooner describes. “We were moving the money around a little bit, trying to determine where best to spend it. Eventually, it made sense to go digital (both in terms of the camera and the post-production DI process) and save a few bucks.”

“DI is a very interesting road to go down, Spooner continued. “It has some real advantages for the DP, say, in terms of colour correction.” The digital path also allowed him to save money compared to 35 mm film.

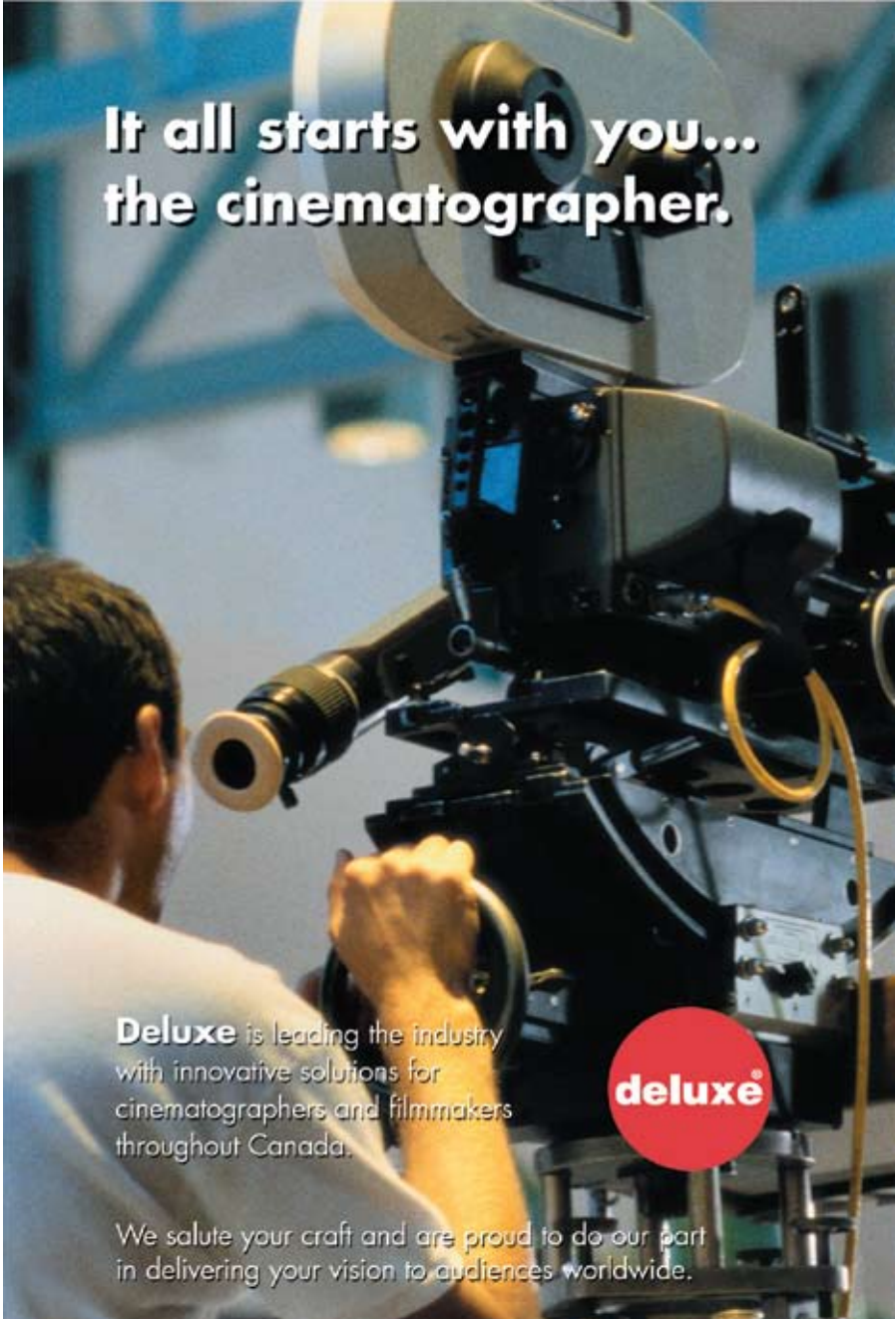
“We still run with full crew, Spooner says when asked about any on-set changes that result from using the Genesis camera. “There’s a 1st and second – but we do not have a playback guy. A 17” HD monitor was used, switching back and forth between two camera feeds, but Spooner noted the camera outputs a linear signal, which is not necessarily the best way to judge an image.

Operational insights and technology tips like this were familiar to Spooner, and not just based on his previous HD and digital camera work. He is, along with DOP Karl Herrmann, a co-chair of the 669 HD Training Committee, and as such was deeply involved in the presentation of the Manitoba Advanced TV & Film Workshops held last year at about this time.

Spooner says the camera “loves the

low light” (he used it on occasion with a 640 EI rating – zero gain – and the image still held up very well, he says). “There’s amazing shadow detail, even in the whites of a T-shirt and still the bottom detail is all there.”

As *Freezer Burn* heads to its release later this year, we can all rest assured that the detail is fine, as Spooner says - now we just have to worry that the rest of the world will be OK. 🍷



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